



Tiny Tunes and Musical Playtime

Project Evaluation



Project Background

In 2025 B Sharp initiated two new early years music groups, *Tiny Tunes* and *Musical Playtime*, at Bridport Family Hub. The groups were funded by Dorset Community Foundation NHS Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund. The aim of this funding was to support adults experiencing mental health issues or poor wellbeing.

Project Aims

The project aimed to support new parents, particularly those living with mental health conditions such as postnatal depression, general low mood, and anxiety, or those experiencing social isolation. These individuals face significant challenges, including isolation and lack of social connections. Many new parents have recently moved to the area and lack established local networks or nearby family support, exacerbating their feelings of isolation.

Our intended outcomes were that **parents/carers**:

- feel improved wellbeing through community connection, through coming to spend time with other adults in a friendly, enjoyable session, where the focus is on the music and the children. (ie the attention is turned outwards).
- experience the therapeutic benefits of taking part in music – using the voice, singing with others, and creative play.
- experience improved connection with their baby/toddler, through shared activity.
- reduce social isolation, through improved social connection, through practical and emotional support from the group.

We also intended that **children**:

- had opportunities to develop their innate musicality, and increase their engagement and enjoyment of music
- experienced the social and emotional benefits of engagement in music
- improved their social skills through regular engagement in a social activity with peers and adults in a safe environment

Project Activity

With this funding we delivered 52 sessions of music-based support groups for new parents/carers, who were experiencing poor mental health and social isolation and their babies and toddlers aged 0 - 3. These sessions were led by a professional music leader, with support from a qualified Mental Health Support Worker. These sessions were delivered weekly, term times. *Tiny Tunes* was for parents with babies, ages 0 - 12 months, and *Musical Playtime* for parents with toddlers aged 1 - 3.

Sessions were relaxed and informal, and focussed on songs and rhymes appropriate for children of this age. These musical activities have been developed to help children develop their innate musicality, focussing on simply rhythm, melody and dynamics. They also help with speech and language development, helping children develop new simple vocabulary such as animals, colours and learn numbers. Props and toys such as shakers, scarves and puppets help children engage multiple senses, and develop fine and gross motor skills. Songs are repeated regularly so that children become familiar with them, and start to join in and learn them. The musical focus, and the careful facilitation by the Music Leader and Mental Health support worker enables the parents and children to socialise in a relaxed but structured, and non-judgemental environment, where the focus

is on the child and the music, not the parent. The sessions have been structured to give lots of time before, after and during the music activity for conversation and peer support.

Leaders actively facilitated parents to socialise, introducing parents with similar needs to one another. The Mental Health support worker also made clear that one-to-one support was available for any parent who wished it, which could be accessed in the session, or between sessions as needed. And also that she would help with signposting to other services as needed. Music instrument kits for parents to make music at home were provided, and Leaders discussed ways for parents to use music with their children between sessions for bonding, soothing, distraction and entertainment as well as talking about the benefits for child development and emotional wellbeing of engagement in music.



Project Impact

The project has improved mental health and wellbeing, and reduced the social isolation of 115 parents/grandparents/carers of new babies and toddlers from the Bridport area. Through improved mental wellbeing and social connection of parents/carers, it has also improved the life chances of 115 babies and toddlers, as well as increased their opportunities for socialisation, musical engagement and bonding. Parents/Carers/Grandparents have been incredibly appreciative of the group, valuing both the relaxed, friendly, inclusive atmosphere, the opportunity to make music with their babies, and the accessible mental health support provided by our Support Worker.

88% of respondents say the group has significantly improved their mood and wellbeing

78% reduced stress and anxiety

90% decreased isolation, improved connection,

Feedback from parents includes:

“Such a valuable group. So welcoming. Really helps feeling connected”

"The group has been an amazing support for a very isolating time. Welcome smiley faces that feel very easy to chat to. Thank you."

"Amazing group, welcoming, supportive, kind - highlight of the week"

The combination of songs and music with mental health support was impactful. It became clear that many of the issues that were causing parents significant stress and anxiety were regular parenting issues (eg around sleep, feeding, weaning, weight, worries about money, relationships, going back to work etc) but were being exacerbated by social isolation, and by offering this group and space to discuss them with their peers, with the music providing the structure and focus, that enabled them to attend, they were able to realise they aren't alone with these anxieties. Also that there is often no 'right' way of parenting that they are 'failing' at, so reducing stress. The group provided a space for all sorts of worries and issues to be discussed in a safe, inclusive environment, with support from Mental Health Support Worker and the Music Leader, and this set-up provided a way for parents to access support, from both peers and professionals.

The Mental Health Support worker's presence as part of the group was really valued by parents. She provided a friendly welcome, a practical additional pair of hands to help with babies/toddlers when needed, and counselling and signposting to additional services. 73% of respondents saying they valued having her there, with 14% accessing significant individualised support/counselling from her including by phone/email between sessions. In addition, 37% said she had helped them connect with other parents, and helped them overcome social isolation.

100% of parents surveyed said they enjoyed learning to use music at home as a way of bonding with their little one, and some talked about their babies and toddlers now responding more to music, interacting more with other babies, and using the songs to soothe, divert and entertain at home and in the car.

Project Challenges

We had initially planned to run the programme as 3 x targeted music-based courses for parents who were identified as having postnatal depression, poor mental health or who were socially isolated, as well as 1 x ongoing follow-on music sessions for when parents finished the 'targeted' course. However, we struggled to recruit to the targeted courses. We knew there was no absence of need, both through our referral partners, and because parents who were attending the open-access sessions that we had designed as a follow-on/continuation opportunity, were struggling with mental health and social isolation issues. In consultation with the Family Hub, we therefore decided to run both groups as open-access groups, one for families with babies aged 0 -12 months, and one for families with toddlers aged 12 months - 3 years, while continuing to work with referral agencies to signpost parents in need of mental health support to the groups. From then on, both groups were extremely well attended with around 20 families attending each session each week (ie. 40 families per week). We have worked with 115 parents/carers/grandparents) across 52 sessions over the 9 months of the program. While not every parent/carer self- identified as having mental health issues or postnatal depression, the high majority (72%) identified as struggling with at least one of these issues: postnatal depression/anxiety, low mood, feeling lonely or isolated, anxiety about baby/toddler (struggling with sleep, or feeding). (Many identified as struggling with several of these issues). There is clearly still a stigma for new parents attached to accessing mental health support and it being linked with parenting, as if parents feel they aren't allowed to acknowledge that parenting is hard and they are allowed to ask for help, or as if they afraid to ask for help as they feel it reflects badly on their ability to parent. By changing the structure of the programme and opening up the targeted groups to also be open-access (but still accepting and actively seeking referrals from partner agencies, and self-referrals of parents needing support) families were able to attend for the music

but with the 'accidental' by-product of support for any problems they may be facing week on week, and hence reducing their social isolation and improving their mental health and wellbeing.

Individual Case Study

X has a learning disability, and was introduced to us by Dorset Council (Family Help), as she had unexpectedly become a parent and was being assessed for the right support. She had given birth alone, unaware she was pregnant, and experienced mental health challenges from this experience. Social cues are challenging for her, making her socially isolated (although she has a partner), and she is very unsure about what she 'should' be doing as a mum. She first came to the group when her baby was 3 weeks old. Initially she would not sit on the floor with the other parents, but on a chair. However, as the weeks have gone by she is now joining in and sitting on the floor with the other mums, and has now started joining in with the music. The child-centred music activity provides an informal and relaxing way for parents to come together, without any focus on them. X seems to have really benefited from being around other parents in this environment, and sitting with parents in a non-judgemental and safely-held space. While at first she was very quiet, she will now talk a little with the other parents, but throughout has seemed really interested in listening in to the conversations about general parenting issues which happen alongside the music - which are held by the Music Leader and Mental Health Support worker in a relaxed manner and are inclusive and inviting - everything is discussed from sleep, feeding and relationships. X's confidence has grown and she trusts us to support her. She comes early to the group every week, and talks one-on-one with the Mental Health Support worker. She has talked extensively about her birth experience, and she also asks questions about parenting - often asking for clarification about advice she has received, if she has been to the Health Visitor (clinic also in the Family Hub). She also seems to value the opportunity to talk through her week with the Mental Health support worker.

Future activity

B Sharp is looking for long-term commissioning for the project, so that it can become part of Bridport Family Hub's regular ongoing provision. In the meantime, we have secured funding from the West Dorset Local Alliance Group to continue to run the groups for a further 16 weeks (2 groups per week (*Tiny Tunes* and *Musical Playtime*)).

Ruth Cohen, CEO/Artistic Director, B Sharp
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