

# Speak Up Make Music



**LOTTERY FUNDED**

# Introduction

**The project ran from January 2014 – March 2015. It was run by Clare Tarling from People First Dorset and community musician Laura Cousins from Lifemusic Ltd.**

## **Aims:**

- To test the theory that combining Lifemusic and Intensive Interaction could create the building blocks for self advocacy
- To run 6-week-long courses in 5 day centres in Dorset

## **Objectives:**

- Contact day service managers. Ask for their support and facilities.
- Inform and inspire support staff.
- Plan and facilitate groups, with day centres as venues.
- Include people with complex physical and learning disabilities in the groups.
- Explore parallels between musical improvisation and Self Advocacy.
- Evaluate the project and share our results

**“I feel happy when we play.”  
Group member.**

**Self advocacy and Lifemusic are similar in many ways.  
The two have never, to our knowledge, been combined before.**

## **They are both about:**

- Communication without language
- Being an active group member
- Influencing other people
- Making decisions
- Building confidence
- Making a noise!
- Listening and being listened to
- Leading and following
- Accepting people's differences

**“Thank you both so much for your Speak up & Make Music session yesterday. Our group certainly enjoyed every minute of it, linked with the opportunity to try a large range of instruments. It was particularly pleasing to see constant interaction from some of our less vocal and forthcoming participants. Everyone seemed to understand what was required from the start, thanks to your careful preparation.”**

**Kate Moore - Moore Activity Day Care**

## **The biggest difference between them is ...**

- Self Advocacy often relies on using words to communicate.
- Lifemusic does not require any language at all.

## Self Advocacy

Self advocacy means “supporting each other to speak up and lead change”, or put more simply, “speaking up”. There are lots of self advocacy organisations all over the country. People First Dorset is run by and for people with learning disabilities. Clare runs the People First Forum, which connects people with disabilities and local authority decision-makers. We also run a Friendship Club and a Quality Checking team.

“It has been very powerful for me to see how we can interact with people who are challenged by the service.”

**Support Staff**

## Lifemusic

Lifemusic was developed by Dr Rod Paton at the University of Chichester. It is a group music-making activity that is specifically designed to be accessible to all. No musical skills are needed in order to take part. Lifemusic has 4 basic principles:

- There are no wrong notes
- Everyone is musical
- Every sound has meaning
- Music making is an act of trust

Laura Cousins has run drumming and music-making sessions with groups and individuals for nine years. She took the Lifemusic training in 2010 and uses the method extensively in social care settings all over Dorset. Clare has also completed the Lifemusic training and is an accomplished musician.

“Very interesting.  
Making Music is interesting.  
I felt very happy.  
I'd like to do it again.”  
**Group member.**

## Intensive Interaction

Intensive Interaction was an important part of the way we ran the groups. Many of the support staff who worked with us were already skilled in using this technique.

Intensive Interaction was developed by Dr Dave Hewitt and Dr Melanie Nind in the 1980s. They took the intuitive ways that parents teach babies the basics of communication and adapted these techniques for use with older children and adults. The method uses imitation, turn taking, understanding facial expression, and being able to influence people who are usually ‘in charge’. We find that I.I. techniques combine perfectly with those used in Lifemusic.

## The need for the project.

People First Dorset have always found it challenging to include people with no speech, or people who do not like sitting with groups in self advocacy meetings.

We ran a Lifemusic day in 2013 at the Ridgeway Centre in Weymouth. Staff and management told us that people “benefitted massively”. They said they would welcome more groups.

We realised that Lifemusic might be able to help us to include more people in self advocacy groups, and started to plan “Speak Up Make Music”.

Day service managers had very limited activity budgets and could not pay for the activity. They told us that service users generally do not have enough money to pay for extra activity fees.

So, we applied for a National Lottery “Awards for All” grant. Our application was successful, and we were given £9,367.



“The 2 sessions I have been to in the group have been fantastic. The guys listened, waited their turn and joined in making music. Lots of contented smiles from everyone when making music. The louder it got the bigger the smiles were!

Everyone joined in, even those who choose not to in other groups.

It was definitely worthwhile doing and I feel it should continue. Thank you to Laura who was brilliant with everyone.”

**Staff feedback.**



“I have learned a lot about 4 people [service users] in particular. I would love to do more Lifemusic.

The sessions were excellent quality and need to be repeated. You just need to observe a session to see how worthwhile it is.”

**Staff feedback.**



# Running the project

We offered each day service a 6 week course of “Speak Up Make Music”. Managers agreed to arrange:

- Playing space and chairs
- Service users who were able to attend for the whole six weeks; who had chosen to take part, or who had enjoyed music in the past.
- Support staff

Lifemusic allows people to communicate using musical improvisation. We already knew that it works well for people who communicate differently, from Laura Cousins’ previous work running community music groups.

## **The Lifemusic method itself is simple:**

“Easy access” musical instruments (requiring no training to play) were laid out and everyone sat in a circle around them.



Staff, facilitators, service users and observers were all equal participants in the process.

Using the Lifemusic technique of Holding Forms, we explored ways of making music and communicating together. Holding Forms and games such as Hello Songs encouraged communication from participants in any way they were comfortable with or capable of.

Sometimes we simply started with silence. Music began spontaneously and developed however the group members wanted it to.

Everyone's different form of communication was recognised and celebrated by the rest of the group.

For example: One participant took a tambourine and carefully dropped it at the musical cue the Hello Song presented him with.

Another participant led an improvisation by pushing air into and out of her cheeks. The movement created a rhythm which the rest of the group picked up on and used as a foundation.

In between pieces of music, there was discussion and relaxation. Some pieces of music lasted less than 5 minutes, others for 30 minutes or more. It was left entirely up to the group how long they wanted to play for.

### **6-week Courses**

- Ridgeway Centre, Weymouth
- Verwood Centre, Verwood
- Stourcastle Centre, Sturminster Newton
- Purbeck Centre, Wareham
- Juniper Centre, Christchurch

**Total:** 27 sessions, 54 people with disabilities, 19 staff, 8 observers.

"She listened well and took turns. She definitely enjoyed it. She usually wanders around. Definitely one of the better activities for her."

**Staff observation, Verwood.**

### **Taster sessions:**

- Moore Activity Day Care, Wool
- Cowden Care Farm, Charminster

**Total:** 19 people with disabilities plus supporters.

### **Evaluation**

Because the idea was so new, with no known predecessor, evaluation was important. This was done using:

- Facilitators' notes, discussions and other record-keeping
- Independent observers
- Evaluation by group members
- Feedback from day centre staff
- Video, photographs

"I would like music sessions every week, the six weeks went really quickly, I was just getting into it!"

**Staff using observation of a person's behaviour, Verwood.**

# Health and Wellbeing

**We noticed several outcomes which are likely to benefit people's health and wellbeing:**

**Communication:** Boosts mood and resilience, and enhances self-confidence. We did not distinguish between intentional and non-intentional communication.

An example of non-intentional communication: A person with autism is not necessarily trying to communicate by rocking back and forth. However, we can watch that rocking, turn it into a rhythm, and the person may then realise that they are leading the music.

**Behaviour:** When a person's choice of activities is limited by their physical and learning disabilities, boredom and frustration can trigger "behaviours that challenge". Being part of a group combats isolation, loneliness and boredom.

We saw firm evidence that the activity helped to temporarily improve difficult behaviours.

**Physical activity:** People really wanted to play the instruments! This encouraged them to move in ways they may not have done ordinarily. We found that people who were quiet and inactive before the activity moved more and differently in order to play. Singing and vocalising are also good forms of exercise.

**Relaxation:** Release of tension and concentration were both observed. People who had appeared unwell prior to the activity seemed to recover somewhat.

We were aware that for some, the noise was unpleasant. We encouraged people to leave if they were not enjoying the activity. This was thankfully a rare occurrence!

# Participation

**People participated in the activity in many different ways.** Participation was not limited to playing instruments. People sang, spoke, rocked, signed, laughed, moved around the room, nodded, clapped, stamped and shouted. Some people also responded and communicated by using eye movements and blinking.



Each person's contribution was anticipated, watched and listened for, and then responded to.

The Holding Forms also allowed participants to initiate their own piece of music, giving instant control of the activity. Each piece created in this way was completely different from all the others, giving everyone an individual musical voice. If someone chose to remain silent, this was also respected by the group.

## Outcomes

Outcomes included increased levels of participation, physical activity, attention and communication, compared with less accessible activities. Also, an increase in confidence, the expression of feelings and needs, and the making of choices. These skills are all essential for self advocacy to happen.

Evidence for this came from observation and evaluation questionnaires filled in by group members.

**Our most significant outcomes were often on a small and personal scale:**

The look of pleasure and surprise on the faces of support staff and family members as participants responded to the musical activities in ways that they had not expected.

People's expressions when they came to the realisation that the whole group was focused on them, and that they were leading the music-making.



Three day centres in Dorset and another in Bournemouth have asked us to deliver training sessions for support staff and based on the project work.

We have been invited back to each of the settings where we ran taster sessions. A participant's mother watched what we were doing and suggested the activity would also be beneficial to carers, in her opinion.

## What made it work?

**There were some essential things that needed to happen, in order for the groups to work well:**

Informing service managers about what we needed and what we were planning to do. We got better and better at this, and the results were tangible. Sessions ran more smoothly.

Sufficient numbers of people with learning disabilities who wanted to take part in the activity (around 10 people works well).

Supportive managers.

Confident, empowering and adaptable support staff.

A suitable playing space and break-out area.

2 experienced facilitators present at every group.

Feedback from a variety of independent observers, which helped us to 'fine tune' and develop the activities.

**Clare's original idea that Lifemusic is a good way to practice speaking up has gained evidence to support it. However, we need more time with people to be sure about this.**

**The project has led to further work. All centres bar one have said they would like us to do more sessions. Two independently-run day services have booked taster sessions.**

# Resources

**The essential ingredients that we needed to run the “Speak Up Make Music” project:**

- Instruments
- Trained, experienced facilitators and support staff
- Suitable space and furniture
- ‘Changing room’ style disabled toilets
- Leaflets and other information for staff and service users
- iPad with music apps
- Camera/ video camera
- Evaluation forms
- Transport
- Public Liability Insurance
- Preparation and reflection time
- Adapted or custom-made instruments
- Refreshments

“Mark has enjoyed the music sessions which has been demonstrated by his calmness during sessions (hands under his legs).

He has shown interest in playing stringed instruments such as the guitar and the ukelele.”

**Staff observation**

## The Future

**We would like to:**

- Run longer courses.
- Include an increasing amount of self advocacy in the groups
- Buy instruments for People First Dorset.
- Link the groups to the work of the People First Forum.
- Find ways to make groups self-sustaining (eg. through personal budgets)
- More research and evaluation.
- Develop ways to assess people’s personal progress.
- We are looking for ways to fund more “Speak Up Make Music” groups in the future.

“In my opinion Steve adored this session:

Smiling lots and lots, head on one side and listening, being silent, tapping his hands, not shouting, not grabbing.”

**Staff observation.**

# Thanks!

Many thanks to everyone who helped us with this project:

- Staff
- Personal Assistants
- Observers
- Managers
- Participants
- Awards for All
- Dr Rod Paton

“Debbie has been amazing. She came and joined the group happily. She engaged and was very cooperative. She was not demanding and did not disrupt the session. There were no episodes of challenging behaviour at all.”

Also that Debbie left the hall happily. Debbie chose instruments and swapped them over when she wanted to. Debbie loved the singing and this was something she could lead. It has been a pleasure to have worked with Debbie in music.”

#### **Staff observation**

*(The staff member underlined the words that describe surprising or unusual behaviour.)*



“I have thoroughly enjoyed these music sessions. It is definitely a ‘feel good’ afternoon. Service users are valued for every contribution they make (no matter how small). Improvisation is so important - to know that all sound is ‘good’ and there are no ‘wrong’ notes. Because of this course and the Lifemusic training I have had, I have just started to lead an improvised music session here at the Ridgeway.”

**Suzanne Richards (staff)**  
Ridgeway in Weymouth.



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## Contact us



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