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‘It’s not just music, it helps you from inside’: Mixing methods to understand the impact of music on young people in contact with the criminal justice system

Abstract

In response to some of the criticisms of previous research into the arts in criminal justice, this paper presents findings from research with a music programme run by a Youth Offending team (YOT). Data was collected on the attendance of 42 participants at YOT appointments - matched against a comparison group - and measures of change over time in musical development, attitudes and behaviour, and well-being. Participants who completed the music programme were statistically more likely to attend YOT appointments than a comparison group. There were statistically significant improvements in participants’ self-reported well-being and musical ability over the course of the project. Effect sizes reached the minimum important difference for quantitative measures. To understand not just if, but how, any impact was achieved, and to ensure the voice of the young people was heard, the quantitative elements of the research were complemented and extended by in-depth interviews with 23 participants.

Keywords

Music, Youth Offending team, mixed-methods, well-being

Introduction

Within the criminal justice system in England and Wales, Youth Offending teams (YOTs) work with children aged 10-17 years who find themselves in trouble with the law. YOTs are statutory, multi-agency, community based teams aiming to work with children to stay away from crime. Statutory YOT partners include local authorities, police, probation, and health. YOTs operate at a local level with national oversight, standards, and monitoring through Youth Justice Board (YJB).

YOT practitioners work with children to understand their needs and risk and create individualised plans that seek to address their offending behaviour. The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 lays out statutory requirements for YOTs, and the YJB (2019) emphasises that YOTs must take a strengths-based and pro-social approach to youth justice with dynamic and on-going review of a child’s needs. Children are allocated a single case manager and individualised sentence plans involve a range of statutory and non-statutory activity, depending on the needs, risk, and interests of the child. This might include offence-related programmes, one-to-one caseworker meetings, educational classes, community activities, and attendance at these sessions is electronically recorded by YOT caseworkers. Attendance and compliance are monitored and, if appropriate,

action taken for non-compliance¹. Staff and activities are expected to encourage and support compliance.

Birmingham YOT runs a music programme for children aged 10-17 years in contact with their service. The project is open to any child in contact with the YOT. Referrals are made by a child's YOT caseworker, where a child is seen to have a musical talent and/or interest in music. The music programme then forms part of the child's individualised sentence plan. The aims of the programme are to: develop the creative, expressive and musical ability of children and young people; improve children and young people's confidence and well-being; and improve the level of compliance and successful completion of court orders amongst project participants.

Sessions run on a one-to-one basis between the music leader and child - with their caseworker present where appropriate - typically in one two-hour session per week over a twelve week period. The programme is run in a professional studio space near central Birmingham and children can work on a variety of music-making activities, ranging from production skills and composition to performance skills and music tuition.

Research Context

There is significant evidence that participation in the arts increases the confidence and social skills of those in contact with the criminal justice system (Anderson et al, 2011; Baker & Homan, 2007; Bilby et al, 2013; Bruce, 2015; Cheliotis & Jordanoska, 2016; Cox & Gelsthorpe, 2008; Loucks & Nugent, 2009; van Maanen, 2010). The improvement of proficiency with a musical instrument in particular has been found to improve self-confidence in performance and rehearsals (Cursley & Maruna, 2015). Increased confidence is linked with a more positive, constructive use of time and associated with integration into education (Adams, 2012; Cheliotis & Jordanoska, 2016; Viggiani et al, 2013). Indeed, a number of studies have found that participation in arts programmes while in contact with the criminal justice system directly increases motivation and engagement with education (Cox & Gelsthorpe, 2008; Wilson et al, 2009; Anderson & Overy, 2010). Winner & Cooper (2000) suggest that participating in the arts uses cognitive processes such as problem solving and close observation, which then make it easier to apply these skills in other areas of learning in the future, such as formal education. Miles & Strauss (2008) argue that the mechanisms and processes behind participating in the arts can increase capability to learn and can therefore help develop important life skills for use after release.

¹ When a child fails to attend a statutory appointment, without an acceptable reason, they are given a written warning, which 'should be followed by the convening of a Compliance Panel chaired by a manager within the YOT, with the case manager, child, parent or carer and any other relevant people invited. Compliance Panels aim to address any barriers to engagement and assist the child to meet the requirements of their court order. Where two formal warnings are given within a twelve-month period and a further unacceptable failure to attend takes place, breach action should be initiated within five working days, or two working days in the case of a child assessed as posing a high risk of serious harm to others....Breach action can also be initiated after only one or two incidences of failure to comply, if this is a serious breach of the requirements of the order such as an act of violence (Youth Justice Board, 2019: Section 2.25).

There is evidence that arts based intervention within criminal justice settings can foster a process of self-evaluation (Caulfield & Wilkinson, 2016; Davey et al, 2015; Silbler, 2005), which has been found to have a positive impact on self-concept (Baker & Homan, 2007; Berson, 2008; Cheliotis & Jordanoska, 2016; Henley, 2012). This process of self-evaluation can be viewed as contributing to secondary desistance (Maruna & Farrall, 2004) where “Desistance is the process by which people who have offended stop offending (primary desistance) and then taken on a personal narrative (Maruna, 2001) that supports a continuing non-offending lifestyle (secondary desistance)” (Bilby, Caulfield, & Ridley, 2013:13). For example, the Changing Tunes music project for ex-prisoners was found to enable participants to see themselves primarily as musicians and individuals who have responsibility and a voice in their own future, and not solely ex-offenders (Cursley & Maruna, 2015). Anderson et al (2011) also found evidence that involvement in arts-based programmes enables participants to redefine their self-image. The literature suggests that arts-based interventions create a sense of personal agency which has a direct influence on desistance. As a result of processes of self-evaluation and change in self-concept, attitudinal and behavioural changes often arise (Bruce, 2015).

Winder et al. (2015) suggest that through arts based programmes participants learn to support their emotions in a safe way and Cartwright (2013) highlights that participation also provides a safe outlet for any negative emotions. A number of studies have found that this positive regulation of emotions through arts participation is linked with increased well-being and decreased anger and aggression (Wilson et al, 2009; Miles and Strauss, 2008; Caulfield, 2015). Henley (2015) also found that music based projects have other positive impacts, including lowering anxiety levels, reduction in incidents of self-harm, and greater ability for self-expression. The building and maintenance of positive emotions is thought to be crucial in countering stressful experiences (Rutten, 2013). The existing literature suggests that arts-based programmes increase a participants’ ability to deal with personal problems and improve coping mechanisms (Wilson et al, 2009; Henley, 2012; Viggiani et al, 2013; Miles & Strauss, 2008). Newman (2002) also suggests that participation in the arts increases protective factors and reduces risk factors.

The relationships forged between programmes facilitators and participants have been discussed by Cursley and Maruna (2015), who found that these relationships increase participants’ social supports. These relationships also provide the participants with new positive role models in their peers and the facilitators (Viggiani et al, 2013). Henley (2012) remarked on the high levels of trust that were built between facilitators and staff. In a similar vein Abrahams et al (2012) noted that the spaces created within the programmes allowed for social barriers to be broken down. The literature generally makes note of the importance of how participants view the facilitators, with professionalism and personality of the facilitators highlighted as important (Eagle, 2008). The skills shown by facilitators has been argued to be essential in the successful delivery of the programme (McLewin, 2006), with these skills modelling positive leadership to participants (Frogett et al, 2017). Daykin et al (2014) found that young people’s levels of engagement were linked with how relevant they deemed the project to be, who seemed to be behind the process, and whether they felt they belonged there for any purposeful reason. When young people had the

chance to take ownership of a programme and set their own ground rules then levels of engagement were good (Eagle, 2008).

Daykin et al (2017: 955) suggest that “music-making led by professional musicians can serve as a personal and collective resource for young people in justice settings”. Daykin et al.'s (2013) systematic review of 63 papers exploring music projects with youth people in contact with the criminal justice system sought to explore the evidence for the impact of music making on well-being and behaviour. They concluded that: “Further research is warranted in relation to music outcomes, particularly personal growth, education and mental well-being for young people in specific justice settings.” (Daykin et al.: 207).

Burrowes et al. (2013) note that there is a lack of good quality research into the arts in criminal justice, citing a particular lack of robust quantitative data. Even when research has taken a mixed-method approach, Burrowes et al. note methodological issues with most research in the area lacking any control group to compare results to. It is rare to see evaluations that use pre-test and post-test scores (Cheliotis & Jordanoska, 2016; Miles & Clarke, 2006), meaning it is hard to clearly establish outcomes in most of the current literature. Hughes (2005) and Meekums and Daniel (2011) note a lack of studies that include follow-up measures, and this remains true today. Bilby et al (2013: 7) note ‘there is a clear need for longitudinal research, combining both qualitative and quantitative methods’.

The research presented here sought to begin to address some of the criticisms outlined above by: investigating whether children and young people taking part in the project achieve improvements in attendance at YOT sessions compared to non-participants; measuring change over time in children and young people’s self-reported musical ability, well-being, and attitudes and behaviour; foregrounding the voice and experience of the young people through in-depth qualitative interviews.

Methods

Research design

This research sought to provide robust measurement of impact and also elicit an understanding of the mechanisms by which change occurs. Consequently, the researchers took a mixed-methods approach, using quantitative measures of the primary outcomes (compliance, wellbeing, musical development, & attitudes & behaviour), complemented and extended by semi-structured interviews with participants.

Attendance at YOT appointments was measured as a proxy for sentence compliance (statutory and non-statutory appointments: including the music programme, Offending Behaviour Programmes, one-to-one caseworker meetings, educational classes). As Ugwudike (2013) notes,

for criminal justice practitioners, concepts of compliance are strongly associated with attendance. Although attendance is not an exact proxy for compliance, non-attendance at YOT appointments has been linked to a high risk of reoffending (Hart 2011).

Attendance data was also collected from a comparison group of children in contact with Birmingham YOT. In this instance, the comparison group – who did not attend the music programme – provides a basis for comparison, allowing for testing whether participation in the programme has any influence on attendance. In an ideal research design, individuals would be randomly allocated to either a participant or control group. However, in this study participants were referred to the programme by their YOT caseworker and so the research team could not exert any control over the selection and allocation of programme participants. When randomisation is not feasible, comparison-group studies are recognised as a suitable alternative (Coalition for Evidence Based Policy, 2007). Comparison group designs are most likely to produce valid results when programme and comparison groups are highly similar in key demographics (e.g. age, gender), key relevant factors (e.g. convictions, sentence length) and geographic location (e.g. from the same city), and when outcome data are collected in the same way for both groups (Coalition for Evidence Based Policy, 2014).

A questionnaire, using validated indicators of wellbeing, musical development, & attitudes & behaviour, was completed by music programme participants at the start and end of their participation in the programme. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with music programme participants at the end of their participation in the programme to investigate their experiences.

Data collection measures

A. Pre- and post- programme scales

The scales measured change over time in: musical development; attitudes and behaviour; and well-being. The research used the scales from Youth Music's 'evaluation builder' (Youth Music, 2018). The tools in the evaluation builder have been designed specifically to explore the impact of work with children and young people, and have been designed to be appropriate for use with children and young people. Three scales were chosen to map onto the project aims. All are scored on a Likert scale from 1-5 (strongly disagree-strongly agree).

Musical Ability Scale: This scale measures self-reported musical ability, based on work by Hallam and Prince (2003). There is a lack of consensus about the concept of musical ability, although it is now more likely to be viewed as a social construct rather than the historic view of a specific aural ability (Hallam, 2006). Hallam and Prince (2003) proposed 77 items under 21 themes to measure musical ability, which Youth Music developed into the six item Musical Ability Scale for children and young people. While there is no validated measure of musical ability with young people, this scale provides an indicator of perceived musical ability.

Attitude and Behaviour Scale: The Youth Music Attitude and Behaviour Scale measures whether children and young people aged 11-18 feel they have developed skills such as working with others, punctuality, respect towards others, contribution to their community, and commitment. The scale includes six questions, with answers on a Likert scale (1, disagree - 5, strongly agree). The validity of this scale has not been established, it is much shorter than most validated attitude and behavior scales (that typically look at attitudes & behaviours towards specific phenomenon), but it provides an indicator that can be considered alongside qualitative exploration of young people's attitudes and behaviours.

Well-being Scale: The Youth Music Well-being Scale is based on the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS: Tennant *et al.*, 2007). The WEMWBS is designed to monitor well-being in the general population and measures elements of positive affect, satisfying interpersonal relationships and positive functioning. We have successfully used the WEMWBS with young adults in previous research (AUTHORS). Youth Music have adapted the WEMWBS for use with children and young people, for example by including a ladder measure (Cantril's ladder) and this has successfully been used in other studies with young people taking part in music programmes (cf. Hudson, 2017).

Music programme participants completed the scales at their first session at the music studio and again approximately 12 weeks later. For practical reasons (the rolling nature of the programme, and funding restraints), the scales were introduced to participants by the programme leader who had been trained by the research team.

B. Attendance data

Data on attendance at appointments (statutory and non-statutory: including the music programme, Offending Behaviour Programmes, one-to-one caseworker meetings, educational classes) were obtained from the YOT Careworks system. Programme participants' attendance data were compared to attendance data from a comparison group of children. The start point for the matching process was all children serving sentences with Birmingham YOT, but not taking part in this, or any other, music programme as part of their sentence. The participant and comparison groups were matched as far as possible on gender, age, and average sentence length. Sentence length was identified as the most potentially significant confounding variable, using sentence length as a proxy for offence seriousness/risk. Cases were removed from the comparison group where their total number of scheduled appointments was lower than 30 as the average number of appointments scheduled for the comparison group was lower than the participant group and so this skewed the data.

C. Interview data

The semi-structured interviews asked participants to discuss: their introduction to and experience of the project; creative developments; relationship between the project and other areas of life; change over time in skills. Interviews were conducted by the research team, in person, at the music studio. The music programme leader was not present. Children were randomly selected from the participant group and contacted by the music leader to arrange the interview, as the research team could not have contact details for participants.

Data analysis

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyse the quantitative scale data. Paired samples T-tests were used to identify whether there were any statistically significant differences between participants' scores on the scales before and after taking part in the music programme. An independent samples T-test was used to analyse data on attendance at appointments compared to a comparison group of children who had not taken part in this, or any other, music programme. Absolute standardised effect sizes (ES) were calculated for between- and within-measures comparisons to supplement important findings. An ES of 0.2 was considered the minimum important difference for all outcome measures, 0.5 to < 0.8 moderate, and ≥ 0.8 large (Cohen, 1988).

The qualitative data was analysed through a process of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2012; Caulfield & Hill, 2018). Analysis began with a coding process involving working line-by-line through the entire body of data, initially led by themes identified through the literature. Subsequent to this, a data led approach was applied to the transcripts. The initial themes acted as a basis for coding, supplemented by new themes emerging during the in-depth coding process.

Participants

Pre- and post- programme scale data was collected with 42 children who participated in the project. They ranged in age from 13 to 20 years old (mean 15.93 years). Three participants were female and 39 were male.²

Data on attendance were received for the 42 young people and a comparison group of 145 children (one female & 144 male).

Interviews were conducted with 23 of the children at the end of their participation in the programme (two female, 21 male, age 13 to 20 years old).

Children who take part in the music programme represent a range of ages, gender, backgrounds, and offence/sentence type in-line with the broader Birmingham YOT population.

Findings

The findings are presented below under three key headings: change over time; attendance data; and interview data.

² While a typical rule of thumb is to have treatment and control/comparison groups of broadly equal size, where the treatment (participant) group is relatively small a larger control/comparison group 'increases the probability that the control/comparison group will provide an accurate benchmark for statistical comparison and is recommended as a method to increase statistical precision (Rinido, 1990:75).

Change over time: pre- and post- programme data

Musical Development

At the beginning of the project, participants scored between 2.50 and 5.53 on the Musical Development scale. The average score was 3.98. At the end of the project the average score was 4.27. A paired-samples t-test showed that there was a significant difference between musical development scores before and after completing the intervention, $t(38) = -2.81$, $ES = 0.39$, $p < 0.01$.

Attitudes and Behaviour

At the beginning of the project, participants scored between 2.80 and 5.00 on the Attitude and Behaviour scale. The average score was 3.93. At the end of the project the average score was 4.06. Although there was a slight improvement, a paired-samples t-test showed that there was no significant difference between attitude and behaviour scores before and after completing the intervention, $t(41) = -1.78$, $ES = 0.23$, $p > 0.05$.

Well-being

At the beginning of the project, participants scored between 1.50 and 5.66 on the Well-being scale. The average score was 4.07. At the end of the project the average score was 4.34. A paired-samples t-test showed that there was a significant difference between well-being scores before and after completing the intervention, $t(41) = -2.32$, $ES = 0.32$, $p < 0.05$.

Attendance data

The participant group had an average length of sentence 339 days (min. 55 days, max. 1098 days), and an average of 119 appointments scheduled (min. 16, max. 548). 54.31% of appointments were attended. The comparison group included one female and 144 males, with an average length of sentence of 357 days (min. 74 days, max 732 days), and an average of 97 appointments scheduled (min. 30, max. 360). 50.46% of appointments were attended.

The data was calculated as a percentage of appointments attended.³ An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the participant and comparison groups on attendance, finding a

³ Given issues working with percentages, and to allow parametric tests to be conducted (and hence to improve the generalisability of the findings), the data was transformed prior to analysis. As percentage data are not free to vary widely from the mean and so this data is normally distributed, the data on percentages of appointment attendance were

statistically significant higher level of attendance in those who have completed the music project ($t_{(190)} = 2.226$, $ES = 0.39$, $p = < 0.05$).

Interview data

The thematic analysis of the interview data from 23 children identified five themes: confidence, professional and social skills; achievements, engagement, and aspirations; wellbeing; and relationships with staff. Each theme is discussed in turn with illustrative quotes provided throughout the discussion.

Confidence, professional and social skills

Fifteen children spoke about a lack of confidence on initial involvement with the programme. Most often, this was a feeling of shyness in working with new people.

“Before I didn't really talk....because I was shy....The studio made me more confident to do stuff”

(Participant 11)

Twelve children spoke about developments in their confidence, social and communication skills as a direct result of taking part in the programme.

“It's also helped with my people skills, it's easier talking to new people discussing new things.... Before I used to come here, I didn't really engage with many people, just my friends and then I'd go home. But since this, I've done shows at colleges, met new people, it's taught me how to communicate with new people, stuff like that.”

(Participant 5)

These participants were able to link increases in confidence and improved communication skills to areas of their life beyond the music programme:

“It helps you communicate with people. Especially I'm not around big people all the time, just in school, just a bunch of kids around, just one teacher? And now it's just me around a lot of big staff. So it helps me a lot to communicate with older people.”

(Participant 2)

“I don't argue with my family anymore”

(Participant 19)

transformed to arcsine values in Excel using the formula $=\text{ASIN}(\text{SQRT}(A2/100))*180/\text{PI}()$. The arcsin transformation moves very low or very high values towards the centre, giving them more theoretical freedom to vary and thus making the data more generalisable.

All the children interviewed spoke about professional skills they had developed and learned through the programme, from developing their singing and writing, to learning completely new skills in music production.

“Before I came here, I never knew how to wire in a mic, use logic, or Final Cut Pro”.
(Participant 1)

“I feel like I have achieved more of an understanding of music as a whole really because with music you only see what they present to you which is the singing, maybe the booth and getting famous. This shows you behind the scenes about how to get to those points, how the music is actually made, how the beats are actually produced”
(Participant 9)

“It’s different every session, sometimes I’ll just record my vocals onto a track, sometimes they’ll teach me to mix a track, or make beats, I learn something new every lesson. My knowledge of music has expanded a lot, I’ve learnt a lot more than I used to do.”
(Participant 5)

Achievements, engagement, aspirations

Nineteen children spoke about coming to recognise their own achievements and personal developments through the programme.

“It’s made me think more about planning, I never used to do it, but now I plan what I’m going to do, make sure I’m not wasting my time”
(Participant 5)

“Helped me realise who I am and who I want to be are not the same person.”
(Participant 15)

“Every session....I feel like I’ve achieved something new”
(Participant 21)

Most participants were able to relate positive changes in their attitude and ambitions to the project:

“This has changed me”
(Participant 19)

“makes me think that I have a good talent for it and that it’s something I should go hard on”
(Participant 5)

Seventeen children spoke about becoming motivated and engaged through participation in the project. While this often began with viewing the project simply as something to pass the time, the

participants expressed the impact that taking-part had on their motivation to improve, to work on their music outside the sessions, and engage with other things.

Yeah, when I do something I don't really enjoy, I never give it my all. I'd go into it half-hearted because I don't really care about it, but since I've been coming here, they've been showing me how to stay committed and to finish after starting stuff. It's made me work harder.

(Participant 5)

"If I didn't have this (The Studio) I wouldn't have much motivation." The Studio "re-motivates you in other things." "It makes you take on other challenges with more motivation."

(Participant 14)

"I write every day. I literally write every day, in class everywhere, when I get the time I just write."

(Participant 20)

Notably, several participants were able to articulate how their increased confidence had an impact beyond the music programme, beginning to raise their aspirations:

"encouraged me to do an access and a degree."

(Participant 17)

"I felt more active. I wanted to do more things."

(Participant 22)

"Since I've been listening at studio I feel like I've been listening at school and taking part."

(Participant 20)

Four children spoke about how their own developments through the programme could change people's perceptions of them:

"It shows people that, you are capable of something. Like you are capable of much more than we thought you were capable of. It lets people know that, 'Ah so you want to do something with your life' which hopefully gets people to see, 'Ok then we can try and help you.'"

(Participant 9)

Wellbeing

Sixteen participants spoke about feeling calmer and more positive during music sessions:

"Music is a good way to cope. When I started to write, because a lot of things were bothering me. It helps you express things...and it takes your mind off things."

(Participant 14)

“They taught me that if I’ve got any problems outside of the studio, maybe I can use that in my music to release stress and stuff like that....There’s certain stuff that maybe sometimes I don’t wanna talk about. But I can express that through my music, and get it off my shoulders.”

(Participant 5)

“It’s about discipline and control. Music is about how to get your feelings out in a song.” “It’s not just music, it helps you from inside...releasing stress....Getting it out. Like a sigh of relief.”

(Participant 23)

The positive regulation of emotions was expressed by six of the children.

“Sometimes it’d be like everyone’s your worst enemy. I was angry. Now I’m more calm.”

(Participant 18)

“I got to see that I can control my anger thing through music. Every time I get angry I just listen to music or start writing. Before studio? I’d be fighting.”

(Participant 20)

Some of the children noted that these positive feelings persisted between sessions.

‘For the rest of today my mood will be stable. It gives me something to focus on. Whatever I feel, I can write it down and next Thursday the process starts again’

(Participant 12)

“I always feel happy here and it lasts all day. Sometimes it can last all week”

(Participant 10)

The data presented here suggest that the programme provided an effective way of dealing with anger and aggression. However, it is important to note the realities of normal life outside the project. While all participants experienced the project positively, it would be unrealistic to expect that participation in the programme would result in a complete removal of challenging feelings and emotions:

“Even today I’m the same as I was when I was 14. I’m angry. Sometimes confused. There’s things that hide it, music’s one of them. I don’t know why I’m angry.”

(Participant 15)

It is clear that the majority of children engaged in the project experience it in a way that is beneficial for their wellbeing. One of the factors likely to explain the reported improvement in well-being is that the children are using and developing their skills and abilities, which results in greater mental wellbeing..

Relationships with staff

All the children were positive about the support and approach of the project staff. The importance placed on the development of these relationships was evidenced by the passion apparent in the interviews with the children, and how they spoke at length about the programme team.

“They’re good, they're helpful. (Programme Leader) is a good person....the music project, to be honest, it's helped me, when he can, he's a good teacher....everyone’s helpful in the group really.”

(Participant 3)

“We talk about a lot of things, you know, like life, what's going on, what you can do in the future, things like that.”

(Participant 2)

“Use their experience to teach us. Suggest new things for us to do... They don’t make us do stuff, give us a good opportunity.” “he expects more, pushes you to your target.”

(Participant 18)

Participants identified and placed value on the support they received from the programme staff.

“I have an issue with people telling me what to do but from (Programme Leader) I listen because he knows what he’s talking about and he wants you to be the best you can’.

(Participant 12)

“They care. They support and encourage. They challenge you if you mess up. They’re not only music producers, they constantly support you.”

(Participant 23)

The children spoke about the respectful relationships developed with the programme staff.

“I’ve got respect for them. I respect what they’re doing....Just how patient they’ve been with me. Their attitude towards me never changes”

(Participant 17)

“there’s mutual respect”

(Participant 12)

Of note is that the children spoke about not only the support, but the importance of constructive critical feedback from the programme team. The children placed significant value on the professional feedback from the programme team and this appears to be crucial in developing mutually respectful relationships. Participants reported valuing the skills and experience of the project staff, as well as respecting their opinion and feedback.

“So if he knows something’s half-hearted or not good, he’ll be like ‘you need to do this, you need to do that’, it’s not that it’s criticism, he just knows what he could do

to make me better as an artist... Yeah, I don't even care if it was criticism, because I know he's saying it for a reason, I know he's not saying it to put me down, he's saying it to make me up."

(Participant 1)

"if I've been slacking they'll tell my mum I've been slacking, they won't stick up for me cos like I always tell them say how it is, there's no point trying to present, if I'm not really improving, then she'd say he's not improving like. But it's not, it's the opposite."

(Participant 3)

"They listen to your, your point of view. If they criticise you they tell you why"

(Participant 10)

Discussion

The findings presented in this paper demonstrate the positive impact of the music programme on participants. This study has also begun to address some of the criticisms of previous research into the arts in criminal justice (Burrowes et al, 2013). The key findings are that: participants who completed the music programme were statistically more likely to attend YOT appointments than a comparison group. There were statistically significant improvements in participants' self-reported well-being and musical ability over the course of the project and effect sizes reached the minimum important difference for all of the quantitative measures. These results build upon previous qualitative research on the impact of music in criminal justice. For example, that well-being increased through participating in the project (Wilson et al., 2009) and the relationship between participants' improvements in musical ability and increased their self-confidence (Cursley & Maruna, 2015). Positive improvements were observed in participants' attitudes and behaviour, but these were not statistically significant.

The research presented in this paper sought to understand both if and how any impact was achieved through the programme, using semi-structured interviews with participants to explore the latter. Participants were highly positive about their experiences of the programme, and almost all had learnt to recognise their own achievements, personal, social, and skills development, and reported feeling calmer and more positive. The support and approach of the project staff appeared to be the key factor responsible for childrens' engagement in the programme, supported by significant differences in attendance between the participant and comparison groups, adding support to previous research in this area (Cursley & Maruna, 2015; Daykin et al, 2014; Henley, 2012). In particular, participants' highlighted the value they placed on the status of the programme team as music professionals as central to their engagement. The status and experience of the programme staff engendered respect for both the development work and critical feedback they provided to participants. Similar findings have been discussed in other research exploring the arts in criminal justice, with adult men in prisons (Caulfield, 2014). Newman (2002) suggests that participation in creative programmes reduces risk factors and increases protective factors,

including social support (Cursley and Maruna, 2015) and new role models in their peers and art facilitators (Viggiani et al, 2013). The findings here about positive relationships with staff add support to previous literature that has begun to demonstrate that the most powerful bonds that form may be between the programme facilitators and participants (Henley, 2012). The findings also add support to Daykin et al's (2014) findings that when professional musicians were used as facilitators, children and young people became engaged and showed respect. The data presented here indicates that the core factor underpinning the engagement of the children in the programme is the relationships that develop with the programme staff.

The sense of achievement, engagement with the programme, and improved aspirations reported by interviewees are corroborated by both the differences in attendance between the participant and comparison groups and the increase in musical development scores before and after engaging with the programme. Previous research has suggested that for many people in contact with the criminal justice system, taking part in a creative programme in prison may be the first time they have felt a sense of achievement, and that this is related to increases in confidence (Caulfield, Wilkinson, & Wilson, 2016). Having aspirations developed, supported, and treated seriously is particularly important as it is viewed as central to achieving lasting change in offender populations (HMI Probation, 2017). Aspiring to achieve, and succeeding, is also associated with well-being (Sheldon and Kasser, 1998).

The improvements in positivity, feelings of calm, and the positive regulation of emotions reported by interview participants align with the significant increase in well-being scale scores by participants before and after the project. There is a wide literature exploring the link between mental health and wellbeing and offending behaviour. Problems with mental health and wellbeing are associated with increased risk of reoffending in those in contact with the criminal justice system (cf. Caulfield, 2016; Ministry of Justice, 2009). The positive regulation of emotions has been linked to increased well-being and decreases in anger and aggression through participation in arts-based projects (Wilson et al., 2009; Miles and Strauss, 2008). The calming effect of participating in arts and creative programmes has been reported in previous research (Caulfield, 2014) and is thought to be – at least in part – attributable to the absorbing nature of the work (Wilson, Caulfield, & Atherton, 2009). Nugent and Loucks (2011) and Blacker and Watson (2008) suggest that the arts can provide an effective way of dealing with anger and aggression, a trait often linked with antisocial and criminal behaviour. In addition, aspiring to achieve (discussed above, and succeeding, is associated with significant well-being (Sheldon and Kasser, 1998). Participation in creative programmes has been shown to reduce risk factors and increase protective factors for mental health and well-being, including social support (Cursley and Maruna, 2015), with social barriers broken down in the spaces created in arts programmes. Although the improvements in the attitudes and behaviour scale before and after the programme were not statistically significant, the improvements in confidence, professional and social skills described by the majority of interview participants are echo previous research findings. There is evidence that participation in creative activities increases confidence and social skills (Baker & Homan, 2007; Bilby et al, 2013; Bruce, 2015; Cheliotis & Jordanoska, 2016; Cox & Gelsthorpe, 2008;). Indeed, in Cursley and Maruna's (2015) evaluation of a music programme for prisoners and ex-prisoners, participants' improvements in musical ability appeared to improve their self-confidence in rehearsals and performances, and increases in the confidence of those in contact

with the criminal justice system can lead to more constructive use of their time both within and outside of programmes.

This research is not without limitations. As children were not referred to the programme randomly, it is possible that some selection bias exists. Children were referred by their YOT caseworker and thus the research team was not able to exert any control over the selection of programme participants. However, the inclusion of a comparison group went some way to mitigating the risk of selection bias existing and affecting the findings for attendance data. Attendance at YOT appointments was measured as a proxy for sentence compliance. Although attendance is not an exact proxy for compliance, non-attendance at YOT appointments has been linked to a high risk of reoffending (Hart 2011). However, it is important to note that attendance does not necessarily imply full compliance. Robinson and McNeill (2008) distinguish between ‘formal’ and ‘substantive’ compliance, with examples of formal compliance being attendance at appointments or placements, and substantive compliance being active engagement and cooperation. While the quantitative findings presented in this current research look at ‘formal’ compliance - as attendance data is routinely collected by the YOT and was available to the research team - the qualitative findings do provide some insight into ‘substantive’ compliance. It should also be noted that there is limited published evidence on the validity of the scale measures used in this research. The measures were used for a number of reasons: they are recommended by the funder of the programme as appropriate for the age group and were specifically developed with this in mind; the measures are concise enough to limit respondent fatigue (Lavrakas, 2008); the measures have also been designed with programme facilitators in mind, being straightforward enough for non-researchers to administer. Future research could utilise validated measures.

Conclusions

This research has built on previous research findings and has begun to address some of the methodological concerns raised about research on the arts in criminal justice (Burrowes et al., 2013). By using data routinely collected by the youth offending team to employ a comparison group design, and using pre- and post-test measures, this study has provided robust evidence of the impact of the programme. This study also ensured that the voice and experience of participants was heard, in order to understand not just if the programme had an impact, but how that impact might have occurred.

The findings presented here suggest that the Birmingham Youth offending team music programme fulfils the aims of developing the creative, expressive and musical ability of children and young people; improving children and young people’s confidence and well-being; and improving the level of compliance. It was not within the remit of this current study to measure whether the music programme enhanced participants’ successful completion of court orders. Future research should seek to access follow-up data from the YOT to explore whether improved attendance was sustained and completion of court orders. It would also be beneficial to look at the longer term outcomes of the participants (for example, educational engagement, & reoffending

data). This would have the additional benefit of allowing for exploration of the relationship between attendance, substantive compliance, and later outcomes. Future research should test and refine the methodology developed here on a larger scale with other music programmes, with other youth offending teams, and in other criminal justice settings. The findings concerning the relationships and respect that developed between participants and programme leaders, and the central role of this in engagement with the programme, is an interesting and potentially valuable avenue for further exploration.

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Dear reviewers/editorial team,

Thank you for the positive comments and feedback. Below we have outlined how/where we have addressed these points.

| Reviewer comment | Author response |
|---|--|
| <p>1. The wording would bear revision here and there. For example, on page 8, under 'Research Methods' we find mention that the 'research design took a mixed methods approach'. I would suggest 'the research design involved mixed methods or 'The researchers followed a mixed methods approach'. Also, elsewhere - 'The key findings are that participants who completed the music programme were statistically more likely to attend appointments than a comparison group.' Isn't this tautologous? Those who were involved in the music programme were more likely to attend and complete the programme than the comparison group? Finally, page 20 - improvement in confidence..professional and social skills described by the majority of participants are echoed by previous research findings. Surely you mean that the findings of THIS study echo those of previous research findings?</p> | <p>Wording revised. In the discussion, key finding about attendance at appointments clarified to be clear this is about all YOT appointments, not the music programme.</p> |
| <p>2. Check punctuation throughout - e.g. participants' (plural) - so the possessive apostrophe comes after the word (not participant's) unless you are using a definite article such as 'the participant's...' or 'a participant's....</p> | <p>Amended throughout</p> |
| <p>3. The music programme is never explained and the response to the earlier review was, in short, to recommend it be written up elsewhere. But without at least a summary of the project - what it involved, its aims, its content etc - it is difficult for the reader to understand its value, as documented through the research conducted.</p> | <p>Please refer to the two paragraph summary in the introduction.</p> |
| <p>4. also raised by the previous review - relates to the decision to replace 'compliance' with 'attendance'. Unfortunately, this is not any clearer - in fact it is arguably more opaque and generally highlights the need for the authors to help the readers contextualise for an international readership what are very</p> | <p>Contextual information added to the Introduction section of the paper</p> |

specific terms used in the context of English youth justice. Without some explanation of what engagement with YOTS (what are they, what do they do) involves (is it a sentence? are appointments mandatory? are there sanctions for noncompliance?), the international reader will not be able to fully appreciate the article's context.

Generally, then, for an international audience, it is important that the article include a short background/description of the context here. This will ultimately enhance the relevance of what is a really useful study in an important area.