

## New Dynamics of Ageing Programme

### Research Project: Music for Life

#### Promoting social engagement and well-being in older people through community supported participation in musical activities

##### Research Team:

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##### Partners and Collaborators:

Guildhall Connect, Guildhall School of Music & Drama; Silver Programme, The Sage Gateshead; Music Department, Westminster Adult Education Service

#### *What is MUSIC FOR LIFE?*

**MUSIC FOR LIFE** is a research project that explores the role of music in people's lives and the impact of participation in music-making. There has been little prior research exploring the potential for music-making to make a significant contribution to people's quality of life.

This project aims to:

- (i) explore and understand the role of music-making in the lives of older people;
- (ii) examine whether there is a link between participation in music activities and the improvement of well-being of older people; and
- (iii) learn about potential wider benefits to families and/or residential communities when older people engage in music-making.



#### *Project Partners*

- **The Sage Gateshead**, where the weekly 'Silver Programme' actively involves over 500 people in various music activities including singing of all kinds, steel pans, African drumming, guitars, recorder, folk ensemble, ukuleles, brass, music theory and samba.
- The **Guildhall Connect Project**, which runs community music projects in East London with people from a wide range of backgrounds, ages and experiences. Its inclusive approach embraces everything from classical to popular music, western and non-western genres; emphasis is put on activities where participants create and perform music together.
- The **Music Department of the Westminster Adult Education Services** (WAES), which offers a range of community music activities for older people. The WAES music programme caters for students at all levels of expertise. Courses in a range of musical genres are offered, specialising in singing, playing instruments, sound engineering and using sequencers, music theory and composing.

## Participants say:

- *You know, I think it's marvellous. And it is good fun as well, you know. Seeing all doing that. Especially the men. I was really surprised'.*
- *'I am amazed every time what comes out of what you do. You know, especially when you'd done that tape of us. I thought, you know...I am over the moon with that actually'.*
- *'And also, I was watching last week, you got the two ladies... M. and the other lady...She was smiling and everything. She don't come out of her box very often. You know, she is very quiet'.*
- *'As long as it doesn't stop. I mean this is the main issue'.*
- *'I enjoy the singing best. I enjoy watching people sing'.*
- *I practise each morning for say half an hour, again at lunch time for 20 minutes and again in the evening for about half an hour. I simply love it and the neighbours don't complain. I plan to continue for years and years.*
- *I left work through stress and lost confidence in everything. I didn't want to meet people or go out but after a while was persuaded to join the Singers ... Even after the first session I felt uplifted and cheered up and over the weeks and months felt life was great. Although I never returned to work I regarded this as a good thing as life was so much better.*

## Are you interested in music?

**Blog:** <http://mflstories.ning.com>

The blog '**Music For Life – Later Life Musicians**' has been built to foster social networking for participants in music, with text, photos, sound and video. You are invited to contribute your stories about taking up or returning to music in later life. <http://mflstories.ning.com>

## Findings

Questionnaires have been filled in by 350 older people participating in musical activities (29% are beginners) and by a control group who participate in activities other than music.

Preliminary findings suggest that measures of well being are higher amongst the music participants than amongst the control group.

Interviews, focus groups and observations have been carried out with music participants and their group facilitators.

The qualitative data support the view that there are social benefits and the potential for musical development amongst beginners as well as those with prior experience in music.

The most frequently mentioned barriers to participation were 'caring for others', 'illness' and 'lack of confidence'.

The musical preferences amongst the participants are diverse, including jazz, work, folk, blues, gospel, soundtracks and classical. The least popular type of music is 'electronic'.

Facilitators of musical activities with older people have specific training needs, but there are few opportunities for CPD in this area.

## Publications and Events

- Findings from this research will be presented at the *International Society for Music Education conference* in Beijing in July 2010; the *British Psychological Society Education Section conference*, Milton Keynes, November, 2010; *Research in Music Education conference*, Exeter, April 2011; and the *Leading Music Education International Conference*, Canada, 2011.
- The project is featured in a chapter about lifelong learning in music, in a forthcoming book celebrating the Year of Music, published by the Institute of Education.
- Participating groups performed at the Barbican Arts Centre, London, on 5<sup>th</sup> May.
- Conferences and events at the Institute of Education (October 2010) and the Sage Gateshead (July 2010) will include live performances of some of the musical groups participating in the project, workshops illustrating the most successful activities, and dissemination of the research findings.