



Music 4 U - Music 4 Communities project – June 2021



Organisation name: Music 4 U

Project name: Music 4 Communities

Location: Aberdeen, Scotland

Grant amount: £46,465

Award date and duration: May 2018, 1 year

Project context: Music 4 U are an inclusive stage school which provides artistic opportunities for young people in Aberdeen. The grant from The National Lottery Community Fund was used to fund the 'Music 4 Communities' project which involved putting on 20 performances in the community, alongside a weekly music café/open mic session for young people.

Project aims: The project aimed to provide more opportunities for local young people (including those with additional support needs) to meet and perform, as well as to provide free performances for the local community.

Project aims

The Music 4 Communities project was developed to fill a gap in the Music 4 U 'offer': Debra, the founder, was aware that some young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, and young people with additional support needs, could not afford to join the Music 4 U's formal Integrated Performance Arts Day programme, which runs three days a week. The Music 4 Communities project aimed to engage these young people, through a music café and community performances.

Additionally, the project aimed to:

- Provide additional opportunities for all Music 4 U students to perform.
- Provide the local community with free performances.
- Change perceptions about what young people with additional support needs can do.

About the grant

Music 4 U are an inclusive stage school which provides a range of artistic opportunities for young people aged between 3 and 25 years of age. The **organisation provides a space for anyone** regardless of ability to attend and feel the joy of music. Around half of those who attend Music 4 U have additional support needs. This includes young people with autism, physical disabilities and mental health issues, alongside other disabilities.

The grant from The National Lottery Community Fund was used to fund their new 'Music 4 Communities' project, which comprised two elements, a **weekly music café / open mic drop in** for local young people, and a series of **20 Music 4 U performances** put on in the local community.

As part of the grant, Music 4 U were able to put on **additional performances** of their Summer and Christmas shows, specifically for an audience of people with autism. The grant paid for the venue and allowed the audience to attend for free. The extra shows were mindful of the audiences' additional needs (such as avoiding loud noises, bright lighting, or closing the curtain between performances etc.).

Project set up and delivery

Debra identified a need for a place for NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) young people to go during the daytime, to relax and play music. For some young people with additional support needs (such as learning difficulties, autism etc.), their personal social care budget was not enough for them to be able to attend the Music 4 U daytime sessions (which cost £45 a day). Debra worried that there were too few free activity options stimulating enough in the local area for these young people.

“There is nothing much out there for young people in this grey area who have no more college education left, and have no more 'day care' options as part of their support package.”

Debra, Founder

Music 4 U hired the Aberdeen Arts Centre café on a weekly basis. The café was used by **young people to relax with friends, get a coffee and perform in an 'open mic'** set up, everyone was invited to have a go and perform. The café was **attended by tutors and 'enablers'**, who were there to help encourage conversation, assist with the performances and to provide additional support to those who needed it. The café was run by a volunteer, a young person who attended other Music 4 U classes. He was invited to carry out the weekly provisions shop for the café and serve drinks. Around **15 young people attended each week**: they were either attendees of other Music 4 U projects or recruited through online advertising. The **grant itself was used to hire the café area, pay the tutors and purchase the refreshment stock.**

The grant was also used to fund Music 4 U students to go into the community to put on **free performances**. A total of 20 performances took place in local **care homes, public spaces, schools, community centres and places of worship**. There were 70 students in the group and all of them performed at least once. The grant funded **the tutors / enablers wages and transport costs**. Music 4 U partnered with EncourAGE, a local organisation that runs events for people who live alone, to combat social isolation. They were invited to the theatre for a free performance, and **the grant paid for their tickets and refreshment.**

For both the café and the performances, a **key cost covered by the grant was staffing costs**. Cate felt it was vital they offered a **competitive wage** for their tutor roles to ensure they hired talented and passionate staff, with knowledge of additional support needs. The grant allowed this competitive wage to be offered.

Project impact

Key highlights	
Numbers supported	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Around 15 young people every week attended the music café. • 20 'Music 4 Communities' musical performances delivered throughout the 12-month grant period by 70 performers (from shows to audiences ranging from 15 to 100).
Key impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased confidence and mental wellbeing for performers. • Increased social contact for audiences attending the performances, and a chance to be entertained. • Making arts more accessible. • Created volunteering opportunities for young people.
Website	https://m4u.org.uk/

Increased confidence

The project had increased the young people’s confidence. Whilst most students attended other classes with Music 4 U, the grant has allowed for far more shows/performances than they are usually able to put on (typically just two per year), which **gives the young people more opportunities to perform on stage in front of an audience and grow in confidence.**

For example, Sophie, a Music 4 U student who was involved in the Music 4 Communities (who also now volunteers with the group), was shy when she first attended and hid behind other performers. After attending Music 4 U for some years, and now volunteering to help with the younger students, she performs solo and has gained enough confidence to apply and gain a place at prestigious summer school.

“It gave me more confidence in school and I've made so many friendships ... I think I'm not as lonely anymore”.

Sophie, Student and volunteer

Both through the community performances and the music café, young people involved in the project have been able to put on more performances, **allowing them to do more of something they really enjoy.**

People have more social contact

Some of the students do not have many friends outside of Music 4 U, but the connections they make in the cafes are really positive and ultimately lead to **strong friendships**. For example, one young man who attends and volunteers at the café, had his 21st birthday party at one of the weekly sessions. Cate, felt this was an example of the friendships made at Music 4 U, especially for NEET young people without other activities or friendships in their live.

"The cafes gives them a relaxed normality of being a teenager, and just being a young person hanging out in a safe environment – and it's a non-judgemental environment."

Cate, Fundraising officer

Sam (a tutor and enabler) agreed there wasn't a lot that catered for younger adults with additional needs in the area. There are respite and residential stays that have activities, or clubs, but those tended to be specifically for teenagers or those aged 60+. The music café provides a real opportunity for those in this 'missing' group to **make social contact and meet with other young people**.

The **diversity of young people** who attend Music 4 U creates a positive environment to improve young peoples' perceptions of difference. Cate explained how the community performance highlights that young people with disabilities are not limited by them, and can still perform and have fun on stage. Pam, the grandparent of a young person involved in Music 4 U and their community performances, felt her grandson was part of a big family, and that the young people were all accepting of each other.

"He has a very warm nature through being with people of different ages, talents, difficulties – learning to accept that we are all the same under the skin."

Pam, Grandparent of student

Making the arts more accessible

Many of audience members at the Music 4 Communities performance would **not otherwise been able to attend an arts event**. For example, when the performances were put on in community centres in deprived neighbourhoods, some of the audience members would not have been able to afford to pay to attend the yearly Music 4 U shows in the city centre. Some of the young people came from these under privileged areas of the city, so it gave their family and friends a chance to see them shine on stage. For the local young people who otherwise could not afford Music 4 U sessions, the café, the open mic sessions and the rehearsals for and performance of the community shows gave these young people a chance to perform more than they would otherwise have been able to do.

Created volunteering opportunities

Young people who have attended Music 4 U for a long while were able to volunteer as part of the Music 4 Communities grant. For example, the person that ran the open mic café had gained skills such as managing money.

Overall reflections

The Music 4 Communities project was a welcome addition to the wider Music 4 U roster of classes and projects and filled a gap for a group of young people for whom they previously had less to offer. Not only was the project successful in engaging young people in the café sessions and providing a safe and open space to practice music, it was also successful in bringing more music and performance into the community.

On reflection, Sophie felt that the café did not work so well when there are smaller groups, and it could be difficult when young people would initially come in and sit alone because they didn't know anyone. This made the role of the tutors / enablers in the sessions particularly important and highlighted the need for them to be there to encourage people to chat and perform. They would assign young people together in teams to help them build connections.

Both the music café and the community performances were started initially with the grant from the Fund in 2018. Both initiatives have continued through the lockdown via Zoom. Cate felt that without the initial money to get it off the ground, it would have never started, and people would otherwise have struggled to keep connected. The community performances have also taken place in open air spaces. Music 4 U shared the link for these live performances with organisations to keep the connection with the local community.

About the case study

As part of this case study, IFF Research spoke to Debra, the founder of the organisation, Cate* (the fundraising and development officer), Sam*, the tutor and enabler, Sophie*, a young person who was a beneficiary and a volunteer, and Pam*, whose grandson was a Music 4 U student. **Names have been changed.*