



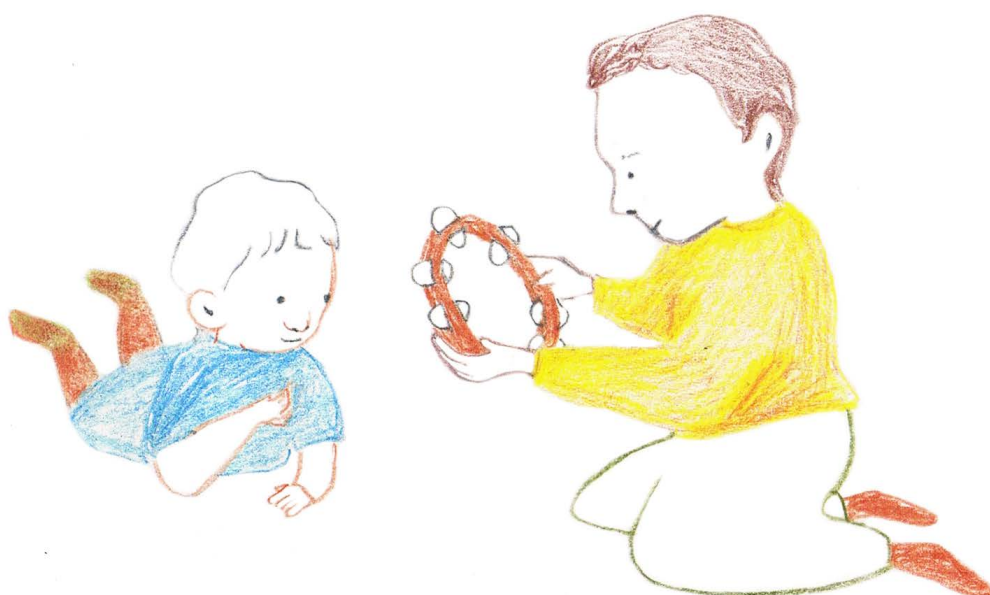
# LOUD & CLEAR!

Ten Year Report



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# Introduction

This report marks the 10th anniversary of Loud and Clear, Sage Gateshead's music programme for care experienced children and their families.

Beginning by exploring the circumstances that led to the creation of the programme over a decade ago, the report goes on to outline the methodology that has underpinned the programme and examines the profound and lasting impact of Loud and Clear on those involved in it.

It features testimonies from the children, young people and families who took part in the programme; the music leaders who led the sessions; and the partner organisations who supported the programme. As well as commemorating a landmark moment, this report aims to gather the learning and practice generated by the programme and to share it for future use.

## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the following organisations for their time, care, and support over the past ten years:

- Youth Music
- Newcastle Foster A Future
- Gateshead Fostering Service
- Adopt North East
- Adoption Tees Valley

Finally, we would like to thank Loud and Clear families: thank you for playing, singing, and dancing with us for a whole decade. We continue to be inspired by you, and to learn and grow with you.

## Sage Gateshead Team over 10 years

Music leaders: Sofia de Castro, Klaire Sharp, Carol Bowden, Joe Johnston, Mel Mello-Pine, Laura Reavley, Paige Temperley, Jim Montague, Kay Stott, Rachel Purcell, Jake Fletcher, Sammi Hung, Eleanor Mooney, Programme Leader; Ryan Humphrey, Project Leader; Louise Duff, Programme Manager; Kay Storey, Programme Coordinator; Tilly Riley, Programme Coordinator; Jenny Young, Accessible Learning Programme Leader; Julia Partington, Early Years Programme Leader Steve Jinski, Head of Musical Inclusion; Jo Thornton and Matt Wigley, Heads of Young People's Programme; Katherine Zeserson, Director, Learning and Participation; Wendy Smith, Creative Director.



# Context

Loud and Clear was established in 2009 through Sing Up, the government-funded National Singing Programme. Sing Up was led by a consortium of partners, Sage Gateshead, Youth Music, Faber Music and AMV BBDO. Beyond The Mainstream, a strand of Sing Up, focused on promoting the wellbeing of care experienced children through singing and was supported by the National Children's Bureau. As part of Sing Up, Sage Gateshead worked in partnership with local authorities in the North East of England to develop singing activities for primary aged care experienced children.

Given the success of Beyond The Mainstream, Loud and Clear was established as a programme within Sage Gateshead, with Eleanor Mooney as Project Leader. The first strand of the programme engaged foster carers and care experienced children aged 0-5. Youth Music funding was awarded to Sage Gateshead and a Steering Group was established with representatives from each partner organisation attending; Newcastle and Gateshead fostering services and foster carers.

In May 2013, the Steering Group recommended applying to Youth Music for further funding to develop the programme. Through conversations with Newcastle and Gateshead Councils and foster carers, training was identified as a key element of the programme, which should be maintained. Resources (song books and song bags) were also identified as integral to developing the confidence of foster carers and continuing activities in the foster home. In response to a question from the Newcastle City Council Aspire team, 'what are you doing to follow the child...?', an additional two strands of the Loud and Clear programme were developed for adoptive families and kinship families.

Since 2013, the Loud and Clear programme has continued to grow and develop, leading high quality and inclusive music making for care experienced children and the key adults in their lives through collaboration with local authority services. Other Sage Gateshead projects established through these local authority partnerships connected to the Loud and Clear programme include work with Young Carers aged 8-18, a Cabinet Office-funded mentoring programme for care leavers, and a volunteer project for care experienced young people.

In 2018, a new strand of the Loud and Clear programme was developed in response to the recognition of the increasing number of children aged 4-7 living within the care system. 'Move on Up!' for adoptive families with children aged 4-7 supported continuity and consistency as the children started school. Several families from the 0-5 sessions moved to these weekend sessions, bringing new family members along.

Loud and Clear continued throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, where all weekly sessions moved online. Families let us know that online sessions were a vital means of interaction with other care experienced families during the COVID-19 pandemic. Online sessions removed geographical and travel barriers, making sure families and care experienced children from across the North East could access music making. Coming out of the pandemic, Loud and Clear has continued to evolve, developing a new solid partnership with Adoption Tees Valley.

This report tells the story of the last ten years of Loud and Clear, exploring the different strands and the impacts of the programme for families, music leaders, organisations and the broader music ecosystem. Along the way, we will share stories, responses and experiences from people involved in Loud and Clear.

# The Pedagogy Underpinning Loud and Clear

*At Sage Gateshead, musical and social pedagogy go hand in hand. It has been so from the very beginning, in different ways for different reasons, and cultivated by different people. Jenny Young amplified that, whilst working in Sing Up and then within Sage Gateshead's learning programmes, through making the connection with Pat Petrie, Helen Chambers, and the Learning Framework for Artist Pedagogues.*

**Wendy Smith**

Creative Director 2022

This section outlines the practice and pedagogy underpinning the Loud and Clear programme.

## How we understand 'pedagogy' and 'social pedagogy'

'Pedagogy' refers to methods or approaches to teaching and learning underpinned by a series of guiding values. In this report, 'social pedagogy' refers to a holistic approach that is person-centred and supports musical, personal and social development.

## Social pedagogy

Social Pedagogy is concerned with individuals' well-being, learning and growth. Initially rooted in social work practices, it has continued to gain prominence across numerous fields. It is underpinned by the idea that each person has inherent potential, is valuable, resourceful and can make a meaningful contribution to their wider community if we find ways of including them (Thempra.org.uk).

With its emphasis on learning and growth, it has become a standard approach for working with care experienced children and young people.

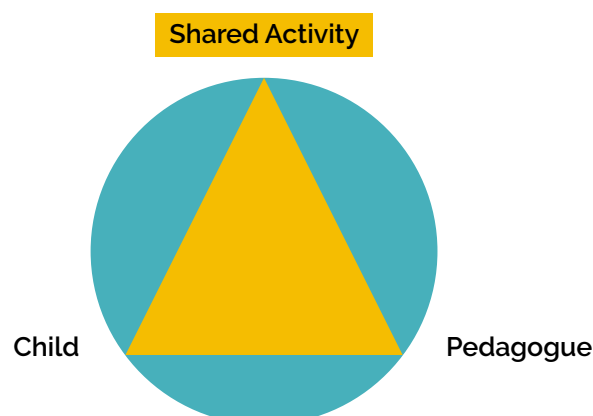


Figure 1.1- The Common Third



“Employing such an approach may support the building of relationships between care experienced children and the key adults within their lives. Some central ideas of social pedagogical practice are the common third and the belief that engaging in some form of non-hierarchical activity may support the development of meaningful relationships and bonds between children and adults”.

*(Humphrey 2020, p.2; Petrie 2011, p.78).*

Social pedagogy promotes the principle of working with head, heart, and hands:

- **Head** - knowledge of the child and their context;
- **Heart** - developing and sharing empathy between children and adults that is built around continuous reflection;
- **Hands** - practical engagement in an activity together.

When working in a social pedagogical approach, it is essential to consider the three Ps defined by Eric Jappe, these are:

- **The professional** part of us relates to the responsibilities, knowledge and skills connected with the work or role we are undertaking. It provides us with a professional framework that can help guide our interactions and decisions;
- **The personal** part of us recognises the uniqueness we bring as an individual. Sharing our own experiences, stories, preferences, strengths, and weaknesses. Allowing young people to see this more personal side of ourselves helps to create authentic relationships and enables us to use our full potential;
- **The private** part of us recognises the area of our life that we would only choose to share with those closest to us, if at all. Sharing something from the private self inappropriately may leave us feeling vulnerable. We must carefully reflect on the line between personal and private and acknowledge that this line will move depending on the situation we are in and who we are working with.

Social pedagogy is a way of being within the Loud and Clear programme; its emphasis on learning, growth, and relationship development is at the heart of Sage Gateshead's work.

## Learning Framework for Artist Pedagogues and Social Pedagogy

Helen Chambers and Pat Petrie's 'Learning Framework for Artist Pedagogues' (2008) significantly influenced the design of the Loud and Clear model. Taking the principles of education and social pedagogy as its basis, this framework suggests guidelines for artistic and creative practitioners working with care experienced children. The framework aims to make sure that this work is of the best quality and in the best interests of the children involved.

In the early stages of developing Loud and Clear, the framework provided three areas for consideration that remain:

1. The principles and values of social pedagogy and considerations for music leaders, including aspiring to do our best for children; supporting the growth of children's confidence; creating safe boundaries; working with head, hands, and heart; leading high quality musical experiences whilst being inclusive and accessible; working in partnership with carers and partner organisations; making time and space for reflective practice.
2. Identifying the knowledge and skills of music leaders, foster carers, birth families, adoptive families, and staff in partner organisations; identifying training needs and responding with accredited training and professional networks;
3. Evaluating the programme to make sure it consistently reflects the quality indicators for work with care experienced children as presented in the framework.

Chambers and Petrie's (2008) framework has also informed Sage Gateshead's Learning Framework for Inclusive Music Making (2022), combining music and social pedagogy to create inclusive music making environments.

## Sage Gateshead's Learning Framework for Inclusive Music Making

Sage Gateshead's Learning Framework for Inclusive Music Making was led by Wendy Smith and developed in consultation with Sage Gateshead's music leaders led by Dr Susanne Burns and Dr Phil Mullen. Sage Gateshead's approach is centred in a philosophy of democratic learning, empathy, and the belief that all children and young people can fulfil their potential.

The Learning Framework for Inclusive Music Making identifies guiding considerations for working musically with individuals and groups:

- **Values:** inclusion, care, children, and young people centred;
- **Environment:** clear boundaries, creativity and risk taking;
- **People:** developing relationships based on care, empathy, trust, and respect;
- **Structure:** responsive and adaptive.

Music leaders working in Loud and Clear make sure that the principles of the Learning Framework are embedded within their practices and that the music making environments are accessible and inclusive.

## **Sage Gateshead Ethos of Family Engagement and Early Years Pedagogy**

Sage Gateshead's family music making, and training sessions were guided by the Learning Framework for Inclusive Music Making and early years pedagogy. In this approach, musical learning supports children's development and the whole family's musical engagement.

**This approach corresponds with the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework, which seeks to provide the following:**

- Quality and consistency in all early years settings so that every child makes good progress, and no child gets left behind;
- A secure foundation through planning for the learning and development of each child, and assessing and reviewing what they have learned regularly;
- Partnerships between practitioners and parents and/or carers, equality of opportunity and anti-discriminatory practice ensure that every child is included and supported.

**Sage Gateshead recognises that all early learning and development areas are important and interconnected. There is qualitative evidence to suggest that music making, especially singing in the early years, supports the three prime areas of learning and development:**

- Communication and language, supported by singing, rhyme and vocal play;
- Physical development, supported by dance and movement to music and developing pulse and rhythm skills;
- Personal, social, and emotional development, supported by making music with others, turn-taking, sharing, listening and simple song writing activities, e.g., incorporating children's creative ideas into familiar songs.

**Within Loud and Clear, the specially trained music leaders support children and carers to explore and investigate music making freely through hands-on play and group music making to:**

- Encourage and value children's creative ideas and contributions;
- Support continuous engagement in musical learning;
- Support areas of challenge;
- Celebrate achievements;
- Encourage and develop children's confidence, musically and socially;
- Support the development of positive and playful carer/child relationships.

The shared central tenet of Sage Gateshead's pedagogy is that young children and adults learn most successfully when they enjoy themselves, have fun and are supported to be adventurous.



## The Importance of Co-Leadership

In the Loud and Clear programme, the co-leadership model, where one music leader can facilitate while the other can support children where needed, supports consistency, reliability, and continuity for families. For music leaders, co-leading supports professional development, deeper reflection, and experience of different approaches. Co-leading also supports social pedagogy through developing positive relationships between music leaders, parents, carers, and children.

## Ethical Considerations

Several ethical considerations must be accounted for in developing this ten-year report. Given the nature of the families involved in the programme, anonymity has been assured through pseudonyms. All individuals involved in this evaluation were provided with details of their involvement and gave permission for the use of their quotes as part of the report. All audio recordings were destroyed after the transcriptions had been completed and signed off.

There has been no video or photographic record of programme activity. Considering appropriate safeguarding, we have instead used high-quality audio recordings and illustrations to bring the programme to life.



# Strands of the Loud and Clear Programme

The following list details the different strands that have been part of the Loud and Clear programme over the past decade.

## **Loud and Clear Foster Family Music Making**

This strand, which continues to take place at Sage Gateshead, works with foster families with children aged 0-5 through weekly music making sessions. These sessions aim to support language, motor-skills, bond, and musical skill development.

## **Loud and Clear Adoptive Family Music Making**

This strand, which continues to take place at Sage Gateshead, works with adoptive families with children aged 0-5 through weekly music making sessions. These sessions aim to support language, motor-skills, bond, and musical skill development.

## **Loud and Clear Birth Family and Kinship Carer Pilot**

In 2014 five pilot family music making sessions were introduced for families on the edge of care and their community foster carers. The evaluation demonstrated that the sessions were successful, the children were engaged, and there was excellent support and enthusiasm from the community foster carers.

## **Foster Carer Choir**

In 2014 a Foster Carer Choir was introduced to support opportunities for carers to network with one another and gain a sense of peer support. The choir ran for ten weeks at Gateshead Old Town Hall. However, the responsibilities and demands of the carers meant that numbers were not high enough to continue. Thanks to the community choir network in the North East, singing carers were signposted to many other groups to choose from and enjoy.

## **Loud and Clear Young Women's Group**

The Loud and Clear Young Women's group took place in 2013 in partnership with Newcastle and Gateshead fostering services. This strand aimed to work with young women in the care system between 11-16, recognising that there was an increasing number of young women entering the care system within Gateshead due to domestic violence, abuse, and neglect. It was hoped that the project could support young women in developing their self-esteem and prepare them with appropriate life skills as they progress towards independence.

## **Loud and Clear 1-1s**

Partnerships with Newcastle and Gateshead Fostering Services and the children's Pupil Premium allowance supported 1-1 music lessons for care experienced children and young people who expressed interest in a particular instrument or voice. Guitar, drumming, piano and vocal lessons took place at Sage Gateshead from 2014 - 2015.

## **Loud and Clear Adoptive Move on Up**

Move on Up Adoptive Family Learning was developed in April 2018 as a progression for adoptive children aged 4-7 who had previously attended the sessions for 0-4-year-olds. Initially established as an after-school activity, following feedback from families and partners, Adoptive Move on Up merged with Adoptive Family Music Making in September 2022 and continues weekly on Saturdays.

### **Loud and Clear Foster Family Move on Up**

Move on Up Foster Family Learning was established in April 2019 for foster children aged 4-7. This strand ran for a term as an after-school activity. Due to challenges around location, availability, timing, and following conversations with partners, a decision was made to pause Foster Family Move on Up.

### **Loud and Clear Adoption Tees Valley**

The Loud and Clear Adoption Tees Valley strand was established in December 2021 and continues to date. Adoption Tees Valley contacted the Loud and Clear team after recognising their work with adoptive families in Newcastle and Gateshead. A weekly session was developed to support adoptive families with children aged 0-4.

### **Loud and Clear 'Saturday Sessions'**

The Loud and Clear 'Saturday Sessions' were developed in 2022 after Adoption North East identified a need for music making for families with adopted children between the ages of 7-11. 'Saturday Sessions' were developed to establish whole family music-making, focused on instrument exploration and playing. Children could also take part in Arts Award Discover and Explore at these sessions.



## **Training for Foster carers and Adoptive parents**

Working with local authority partners, Loud and Clear has developed training to support foster carers and adoptive parents to develop knowledge of theory and practical approaches for music making with young children. Beginning with one-off training events at Sage Gateshead, we identified that integrating training into existing local authority training and events was more accessible. This led to researching, and mapping training to the national Foster Carer Training Support and Development Standards and Sage Gateshead training was embedded in Newcastle Adoption Service's Pre-Adoption Training. This training will end in March 2023, due to changes to funding.

## **Twilight Ukuleles**

During the pandemic, we learnt that carers and parents were missing the peer support and connection they found during in-person sessions. We were also keen to continue with training. This led to the development of online Twilight Ukulele training, a termly event for carers and parents to meet post-bedtime and learn some new ukulele skills and songs for the family to share and chat with other parents and carers. These new sessions have proved popular due to the ease of attendance, with no childcare/travel needed, and continue to run.

## **Associated Activity**

### **Songbooks and Song Bags**

In the first year of Loud and Clear, a decision was made to create song bags and songbooks that could accompany the child through their care journey. One of the foster carers' birth children developed a songbook including various songs from the Loud and Clear sessions that carers highlighted as favourites.

Song bags have been created and shared with all families. These bags include a variety of instruments people can shake, scrape, and tap, with hand puppets, ukuleles, and musical storybooks. Feedback from families illustrates the importance of the song bags in encouraging family music making in the home and using music to help develop structure and routine.

### **Concert Tickets at Sage Gateshead**

Through the support of Youth Music funding, families involved in Loud and Clear can attend concerts, gigs and shows free of charge. Families have enjoyed family shows based on the EYFS framework, touring theatre productions and Royal Northern Sinfonia performances of The Snowman each Christmas.

### **Tenth Birthday Song**

To mark the Loud and Clear 10-year milestone, music leader Jake has co-written the first Loud and Clear song with families we work with. He visited each weekly session, writing lyrics and recording the families singing and playing, capturing the musicality, community, and enjoyment of Loud and Clear sessions. The music leader team also feature on backing vocals.

The following section will explore Loud and Clear online sessions' impact on families, music leaders and partners during the COVID-19 pandemic.



# Digital Loud and Clear

Moving the Loud and Clear programme online during the COVID-19 pandemic brought challenges and the opportunity to be innovative. This section of the report examines moving online and the impacts experienced by families, music leaders and partners.

Online activity took place through Zoom with the support of partners who distributed web links and equipment. The music leaders continued to co-lead sessions, overcoming challenges such as latency, muted voices, and limited visibility of the families on camera during sessions. Co-leadership in this unexpected situation was vital to support music leaders to adapt and develop new activities, support families with IT and observe how families interacted to make sure established Loud and Clear practice could continue within the sessions.

Sessions took place online between October 2020 and July 2021. During that period, a total of 90 sessions took place in the three core Loud and Clear projects:

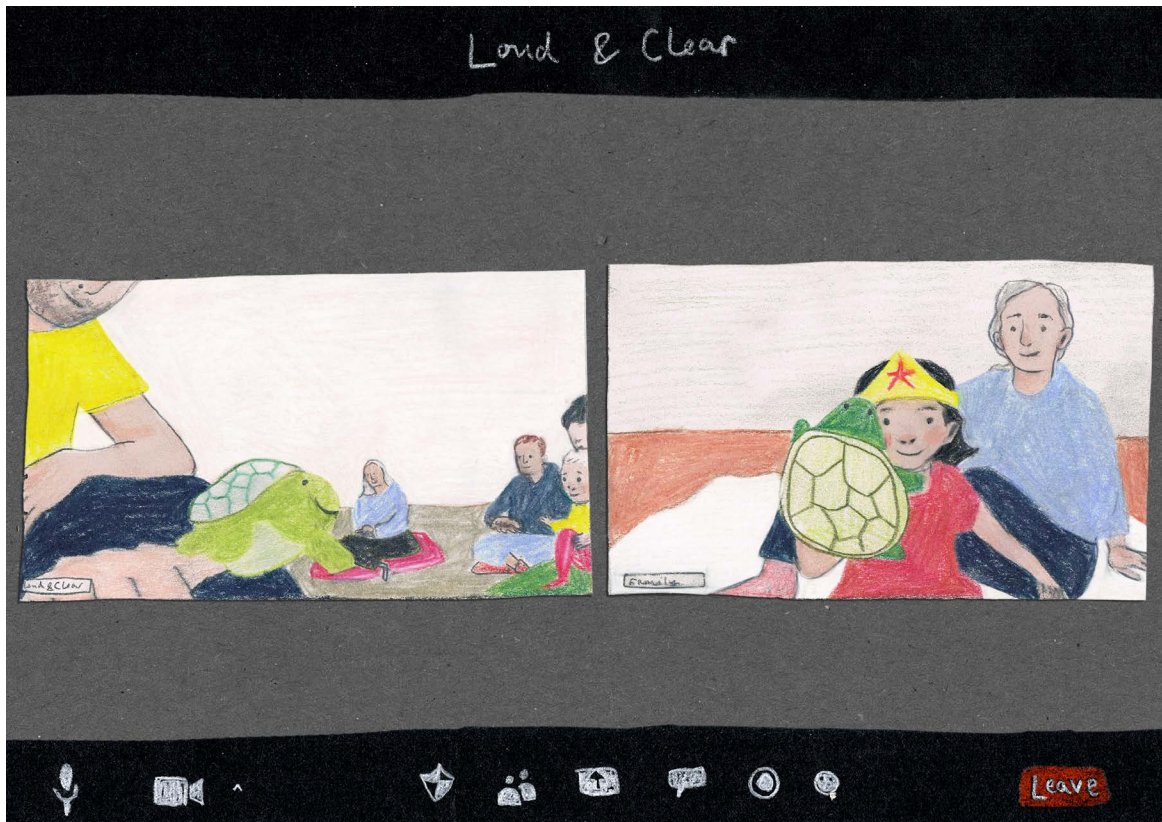
- Loud and Clear Foster Family Music Making;
- Loud and Clear Adoptive Family Music Making;
- Loud and Clear Move On Up.

Families could also take part in one-off online events:

- **Loud and Clear Summer Special:** scheduled in the summer break, for adoptive and foster families;
- **Three Virtual 'House Party' events:** One-hour events on Zoom for children aged 0-7 and their families;
- **Make Music Family Band:** Ukulele and percussion sessions at the end of every term;
- **Digital Music Making Videos:** Four pre-recorded digital early years videos were developed over the first lockdown. These videos are hosted on Sage Gateshead's YouTube, distributed by partner organisations;
- **Music Making Activity Book:** A Musical activity book shared with families through partner organisations. The books included identifying instruments, rhythmic games, and songs to explore and sing;
- **Song bags:** A song bag was posted out to families and included instruments (drums, guiros, egg shakers, bells), scarfs and bubble machines to support children's music making at home.

## Families experiences of online sessions

Interacting with other people who had been or were living in similar circumstances seemed even more critical during COVID-19 lockdowns. Several families described how the Loud and Clear programme became one of the only activities they could attend where they were able to interact with other adoptive or foster care families:



“Contact with the outside world. Good for my mental health as I love to sing along. Assists me to stimulate my baby. I enjoy it. ”

*(Masey, Adoptive Mother, Summer 2021)*

“Because there was no play group and no social activity for the baby due to COVID”

*(Karen, Foster Carer, Spring 2021)*

“It was important to us that Sally knows other adopted children.”

*(Paul, Adoptive Father, Spring 2021)*

### **What benefits did foster, and adoptive families experience from Loud and Clear online sessions?**

Families reported how online sessions supported them in developing their knowledge of repertoire, songs, and activities that they could use away from the screen. For one set of adoptive parents, singing and learning children’s songs was crucial for helping them build their catalogue of songs to sing with their baby to provide stimulation daily:

“Social mainly and her confidence has grown since starting the classes as she now recognises the songs. Benefits us as a family as we keep singing the songs at home. Missing out on baby classes means our catalogue of children songs is very limited.”

*(Ester, Adoptive Mother, Winter 2020)*

Adoptive parents and carers also reported that the programme supported the children's personal skills development. For instance, 6-year-old Robbie's adoptive mother noted how music making had become a way of helping him to 'control his sometimes big emotions' outside the session (Sarah-Jane, Adoptive Mother, 2020). Similarly, David, an adoptive father, outlined how his son was growing in confidence through interacting with other adults through Loud and Clear Adoptive Family Learning. This was believed to be crucial for this young person, who may have struggled to have the space to interact with other adults through Covid-19 lockdowns.

Unsurprisingly, since many families began attending Loud and Clear to interact and socialise with others in a similar circumstance, many outlined this as one of the most significant benefits of attending the sessions. It was believed that socialising with other adoptive children was beneficial for the children. For Daisy, Emma's adopted daughter, Move on Up sessions online supported her in developing friendships with the rest of the group members, even though she had never actually met them in person at a time when she did not have the opportunity to socialise with others.

The social aspect is very important as she considers Ryan and Rachel [music leaders] plus the other group members to be her friends.

**"I can't praise Ryan and Rachel highly enough; they are so welcoming and friendly and make my child feel special."**

*(Emma, Adoptive Mother, Summer 2021)*

### **How did Loud and Clear support the development of positive relationships?**

Many adoptive parents and carers described how the session had positively impacted their relationship with the child in their care. For instance, Sarah-Jane (adoptive mother, 2020) described in her questionnaire how the sessions became a 'special time' for just her and Robbie, which helped them to develop their bond. Whereas Sarah, a foster carer, outlined how music making had become a way of communicating with her child that she could use when her child was upset.

**"When I sing the hello song, she is happy and smiles even when she was unhappy or crying"**

*(Sarah, Foster Carer, Spring 2021)*

Finding ways to communicate was vital to developing bonds and was echoed by many other families. Mavis, an adoptive mother, outlined how communicating with her non-verbal son through music supported them to strengthen their bond as it provided them with a unique form of communication.

Finally, it was believed that Loud and Clear's online model encouraging adults and children to join in together also played a vital role in developing relationships. Families described how children witnessing them learning and developing their musical skills together was believed to be crucial in supporting the bond between adult and child.

## How did Loud and Clear increase music making in the family home?

Loud and Clear had several impacts on the sorts of music making going on at home. For families, the songs and activities were replicated outside sessions as a form of enjoyment and stimulation. Loud and Clear song bags filled with instruments and toys supported this music making:

**“We know more songs and actions now. Daisy sometimes has a go at singing some of the songs by herself after the session ends. It was so wonderful to receive the Loud and Clear song bags during lockdown. They were so thoughtfully put together and meant we have more instruments and resources”**

*(Emma, Adoptive mother, Spring 2021)*

For Mavis, an adoptive mother, seeing her son Christian's music making and how it helped regulate his emotions in the session led them to begin replicating the songs at home to support Christian regulate his emotions or in everyday activities such as walking:

Since attending the sessions, several children have been making their own music. Several families described their children creating songs away from the sessions or exploring different household items as instruments, which they had not previously.

## Music leader's experiences

By examining their reflective accounts, it becomes clear how music leaders adapted their practices online to lead sessions that they believed would support the children in developing their musical skills. Given the young age of the children they worked with, all music leaders based the sessions around helping the young children develop their sense of pulse and rhythm as a starting point for musical skill development. For instance, music leaders described using a 'hello' song where they asked the families to keep a steady beat by moving their hands from one knee to the other with the instrument being played.

Songwriting activities also supported structured music making activities to develop musical skills. Across Loud and Clear sessions, music leaders scaffold songwriting, encouraging the children to bring cuddly animals to the screen or ask specifically for their input and include the suggestion in the song. In several cases, this seems to play a critical role in encouraging the children's involvement in the session

**“Session attended today by Mason and his parents, Robbie and his Mam and new participant Arthur with his Mum. Toby and Robbie were engaged both musically and socially from the very beginning - answering questions and joining in tapping and clapping to the beat in the hello song. Both boys gave examples of flowers to include in the Happy Sun High song and were able to put in actions.”**

*(Rachel, Music Leader, Spring 2021)*



Instrument playing also helped the children develop their knowledge of musical instruments and their playing. Sessions were based around playing different forms of percussion, and because they were led online from home, they used the instruments the children had access to. The instrument section explored areas such as exploring keeping the beat, musical dynamics and playing in time together (on mute) from home. The music leaders used the 'mute and unmute' feature on Zoom to support families with the experience of playing together.

### **How music leaders supported children and adults to develop their relationships.**

Music leaders leading Loud and Clear sessions supported interactions between children, their carers, and their adoptive parents through music making. With the knowledge that physical interaction can play a role in developing attachments, music leaders emphasised songs that would involve the children and adults engaging in some form of physical contact. There was emphasis across all the sessions for the children, their carers, and adoptive parents to be up on their feet dancing to help them develop their relationships. This appeared most evident in the Move On Up sessions, where Ryan and Rachel saw how Robbie and his Mum interacted through dancing together, which both music leaders believed would help them develop their relationship.

"After the session Ryan and I commented between us what a nice relationship Robbie and his Mam have. We've worked with them for a long time now (Ryan even longer) and we can see how far they have come. This was particularly evident today when singing some movement songs. Robbie and his Mam were running, skipping, jumping etc around their living room together - we were laughing as we could just see a blur as they zoomed past the screen!"

*(Rachel, Music Leader, Spring 2021)*

Similarly, the music leaders welcomed parents' and carers' input into the sessions just as much as the children. Jim, for instance, reflected on how the move online had led him to begin taking more interest and notice of the sorts of music the adoptive parents and carers were engaging with to bring new musical styles and experiences to the sessions.

"I remember starting to ask adults more about what they listen to- and it was around that time, I started to think, it's really important to value the music in the home. Not just children's music, but just music. What are they accessing."

*(Jim, Music Leader, Summer 2022)*

It was hoped that increasing the carers' and adoptive parents' interests in music through the sessions could provide a shared interest between adults and children that supported them in developing their relationships.

## **What did the music leaders learn through their experience of online sessions?**

Working online was a brand-new experience for music leaders, providing a learning opportunity. The team had to find a new way to co-lead the sessions. Music leaders used the chat function on Zoom to communicate ideas with one another for how to develop the session. Similarly, through leading the sessions, music leaders had to continuously expand and develop their repertoire and activities to use the children's materials in their home environments.

For instance, in several of his diaries, Jim describes creating songs and instrument-playing activities around the children's different instruments at home. At the same time, Ryan and Rachel describe how they developed songs around the children's animals in the house in several Move on Up sessions.

## **Partner's experiences of Loud and Clear Online Sessions**

A digital questionnaire was sent to the partners in July 2021 to gather their feedback and explore the Loud and Clear online sessions' impact on families.

## **How vital were online sessions for care experienced children during the Covid-19 pandemic?**

Partners outlined that it was integral for the families to have online sessions throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. One of the main reasons stated was the levels of isolation they believed families would experience by not having groups to attend where they could interact with other families in similar circumstances.

**"During Covid our families lost opportunities to connect with other people. Adoption can be an isolating experience especially for new adopters. Without contact with others to share the highs and lows of becoming parents our families are at risk of feeling lonely and unsupported."**

*(Adopt North-East, Summer 2021)*

**"During the pandemic our children had very limited engagement with other children and adults, this session provided the time to share stories about the children's interests and songs were adapted to celebrate those interests and experiences."**

*(Newcastle Foster A Future, Summer 2021)*

## How did families experience Loud and Clear online?

Partner organisations were asked to reflect on how families experienced online Loud and Clear sessions. For Newcastle Foster A Future, the sessions were a source of routine and structure for the families, which was missing during Covid restrictions.

“The sessions offered families the chance to engage with each other. One foster carer reported that she felt the routine was important for herself and her foster child. They looked forward to a Thursday morning, her foster child knew it was time for the session to begin when they gathered up the instruments/toys and laptop.”

*(Newcastle Foster A Future, Summer 2021)*

All partners perceived the Loud and Clear online sessions as a non-judgemental space where there would be no awkward questions because they had all had a similar experience. Therefore, the music making experience was considered to be relaxed. Furthermore, there was a recognition of the therapeutic nature of music making. The sessions are described as a fun stimulus for the children that would support them in feeling calm and an emotional release.



The following section will explore the impact that in-person sessions over the past decade have had on families, music leaders, Sage Gateshead and local authority partners.

# The Impact of Loud and Clear Over the Last Ten Years

This section of the report will explore the emerging impacts of the Loud and Clear programme over the last decade. We will begin by exploring the impact the programme had on families. These can be categorised into the following.

- Impact on children;
- Impact on key adults;
- Developing a sense of family;
- The development of peer support networks.

## Impact on Children

The Loud and Clear programme was perceived to have several impacts on care experienced children, specifically in confidence, communication and language, and musical skill development. Hannah, an adoptive parent, who has been attending Loud and Clear for the past two years, described how her daughter Rebecca had grown in confidence through attending the sessions. Hannah believed that Rebecca could engage with new people and experiences through the sessions, which positively impacted her confidence. This has broader impacts on supporting Rebecca transitioning to other groups such as nursery.

Linda, another adoptive parent, shared a similar perspective. Linda had attended Loud and Clear with Nathan since they adopted him in 2017. In 2019, they transitioned to Move On Up when Nathan turned five. Over the last five years, Linda had witnessed Nathan's confidence grow, supporting his socialisation with other children in the group and engagement in the session. Linda witnessed Nathan's musical development grow inside and outside the sessions by being more engaged in the session.

It was not just the carers and adoptive parents who saw the children's confidence grow. Reflecting on her experiences supporting children to engage in Loud and Clear, Heather, support worker from Newcastle Foster A Future, outlined that one of the memories that always stood out for her was the changing confidence levels of children.

I suppose that confidence they're developing initially - when they come with their little folded arms not looking at you - but as the confidence develops, and I remember writing songs with them, and they used to write little rhymes and stuff and make up songs [...] We did a performance at the Cluny [local live music venue] with the children who were involved and they'd written their own songs and in terms of confidence development it's all key, really key to that.

*(Heather Parkin, Newcastle Foster A Future, Summer 2022)*



Alongside developing the children's confidence, carers and adoptive parents reported that the sessions benefited the children's language and communication skills. For instance, Sarah-Jane described how her adopted son Robbie had developed his listening skills through Loud and Clear Move on Up. When Robbie first began attending nursery, Sarah-Jane outlined that he often found it challenging to listen to instructions. However, since attending Loud and Clear, he was much more responsive to following instructions; she believed this was down to how music leaders in the session gave instructions with a more relaxed approach.

In addition to the positive impact on personal development, the Loud and Clear programme has been influential in supporting children to develop their interest in music and their musical skills. A prime example of this was Robbie, whom Sarah-Jane described as going through a noticeable difference in his musical engagement. Before starting Loud and Clear, Robbie had shown no interest in music, but after Robbie and his family began to attend, he showed a greater interest in music, even using his Christmas money to buy a ukulele.

"It was just great to see him enjoying himself every week with music as well, because he didn't really connect with music at first, and he didn't really respond to it. So, what's quite nice is now that he was having that connection with music [...] he has a ukulele that he bought with his Christmas money, and he still kind of picks it up and tries."

*(Sarah-Jane, Adoptive Mother, Summer 2022)*

## Parental Impact

This section explores the impacts of the Loud and Clear programme for carers and adoptive parents. These included increased enjoyment in music making and an opportunity to communicate with their child through a different medium. They also described how the opportunities to socialise with individuals in similar circumstances as being impactful; however, this will be explored later in the development of support networks.

In the early stage of developing the Loud and Clear programme, the Steering Group were unsure of the impact the programme would have on foster carers and adoptive parents. Although they knew music could support the development of relationships, their understanding of the impact the programme might have within the carers' and adoptive parents' lives was yet to be discovered. Jenny Young reflects on this as being a key moment where the team were able to see the value and meaning of Loud and Clear to the key adults within the children's lives.

"There was this carer, she was so dedicated. It might have been at either the Christmas or the Halloween holiday activities whereby there was a song that was sung, and it got her really upset. And it was because the child that she'd been looking after for so long, since the child was a baby, had moved on to another home. And it reminded her of that child. And I think that one of the things that the sessions and the approach and feeling safe and singing, certainly enabled those carers to do is provide them with regular songs to sing with children that were very impactful upon their regular daily routine and marked their day."

*(Jenny Young, Director, Blue Cabin, Summer 2022)*

Here, Jenny alludes to the critical role that music, and as a result, Loud and Clear, can have in the lives of the key adults. It supports them to use music within their homes with the children, to begin building structures and routines; it becomes a joint activity that they can share with the children in their care, and it becomes a part of the identity of the relationship between themselves and the children. The Loud and Clear programme has become integral to many of the carers and adoptive parent's lives. Some have become ambassadors for the programme, advocating for, and informing others of, Loud and Clear, which has supported its growth.

By being part of Loud and Clear, carers and adoptive parents have developed their enjoyment in music making. Linda described how her husband Darren increased his music making by attending the sessions on a Saturday morning. Darren could not attend Loud and Clear 0-5 sessions due to work commitments but could attend when Nathan progressed to Move On Up

**“Yeah, and even like the Tuesday session, if he was on holiday, he would come with us. But I think he only make like three or four sessions over the years that he was able to make. But the Saturday sessions he actually stopped working on a Saturday specifically to come to the music group with us. Because he used to work every Saturday morning as well. It’s been really nice for him to bond with the bairn in in a different surrounding in a different situation and everything as well.”**

*(Linda, Adoptive Mother, Summer 2022)*



Liz was one of the first carers to attend Loud and Clear Foster family music making and has also developed new musical skills and a greater interest in music. Liz joined Loud and Clear Foster family music making at its inception, which coincided with her first placements; Bobby, aged four, and Harriet, two weeks old. Initially, Liz shared concerns about her musical skills. Liz attended three training sessions and weekly Loud and Clear activities and soon became an advocate for them, encouraging other foster carers to attend. When music leaders suggested creating individual song bags, they learnt Liz had taken the initiative to create one, to use with Bobby and Harriet. As Loud and Clear developed, so did Liz's belief that music benefits children's early development. She also developed greater confidence in making music with the children in her care.

## The impact on developing a sense of family

Carers and adoptive parents reported that Loud and Clear was often one of the first activities they attended with their children and therefore played a significant role in developing positive and meaningful relationships. An example is a story of Melissa and her newly adopted child, Nancy. After finding the first few months incredibly challenging, Melissa was trying to find an activity they could do together to support the development of their relationship. They began attending Loud and Clear 0-5 sessions in the first stages of the adoption process. The Loud and Clear programme supported them in finding new ways of interacting with one another and supporting their relationship to develop. They continued to attend for three years until Nancy started school. As they were leaving, Melissa shared the following message with the Loud and Clear team:

“When I first adopted Nancy, I found it very difficult. After two months I had not bonded with her, and I started to panic. I became anxious and depressed and did not think I could continue to be her Mummy. I struggled to fully care for her for many months and it looked likely that the adoption was going to break down. Coming to music group every Tuesday was one of the things that kept me going. You were so friendly; the music was wonderful, and I obviously met other adoptive mothers. Watching other parents interact with their adopted children, I often wondered how much they loved them and how often it took for them to bond. Gradually, being in that environment gave me hope that in time, I could be like them. Without doubt, watching Nancy at music group, hearing her start to join in and talking about my daughter with other adoptive parents helped me to fall in love with her. As time went on, I no longer had to pretend to be happy. I didn't tell anyone I met at music group how I really felt and to that end, I often wonder how many other adoptive parents that we've met, and sang with, were going through something similar. I can't thank you enough. I've looked forward to every session. Nancy and I both love music group, it had helped our family very much and we're very sad that our time there is over.”

*(Melissa, Adoptive Mother, Summer 2018)*

One of the primary reasons partners have been so invested in the Loud and Clear programme is because it supports carers and adoptive parents to develop stronger relationships with the children in their care. Unfortunately, relationship breakdowns are a common occurrence; hence finding ways that this can be prevented is critical. This is one of the reasons why in 2021, Adoption Tees Valley contacted Sage Gateshead to support the development of a Loud and Clear Adoption Programme in Stockton-on-Tees, to support newly adopted children in forming meaningful relationships with their carers or adoptive parents.

Understanding that joint music making can act as a catalyst for and support the development of relationships between care experienced children and key adults within their lives, has provided a rationale for the many different training initiatives that carers and adoptive parents have been able to access as part of the Loud and Clear programme. The skills learnt, and the confidence gained during these training sessions have been vital for supporting them in developing their relationships, structure, and routine in their family life.

## The development of peer support networks

Carers and adoptive parents have highlighted how being part of Loud and Clear has enabled them to socialise with others with similar experiences. They have developed support networks, in which some recognised that the challenges they were experiencing in the fostering or adoption process were unlike those experienced by others. Linda, Nathan's adoptive mother, described how her concerns about Nathan's behaviour in Loud and Clear programme were eased by the space being non-judgemental, creating a feeling of shared acceptance within the group.

Other carers and adoptive parents have also commented on the non-judgemental environment fostered during Loud and Clear activities, which is critical to their experiences of being part of the programme. Many stated they had experienced activities where they often felt judged for their child's behaviour and, as a result, were not part of an inclusive environment where they could talk about their children in the same way.

Music leaders have observed carers and adoptive parents develop friendship networks throughout the last decade after socialising at Loud and Clear. The first adoptive families to be a part of Adopt North East and Adoption Tees Valley sessions have developed their own WhatsApp groups and remain in regular contact with each other, and foster carers also socialise outside of Loud and Clear activity. Representatives of partner organisations attending Loud and Clear activity have referenced how the programme supports community. Clare, Newcastle Fostering, discussed how the shared understanding between music leaders, carers, and adoptive parents, leads to an inclusive and open environment:

"I think it's because they are all in the same position [...] the foster carers have that kind of comfortable relationship, the children just kind of warm to that as well. I think they're all kind of in one group, and that all supporting each other's children to wander off and have a little play with other foster carers. And you don't often see that within other music sessions. It's a very, very different session, compared to the mainstream session I was involved with previous. I think that's the whole difference and the children kind of just get that. Acceptance, I think, I think they just feel that, you know, everybody in there genuinely cares for them and they feel comfortable and open, and they just enjoy the experience a whole lot more."

*(Clare, Newcastle Fostering, Summer 2022)*

Sage Gateshead staff are acutely aware of the importance of adults being able to socialise within Loud and Clear sessions. Kay Storey, Programme Coordinator, described how Loud and Clear has a strong sense of community, which she believes emerges from families being able to socialise with other families with similar lived experiences. The recent Somerset Judgment, a series of hearings in relation with possible non-compliant adoption regulations, are an example of a subject discussed during Loud and Clear activity, and music leader Jake Fletcher highlighted how the inclusive space at Loud and Clear supported foster carers to discuss their experiences of this subject openly with others.

Understanding the importance of peer support within the Loud and Clear community, music leaders bring what Eleanor and Ryan have described as 'stealth socialising', where the social elements of Loud and Clear are valued equally with the music making. All sessions have a break, varying in length to meet the group needs, to promote socialising and the development of support networks, all supporting the development of meaningful relationships between adults.



# The Impact of Loud and Clear on Music Leaders

The impact of Loud and Clear on music leaders can be categorised in three ways;

- Development of knowledge and impact on their practice;
- Increased feelings of personal enjoyment and satisfaction;
- Personal growth.

## Developing music leader's knowledge and practice through Loud and Clear

Music leaders have expressed how working on Loud and Clear has increased their knowledge regarding the care experienced community and supported them in developing their practice to be much more adaptable. Rachel, a qualified teacher and music leader of Loud and Clear Move On Up, described how the programme supported her to understand more about care experienced children in a way that she had not previously considered.

"It's made me more aware of foster and adoptive communities. When I started working on the programme, I was working on the foster side. I was still teaching in schools, and I taught some children who were fostered. I also taught some children who were adopted. It hadn't really occurred to me before, the background that they came from. Because I just saw them in context, you know, in this class full of 29 other children, and to actually think, the trauma that they probably have experienced, for such a young child, and then you see them in a school uniform, and you can forget about that. It really made me more aware, as a teacher and in general, everyday life, about these families, and how all families are different. I'm trying to be aware of that."

*(Rachel, Music Leader, Summer 2022)*

Similarly, Louise, Programme Manager, described how being part of Loud and Clear training developed her knowledge of trauma-informed practice and the impact that early traumatic experiences can have on the lives of children. With increased knowledge of the context that Loud and Clear staff were working in and the community they were working with, Louise understood the impact and value of Loud and Clear differently and that this influenced how she writes and communicates about the programme to external partners.



Working on the Loud and Clear programme was described by music leaders as providing them with a sense of personal enjoyment and satisfaction through seeing the developments and impacts emerging from the programme. For instance, Jake described that he enjoyed working with the families so much that he would sometimes question if the session was for the families' enjoyment or his enjoyment.

**For me, it's like something weird happens when you walk through the doors of the children's room where you could have the worst thing in the world happen prior to the session. I mean, it's pretty hard to have a bad day when you have a rabbit wrapped round your hand, making like animal noises [laughing] So yeah, for me, it's like, I sometimes finish the session, I sometimes think is that for me or them because I feel better.**

*(Jake, Music Leader, Summer 2022)*

Jake's comments were echoed by several other members of staff who described feeling impacted through working on the Loud and Clear programme. Kay, Programme Coordinator, described how she felt a sense of enjoyment manifest through the analysis of the carer and adoptive parent questionnaires she undertook each term, viewing them as one of the highlights of her job.

This sense of personal satisfaction and enjoyment from the Loud and Clear programme that became apparent across all the interviews was also highlighted as impacting the ease music leaders felt when moving away from the programme. Carol described how the Loud and Clear programme had made it difficult for her to choose to leave Sage Gateshead in 2020 because of how much admiration and love she felt for the programme.

**Oh god loads. I absolutely love that programme. It was the Loud and Clear programme that really, really made it difficult for me to leave the Sage Gateshead. It's the connections that you make with the families**

*(Carol, Music Leader, Summer 2022)*

## Personal Growth

Working on the Loud and Clear programme reportedly led to music leaders feeling that they had engaged in some form of personal growth. One personal growth many music leaders reported was a development in their outlook on what it meant to be human. Carol, for instance, described how building these relationships with the families and developing her knowledge of care experienced children, trauma and how individuals build attachments all impacted her perspective of what it means to be a human.

Similarly, Eleanor's involvement in the Loud and Clear programme profoundly impacted her professional self and the journey she took as a community musician. Although Eleanor was passionate about early years music making, her experience with Loud and Clear has supported her to be able to articulate and conceptualise the work that she actively wants to develop; family engagement.

The whole experience of Loud and Clear has really helped me articulate what the work is that I really want to be doing, and what's important. I think everything that we've discussed around the table, the peer support, and this being a place for adults as well, the relationship building, and oh just all of it!

*(Eleanor, Programme Leader, Summer 2022)*

These experiences and personal growth have supported Eleanor in developing Sage Gateshead's family programme to embody social pedagogical practice, socialisation, peer support and whole family engagement at the core of its work. Thus, it could be considered that the personal growth here has also had organisational impacts on Sage Gateshead, which will be explored in the next section.



# The Impact of Loud and Clear on Sage Gateshead

The organisational experience of leading Loud and Clear for the last ten years has been transformational and influential. The Loud and Clear programme has positively influenced Sage Gateshead's organisational awareness and knowledge of the care experienced community. This has encouraged staff to create innovative management and evaluation processes, considering the reflections of music leaders, carers and adoptive parents, which inform future planning and makes sure the Loud and Clear programme remains relevant and responsive to the needs of the care experienced community.

Loud and Clear was just such a turning point in terms of how we look at the impacts of what we do. We've adapted the questionnaires, reflection diaries and evaluation scales across the board for all of the different sessions. It's always been a good example because we've always had colleagues and families really engage with it and I try to utilise and adapt what I know works within Loud and Clear for our other sessions too.

*(Kay Storey, Programme Coordinator, Summer 2022)*

Understanding safeguarding of the care experienced community whilst considering the visual recording of Loud and Clear and experiences has led us to work with illustrators for the first time. Ditte Ely Gourd and Lily Kroese have created beautiful images of families and music leaders making music together in person and online, helping us to bring experiences to life, advocate for the work, create films and music videos and make sure families have a tangible memory of making music together.





## Development of partnerships

Over the past decade, Sage Gateshead has had the privilege of building and maintaining local partnerships. As an organisation, we have built strong relationships with Newcastle and Gateshead Fostering Services, Adopt North East and most recently, Adoption Tees Valley through the Loud and Clear programme.

Through these partnerships, we have hosted several Newcastle Foster A Future Celebration of Achievement events in Sage Two concert hall and hosted several care experienced Teenagers To Work placements. We led workshops and performances with young people for both Gateshead and South Tyneside Virtual Schools. These programmes and events meant a great deal to all organisations and brought about partnerships with meaningful impact and long-lasting effects.

Alongside Sage Gateshead's Youth Music funded work the Loud and Clear model and pedagogy has helped us to successfully work in partnership with the incredible regional charity Children North East; Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Trust; Newcastle Young Carers; North East Autism Society and more. These externally funded projects have resulted in Children North East establishing their own successful family music making sessions - Boogie Bairns; the development of musical support for families with children with an early diagnosis of autism in partnership with the North East Children's Hospital and North East Autism Society, and the establishment of a staff choir at the North East Children's Hospital.



# Summary

The stories and details from this report demonstrate the personal, social and musical impacts of the Loud and Clear programme over the last decade. The programme has become a vital part of many care experienced children, carers and adoptive parents' lives, providing shared moments of joy, relationship building and music making that they have continued to use outside the sessions. The partnerships developed throughout the last decade have been integral to the Loud and Clear programme, supporting music leaders to transition from in-person sessions to digital sessions during the COVID-19 pandemic. The dedication, care and impact of working on the project for music leaders and Sage Gateshead have also become apparent as they have learnt and grown and developed relationships with the families as they take part in the Loud and Clear programme.

Taking all that has been learnt over the decade and looking ahead, there are several areas which we will apply our learning in this new phase of Loud and Clear.

## **Loud and Clear and Refugee Families**

Building on work to date, and as part of Sage Gateshead's mission to become a 'Theatre of Sanctuary', we will begin to work with refugee families with young children, to support them in a time of challenging change. We know that Loud and Clear can help with the acquisition of English language skills in children and create friendships between children and families – which will further support transition. We will work with local partners who have experience of working with refugees. We are exploring working with Gateshead and Newcastle Councils and Peace of Mind North East.

## **Trauma Informed Practice Training**

As we emerge from the Covid-19 pandemic, and in recognition of the increase in mental health needs amongst children and young people, all music leaders, administrative and operations teams will engage in trauma-informed training led by Kazzum Arts to support their work with children and young people and the adults in their lives. The training will also support staff wellbeing.

## **Learning Framework for Inclusive Music Making**

Loud and Clear has played a key role in the development of music and social pedagogies and practice at Sage Gateshead, especially in establishing social pedagogy as central to inclusive practice. Based on these music and social pedagogies we have created a Learning Framework for Inclusive Music Making for our music leaders, and anyone who works in music education to help keep the learners' experiences and enjoyment central to how they make music. The considerations and practices within this framework are ever evolving and support music leaders to create safe, inclusive and inspiring environments.

Based on the Learning Framework, we have also developed training and reflective conversations for music leaders at Sage Gateshead, to make sure we have a shared understanding of the pedagogies and practice that underpin all our work with children and young people as they continue to evolve.



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