

Tangent Funding Report

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The Tangent fund music therapy project began in January 2020 and face to face group sessions were delivered until covid-19 lockdown, where online methods of session delivery were provided. The project was titled "Baby Beats" and currently provides a music therapy group for mothers and their babies between the ages of 0-14 months in the Merkinch area of Inverness. The group runs on Mondays at 10.30 for 1 hour and is led by HCPC registered music therapist Kristen Macleod Smith from private practice Harmony Music Therapy Scotland. Kristen is the only registered music therapist in Inverness, and one of two working music therapists in the Scottish Highlands. This funding made music therapy more accessible to those living within Merkinch and also allowed for the growth of the delivery and awareness of the profession in the North of Scotland.

Merkinch in Inverness is one of the most deprived areas in Scotland and there is currently not a lot of support specifically for women or for new mothers in this area. There are a high number of women who have suffered from abuse and who have experiences of substance abuse within their households. Mental health issues are also high within this population in this area. This music therapy group primarily aimed at providing a safe therapy space where women were given the opportunity to develop bonds with their babies, develop a positive relationship with the therapist and other women in the group, feel a sense of community and to help boost self-esteem through musically exploring elements of release and self-expression. Although initially developed to meet the needs of this specific population group generally mothers across the area who had no other structured groups to attend that were easily accessible became interested in the project and saw the benefits of music making on their baby's development.

The project was initially held in the small community church hall which was easily accessible to all in the area without the use of transport. It is also ideally situated directly across the street from Inverness Women's Aid- which has self-contained flats for women and their children escaping domestic abuse. This made the group more readily accessible to women currently residing there. Referrals have come from the church, women's aid, health visitors and also advertising through local community groups.

The initial 3 months of the project took place face to face and saw numbers grow from 3 in the first session to 8-10 in the group with consistency of returning women. It has been great to see relationships form with participants and the therapist, and also with each other. Music Interventions explored in the group included bonding songs, instrument exploration, sensory play, movement activities and music experiences specifically for the adults to help provide a moment of calm and release for them. Feedback from participants in the group included:

"My baby boy (5months) really enjoyed his first time at the group today. I think it's great that Kristen sings the songs herself making it personal to involve all the children and mums and then lets the babies touch and feel the actual guitar, drum and instruments. It's a real music session!"

"H really loved the music therapy today. I had a grumpy baby coming in and was really stressed and worried that I would be told to leave if he didn't calm down. He calmed the moment you started music and I went home with a baby who slept soundly for an hour- that was my therapy!"

Due to COVID-19 lockdown the group had to stop meeting face to face. Lockdown brought many barriers to the provision of the music therapy group. It has been a difficult time for many especially single mothers or those who have been in difficult home situations. To begin with, there were barriers to the provision of online live sessions. These barriers included: difficulties in accessing technology at the time of the session; limited access to instruments for the group participants to play along at home as they had done in face to face sessions; the babies falling out of regular routine with nap times due to lockdown changes, which meant inconsistency in participants accessing the online live sessions. Solutions that were worked out through ongoing communication by phone calls, social media and messages found that recordings of session videos were much more readily received. This meant that the group members could participate in their own time when their babies were ready and when the mothers could access technology. This improved participation, lowered stress levels for the participants while also reducing the anxiety feelings of missing out.

Video tutorials were provided in how to use readily available materials around the home to make their own instruments that were suitable for their babies. For example, using a baby bottle and filling it with Lego or pasta to make a shaker instrument or using pots and pans and wooden spoons for drums, using baby muslins as scarves for 'peekaboo' interactive songs etc. A Facebook group was set up to share the private unlisted YouTube video links and also to encourage discussion and share photos/videos of the participants joining in at home. The therapist also included her own 1 year old in a couple of the videos and participants provided feedback that this really helped model ways to engage with their babies through music. Feedback also suggested that seeing another mother and baby coming into their homes (virtually) through lockdown helped decrease feelings of lockdown isolation and helped them better connect to the session. Each video gathered a good number of views reaching more participants than were in the original group, as the mothers shared the online session with friends with babies and toddlers of various ages. This was another positive outcome to the online session delivery as the face to face group sessions may not have been able to facilitate a larger number. Each video was only made available for a limited time in order to encourage engagement with the next video and to encourage exploration of different musical stimuli. However, if a participant could not watch it in the couple of days it was available, they could request another link. Video views ranged from 20 – 90 views per video.

Feedback comments from the online sessions included:

"we've been going to Kristen's sessions on a Monday morning. She's brilliant and even recorded videos for the babies when we can't meet just now. This is helpful. Looking forward to getting back to them again."

"Its so helpful to see a familiar face at this time."

"I love seeing Kristen and her little girl doing music together. Brings a smile to my face and my little boy K is watching everything they do!"

"F said 'more' for the first time today when watching your video. Its one of her first words"

Funding streams are currently being looked at to continue the work of the group. Currently indoor children's activities are not yet given the go ahead to commence in Scotland following phased lifting of lockdown so the group will be unable to meet face to face until the next phase. Participants are looking forward to returning when possible and for a new group to be developed for older babies/toddlers. Although the main goal of the group sessions was to provide socialisation and bonding through music, lockdown really had an impact on how this could be addressed. However, by providing these online music therapy sessions there was great success in reducing an element of

loneliness and providing an alternative way of group music making during a very difficult unprecedented time.

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