

## Vocal Beats Evaluation Report July 2021: Delivery of participatory music-making at Royal Brompton and Harefield hospitals and The Royal Marsden NHS Foundation Trust

### Evaluation methodology

Between June 2020-21, we used a mixed methods approach to our evaluation including the completion of ArtsObs by music leaders, with Youth Music Wellbeing Scales and UCA 3-Point Loneliness surveys by young people aged 16 and above at Royal Brompton. These methods were chosen because of their formal validity in capturing robust data and creating synchronicity with evaluation completed in years prior, allowing for direct comparisons. Due to working solely online inline with COVID-19 restrictions, this approach has been experimental in its nature and is perhaps limited by a smaller sample of young people taking part. However, the data that has been gathered has shown indications of positive developments in the intended outcomes of improving participants' musical skills; increasing levels of confidence; and reducing feelings of loneliness.

74 ArtsObs have been completed cross-site providing observed descriptive qualitative data, tracking participant's musical and emotional development over time. 24 Wellbeing scales and UCLA 3-point loneliness scales have been completed by a sample group of 6 teenage/young adult participants, providing self-reported quantitative data to indicate levels of progression. As all activities delivered took place virtually, surveys were distributed online.

In addition, The Royal Marsden saw the delivery and implementation of VisualBeats; an audio-visual exhibition created as part of an audio-visual methods PhD project by Ben Hartley. Artworks were created by a group of young adults taking part in Vocal Beats sessions; this included poetry and song lyrics along with photography and drawings inspired by the music programme. These were accompanied by feedback from the artists themselves and were displayed in the Trust's Sutton site, and online.

We have also employed more informal creative techniques to capture feedback including a filmed Q&A with 4 young people at Royal Brompton discussing their experiences of music-making, and a video of testimonials from cross-site participants and families.

Whilst we have worked with a smaller group of young people, the data we have been able to collect has regularly tracked their progress in finer detail than perhaps would usually be possible on hospital wards.

### Findings

#### 1. Musical Skills:

Descriptive data generated from ArtsObs recorded by music leaders indicates developments in participants' musical skills through nuanced changes in sounds produced, techniques employed and theoretical understanding:

*'E21 was very good at recognising that a motif was being repeated'* – musician observation.

*'In between the spaces of each verse it was visible that she was counting the beats until the next'* – musician observation.

*'His [beatbox] timing and power have already improved since the first lesson'* – musician observation.

The VisualBeats exhibition findings offered perhaps the strongest demonstration to the increase of young peoples' musical skills by actively show-casing their musical work including recorded tracks and written song lyrics. Testimonials from the young people themselves were displayed next to their pieces discussing the impact their creative work has on their wellbeing, providing powerful advocacy to staff and patients in the spaces:

*"Making music with Vocal Beats has allowed me to truly express myself. I have been able to express my feelings and views about myself, others, and how we all can relate. Vocal Beats has allowed me and enabled me to tap into my creative side which I've been unable to do in a long time. I am blind, but I don't let this stop me from doing what I want to do, and I will never give up. So, I want to inspire others to have the same mind-set, and despite what they are going through, they should never give up"* – participant testimonial.

For the first time in Vocal Beats' history, a young adult has successfully migrated onto a training and mentoring programme with Wired4Music where they will continue their musical development. This comes as a result of personalised 121 music sessions over several months delivered online, meaning the participant could continue their sessions once having been discharged from hospital.

## 2. Confidence

24 Wellbeing scales were completed by 6 young people between October 2020-April 2021 indicating positive improvements in young peoples' sense of purpose and feelings of self-actualisation. Before/after scores show a 38% increase in feeling 'useful'; a 29% increase in 'being able to make up my own mind about things'; and 25% increase in 'thinking clearly'.

The progression seen in young people's observed levels of confidence is also overwhelmingly positive, with the development of musical skills clearly being a contributing factor;

*'He was really smiling after singing and said he could see a difference in how his singing felt and sounded. He also said he was starting to feel much more confident with everything'*- musician observation.

*'She had such a confidence with herself and wasn't shy to try anything. She played the glockenspiel and also heard beatboxing for the first time'* - musician observation.

The short courses culminated in a young people-led event in which participants independently delivered their own public Q&A discussing their experiences of music-making, with one musician remarking; *'the fact that the four young people were able to have the discussion without any of us facilitators in it made it an incredibly powerful thing to watch'*.

### 3. Loneliness

A sample of 24 UCLA 3-Point Loneliness Scales completed between October 2020-April 2021 by 6 young people, distributed after each group workshop, indicate a decrease in feelings of 'not having anyone to talk to' by 30%. Self-reported feelings of being 'left out' fell by 9%.

Observations gathered from group activities have powerfully demonstrated what an impact the opportunity to take part in creative activities with peers has had on young people taking part. This is pertinent considering all those taking part have been required to shield throughout the past year due to being extremely clinically vulnerable, even when 'well'. The collaborative nature of these sessions encouraged participants to share their work with each other, creating a supportive environment;

*'All participants jumped at the chance to tell her that what she had written was great and that she shouldn't be so hard on herself. They then told her what they enjoyed about what she had written, and you could see she felt supported'* – musician observation.

*'Many of them talked about the sense of community and friendship that they had got from the course as well as how their confidence with singing has grown. We have signposted them to the [youth forum] Facebook group and it seems that some will go onto to join that community'* – musician observation.

Some ArtsObs entries suggest that working online has enabled greater access to group activities for some who would usually be unable to attend group sessions face to face because of their condition. This includes opportunities to meet other young people who identify as disabled from other trusts;

*'She said that her social life had actually grown during lockdown through the Vocal Beats activities and that she had really enjoyed that'* – musician observation.

*'All participants were very encouraging and supporting of each other's work and happily discussed how even though they were patients at different hospitals for very different reasons, they could absolutely relate to one another'* – musician observation.

Testimonials from parents whose children received 121 sessions indicate that being able to access intensive sessions with musicians over longer periods of time is also effective in alleviating feelings of loneliness and isolation.

*'[My son] lives for these Zoom calls. It gives him independence and he actually engages in conversation. You have made him so happy. He had his 2nd COVID jab this morning. He has been shielding nearly a year now. Thank you'* – parent comment.

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## Conclusion

Quantitative and qualitative evaluation data suggests that Vocal Beats continues to be an effective programme online with the ability to increase musical development and levels of confidence whilst reducing loneliness in a virtual setting. Outcomes are currently being explored in more depth through the ongoing VisualBeats research project at The Royal Marsden.

Working digitally with children and young people – whether in a series of 121 sessions or a group short course – enables opportunities for greater progression which had been a challenge for us prior to the pandemic. This suggests that there *could* be a strong potential to develop a ‘through-the-gate’ service from hospital wards to community settings. The continuous attendance of participants over several months indicates their commitment to the music sessions.

However, whilst retention of participants has been successful, the recruitment of new participants to online settings continues to be a challenge. This is particularly the case for inpatient participants unless there are staff on the ground to bridge delivery. Because of this, it is critical that we develop standard operating procedures to enable partial face-to-face delivery to be blended with an online programme.

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