

Make Some Noise Song In a day Project @ Womens Aid

- Amys* Case Study -

**name has been changed to protect the young persons identity*

The remit of this Song In a Day project was to work with a group of participants who currently have a range of complex needs resulting from experiencing domestic abuse. Our aim was to use music as a means to engage, help motivate and improve the self esteem of participants and to help them cultivate and develop music related interests.

The organisations involved in the project were Womens Aid who support victims of domestic abuse and Make Some Noise who hire freelance artists to deliver music based intervention and enrichment provision. During our initial planning meeting - which included myself and Chris Watt from Make Some Noise, Gemma Lane, Maggie Cross and Steph Alexander from Womens Aid, we agreed that sessions would take place at the Womens Aid outreach office during the Easter 2014 Half Term holidays. We agreed that delivery would consist of four full day sessions with Dave Day as assisting facilitator, myself (Kurly) as lead facilitator and supporting in each session would be Maggie and Gemma from Womens Aid.

The staff at Womens Aid said 7-8 young people they work with would be keen to participate and should be recruitable for the project within the next two weeks leading up to the first session. Another consideration regarding group size was the manageability of the group should sessions become a vehicle to express and discuss personal and sensitive experiences of past abuse/s. Based on previous experience working with similar sized vulnerable groups - where emotive subjects have brought about strong feelings we found the groups tended to sympathise and support one another more. So Chris and I felt this was a safe number to work with should the nature of the sessions go this way.

Shortly after arriving at our first session Dave and I were told only one participant had arrived at the meeting point to be picked up by Gemma. We were then told attendance was low due to changes in personal circumstances preventing some young people from attending. As for the other young people, Gemma and Maggie described a lack of encouragement and support from home being a likely reason they didn't attend.

This certainly brought to our attention the challenging lives that many of these young people lead - highlighting their environmental and emotional instability. This unforeseen development of having one participant (Amy) added a rare dynamic to the session as it meant our approach would have to accommodate the fact that all our focus would be on her rather than spread amongst peers. We understood that our enthusiasm for success channelled towards one participant could prove intimidating for Amy who was already quite shy, so our key approach was to make the most of her established rapport with Gemma and involve all the adults in the activities as much as possible. This helped to spread the focus of involvement amongst staff as well as Amy and allowed us all to begin building a positive rapport with her. Her initial response to us at the start of the first session was "I'm definitely not going to sing!" but working in this manner she felt comfortable and safe enough to choose to sing later on. As we progressed through the two sessions Dave and I witnessed Amy's confidence increase, we saw her come out of her shell and express herself more confidently through music. Staff who knew her better described how she had opened up a lot and in the end they felt she really benefitted from being on her own, more so perhaps than if other participants had turned up.

During the first session she wrote a song about about traveling the world and being able to grow as a person. She wrote and performed on the track and shared ideas around how the music might sound. After the session we reflected on how it went, staff were very happy about Amys positive input and tangible growth in confidence - both very important in order achieve our aims of writing and recording. We also discussed the issue of low participant attendance, Maggie said she'd call the parents of the young people who didn't turn up and try again to encourage them to attend the following day.

Unfortunately no additional young people attended the second session, so Amy had another solo session. After discussing attendance again with Chris and Tim we felt the best way forward would be to maximise outcomes for Amy by continuing the sessions within the Bronze Arts Award framework. This meant she'd be able to conclude the project with all the pre-planned and agreed outcomes as well as achieving a nationally recognised qualification. Due to the success and enjoyment (that she herself expressed) during the previous day Amy was very happy to complete all the Arts Award tasks during session 2. At the end staff described again how much more Amys confidence had grown. They emphasised her confident ability to record her Arts Award evidence directly to camera, normally she is reluctant to be pictured or filmed in any way as she is normally too self conscious.

Amy had lived in an environment of Domestic Violence for a number of years, witnessing violence being inflicted on her mother and also suffering

direct abuse from her adopted step father. Prior to this she also suffered from a major bereavement when her biological father died in an incident when she was 3 or 4 years old. She has been subject to social service referrals and has had a Child In Need plan in place. Amy and her mother both receive support from Womens Aid and at the time of delivering sessions 1 and 2, mother was heavily pregnant and expecting to give birth in the following days ahead. Amy is also designated as her mothers birthing partner which means she'll be there to support both her mother and sibling during birth.

A few days prior to the third session I had a call from Gemma to say that mother was likely to be induced soon, therefore baby will definitely be arriving in the next few days and it would be unlikely that Amy would be able to attend further sessions. After speaking with Chris we agreed it would be best to attend in case baby is still unborn and Amy does arrive.

The third session began with Gemma explaining that Amys mother had in fact given birth during the early hours of the morning so Amy would not be attending any more. No other participants turned up so Dave and I used the day to complete paperwork and reflect with Gemma about strategies to improve attendance for potential future sessions. We attempted to negotiate a way to postpone and use the forth session (originally scheduled for the following day) to potentially deliver some form of music based activity with another group that Womens Aid my be working with but unfortunately they had nothing appropriate within the time frame required.

So unfortunately due to the (pleasant) circumstances we wouldn't be working with Amy any further but within the two sessions we had successfully guided her through creative process of writing and performing her own original song and supported her through a Bronze Arts Award qualification.

We found what worked well was taking into account Amys position regarding her shyness. Having lots of patience, going at a slow and friendly pace with varied fun activities that prompted discussion around creativity was crucial in building a productive rapport. She is an already very creative and articulate persn with a great vocabulary and an interest in journalism. But this was approach to expressing herself was quite alien but gradually her input increased parallel to her confidence. And we managed to use the low attendance situation to her advantage to get the best out of our time together. There were creative points in the session that required less input from adults, which could quite easily have gotten overwhelming so we made use of the lovely weather outside and suggested that she and Gemma (with whom she felt most comfortable with) went in the sunshine for 20 - 30 mins - for instance, to reflect and make notes around ideas for the direction of the second verse. This all helped to build trust and confidence, especially when feeding back her ideas, Amy would say during the session how good she felt about what was being created and how fun the process of being creative in

this way was. Certainly for Dave and I, we measured the success of our approach next to Amys first statement after we introduced ourselves which again was “Im definitely not going to sing!”, and looked at what we had achieved - a song that she had written **and sung**, aswell as an Arts Award.

The outcomes of the session would have been different had more young people attended, the dynamic of other participants may have allowed Amy to share and develop ideas during teamwork activities and perhaps may have also laid the foundations for friendships that would last outside the session which may have been another positive outcome. But it may have been less likely we would have gotten through an Arts Award.

One of the differences the project made was developing Amys sense of self belief in what she can achieve. Boosting her confidence and aspirations during the sessions from having no song - to having a song then from no qualification to having an Arts Award qualification (a day for each) was a really valuable journey that staff felt broadened her horizons and scope of what was possible with a positive attitude. Hearing Amys feedback on film in her Arts Award evidence reinforces this, along with hers and staffs comments during the sessions. Amy has expressed an interest in developing some art work that could be used as cover art for a CD cover. Gemma tapped into this too and being Fine Art student she relished the idea. Staff said they’d love us to work with them again as Amy got so much out of the session. Another interesting piece of feedback was the positive male role modeling that Dave and I were able to provide, aswell as communicating effectively and constructively, as males we were able to offer what others had damaged such as confidence, self esteem and pride. Gemma and Maggie said they’d wished other participants had been present to benefit from the sessions - including boys.

As mentioned previously Amy is the birthing partner for her mother, who had recently given birth to a baby boy, but she is very keen to come back should the opportunity arise and support other participants in future sessions as a mentor.

Written by Alan (Kurly) McGeachie (Kurlyspoetry.com) on behalf of:



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