

Live Music and Mental Health 2021 Workshops summary

“It makes me feel elated and like the arena is the only place on the planet / in the moment”

Young person

About these workshops



In 2021 Children in Scotland, Scottish Ensemble, University of Stirling, Scottish Government and Changing Our World¹ came together to explore the impact of live music experiences on children and young people’s mental health. We formed an Emerging Minds Special Interest Research Group and delivered four workshops over the summer to explore this topic with other young people, policy makers, musicians, children’s organisations and mental health organisations. Together we generated considerable learning and a series of recommendations that we hoped, can be used to open up more opportunities for children and young people to experience the mental health benefits of seeing live music.



This briefing provides an overview of the four workshops, which took place online in between May and August 2021. With thanks to everyone that came along to the workshops to give presentations or share their views, and particularly the children and young people who gave up their time to participate.

“The atmosphere when seeing music live is unbeatable – the energy is electric and unforgettable”

Young person

¹ Changing our World is Children in Scotland’s Children and Young People’s Advisory Group. Members of Changing our World attended and presented at each of the workshops.

Workshops overview

Workshop 1 (May 2021)

- Our first workshop focused on what we already know about this topic from research evidence and experience. We realised the published research on the topic is limited,² but there are examples of initiatives (such as **New Vibe**) that are using music to improve young people's mental health. The young people we spoke to felt the connection between live music and mental health was strong. We confirmed this is a relevant and interesting research topic to focus on.

Workshop 2 (June 2021)

- We looked at how we might measure the impact of live music experiences on children and young people's mental health. We discussed both positive and negative outcomes and realised feeling safe and belonging were important factors.³ For older young people excitement and adventure were also desirable. We recognised that impact could be immediate but also longer term and we identified some tools that might help us measure these. We enjoyed hearing about **FeelsFM**.

Workshop 3 (July 2021)

- We explored things that helped and hindered live music being accessible for children and young people and looked at how venues could make a difference. We heard about how the **Tolbooth** in Stirling offers gigs and performing opportunities for young people. We also heard about some of the weird and wonderful places the **Nevis Ensemble** play. We realised that different ages of children and young people might need different things. For younger children, the chance to play and move about while you listen was important.

Workshop 4 (August 2021)

- We looked at how connections between health services and music organisations could be strengthened. We heard about art therapy from **NHS Lothian** and social prescribing from **The Alliance** and discussed how live music experiences could complement other types of mental health support. We thought about how health services could be more aware of live music opportunities available in their localities and how partnerships could develop.

“Last evening’s workshop was well worth missing the sun for! I took away a lot of new ideas about how we might best support young people to express the impact of listening to music performances. I have also already shared some of those with colleagues here and it has been great to feed back to them and shape their thinking as well.”

Workshop participant









² A short bibliography is included at the end of this briefing

³ We have included Changing our World's outcomes in this briefing







Children and young people's suggested outcomes

Changing our World developed a set of positive and negative outcomes they associated with live music experiences, which could be used to help measure the impact of live music on their mental health and wellbeing. They thought hard about how these outcomes could be made accessible with the use of images and emojis.

Positive impact of live music

-  I feel fresh
-  I feel relaxed
-  I feel happy being with my friends
-  I can shout and sing and not feel restricted
-  I am transported somewhere else
-  I feel calm
-  I feel excited
-  I can concentrate better

Negative impact of live music

-   I feel nervous or anxious
-  It feels too intense to be in big crowds
-  It reminds me of something sad
-  I see things that make me feel stressed or unsafe
-  I get distracted



Our key recommendations

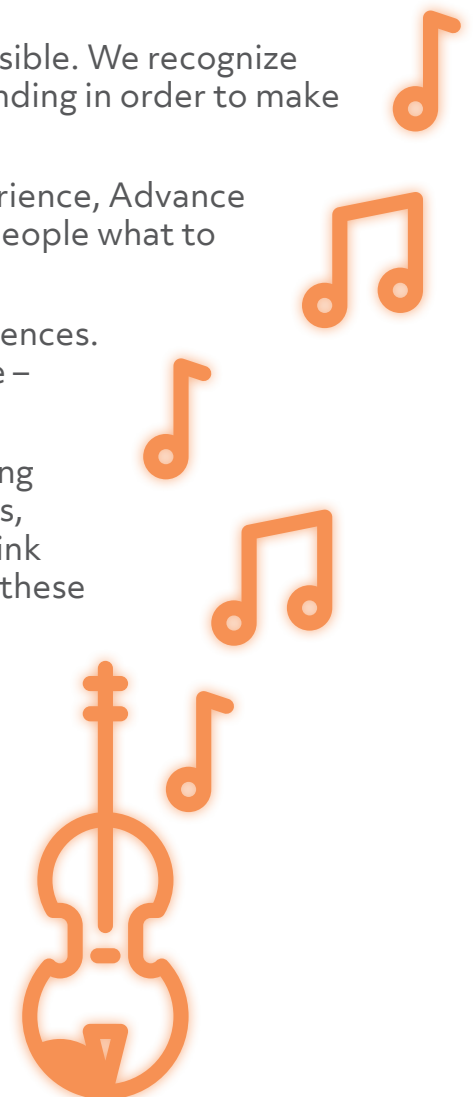
“It is wonderful to fully immerse yourself in the moment and there is just this beautiful atmosphere in the air”

Workshop participant



Based on the findings from the four workshops, we have identified the following key recommendations that could help to support children and young people experience the mental health benefits of live music.

- Mixed music performances can offer children and young people the chance to experience a range of music styles and genres and help expand their music interests
- Think about the different needs of different age groups. Younger children will want different things than older children and young people.
- Make the experiences as informal as possible, particularly in settings where there are established rules about behaviour – moving about, playing and dancing to live music is ok, even in school!
- Many young people enjoy the excitement of going to a live performance, but also want to feel safe, particularly in adult settings. Having youth work staff in venues can support this to happen in an unobtrusive and supportive way. Alcohol free performances and chill out spaces were also recommended. Some young people may want their parents and supportive adults to be able to come along as well.
- Reduce or remove the costs for attendance as much as possible. We recognize that performers and venues may require additional funding in order to make this affordable and sustainable.
- The build up to the performance is part of the overall experience, Advance information can help set the tone, tell children and young people what to expect, and generate excitement and buzz.
- Memories are also an important aspect of live music experiences. Set up methods to measure the impact of the performance – immediately and longer term.
- Health professionals may be working with children and young people that could really benefit from live music experiences, but don't know about what's on offer. Reaching out to GP Link Workers and Art Therapists are good ways to start making these connections.



Five emerging areas for further exploration and research



1. Give that the current evidence base is so small, there would be value in new research measuring the impact of live music experiences on children and young people's mental health. The four workshops generated some proposals for outcomes and evaluation methods that could be further developed and tested.
2. We found some evidence that younger children had different preferences than older children and young people in terms of venue locations. Exploratory research could investigate different needs and preferences of different age groups.
3. We learned from Tolbooth about some of the actions they had taken to make their venue more accessible. Co-design action research could develop and test guidance for venues and music organisations to support more child inclusive practices.
4. There are various ways new live music opportunities could be developed to support mental health. Piloting different live music experiences would help explore what works well for who and in what circumstances. This could be anything from a small scale concert or gig or a large young person co-designed music festival.
5. Workshop participants agreed that live music could potentially offer complementary mental health promoting experiences to young people receiving formal mental health support. Piloting a social prescribing intervention would help us to develop and test approaches that provided access to live music experiences as part of a wider mental health support package.

Live music & mental health bibliography

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Participating organisations

- The ALLIANCE
- Children in Scotland / Changing our World
- Creative Scotland
- Dunedin Consort
- MishMash Productions
- Music Broth
- Nevis Ensemble
- NHS Lothian
- Samba Ya Bamba
- Scottish Chamber Orchestra
- Scottish Ensemble
- Scottish Government
- Scottish Youth Parliament
- See Me Scotland
- Sistema Scotland
- Tiny Changes
- The Tolbooth
- University of Stirling
- YouthLink Scotland

