



# THE MUSIC HOUSE FOR CHILDREN

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UKULELE ★ SINGING ★ MUSIC FOR BABIES ★ MUSIC FOR UNDER FIVES  
INSTRUMENTAL LESSONS ★ HOME TUITION ★ WORKSHOPS ★ CONCERTS

**An early childhood case study  
Music as a means of communication and intervention  
With a children's centre  
Funded by Sound Connections  
Final Report 2007**

## ***The delivery organisations***

'Boogie Babies' with **The Music House for Children (abbreviated as The Music House)** in Shepherd's Bush is a social enterprise offering a range of music participation and learning activities to children ranging from 0-18. The activities took place at **Cathnor Road Children's Centre**, Shepherd's Bush, which provides care and learning activities for children under five and their families. The centre is part of the Children's Centre network provided by local authorities in England, as part of 'Every Child Matters.'

## ***Participating groups***

**Participants:** babies and toddlers aged 0-2 years, plus parents/carers in the London Boroughs of Ealing and Hammersmith & Fulham.

**Staff:** Emma Hutchinson from The Music House as Music Leader, Christine Whisker and Iman Hatam, Cathnor Road Children's Centre. Himisha Patel.

## **The project**

'Boogie Babies' took place in 2007 as a Youth Music Action Zone Small Project, running over ten weeks with weekly music sessions at Cathnor Road Children's Centre, engaging multi-cultural families and babies/toddlers with sound, song and activities.

The 2007 Music House ('Boogie Babies') was a small project to investigate Early Years music making as a means of communication and intervention with vulnerable families. This helped Sound Connections shape the brief for two other early childhood music projects.

## **It's never too early...**

Working with very young children is challenging, not least because of the practical and creative needs of this group and their parents/carers. The Every Child Matters agenda recognises the benefits and advantages of creativity at early ages, in terms of parenting confidence and skills as well as encouraging social interaction, pleasure and stimulation in even the youngest babies. Notwithstanding this, creative activities for babies are still not as widespread or accepted within the wider field of intervention and health benefits as they should be.

This case study is an example of ways in which organisations and artists can engage creatively and successfully with very young babies and children and their parents or carers, through Early Years settings in England. The

Music House project took place in 2007 and was a pilot, being the first time that Sound Connections had supported Early Years work.

### ***Music specialist***

The Music House wanted to build on Emma Hutchinson's own work with babies and very young children. Emma is an experienced facilitator and trainer, and head of The Music House for Children. She devised 'Boogie Babies', a ten week music making collaboration with Cathnor Road Children's Centre, which brought together a diverse and vulnerable group of mothers and babies. Words and language, particularly 'baby babble' was chosen as the starting point from which to explore and document musical communication with babies and their parents, as facilitated by the music leader and centre staff. Baby babble is a term to describe the earliest sounds a baby makes often in conjunction and response to his/her surroundings, people and siblings.

Adults with their babies were encouraged to utter babbly noises that were then picked up by the Music Leader and developed into simple songs. The exercise could be practised and developed at home by parents, and the Early Years practitioner employed by the Centre during the week, to encourage adults to sing their own songs, learnt at their own pace and ability. Over the weeks the babies showed their enjoyment of spontaneous babble language, and parents learned how to feel more confident making natural sing-song part of their play activities.

### ***Core group***

A core group of 15 was established, at first made up of ethnically diverse and traditionally hard-to-reach babies and parents: young single mothers, Lebanese, Turkish mothers and a Somali father. The Early Years worker fed back that using words, phrases and sentences from languages other than English were "very effective in group work and proved successful when considering participation and belonging – families feeling valued and respected".

Word of mouth soon passed round the area, which led to too many people turning up. This presented problems, as the new participants were generally not from the target groups and would probably be able to afford this type of activity through other channels, unlike the original target group, identified by the Music House and Cathnor Road Children's Centre. In the end, a ticketing system had to be operated, and both The Music House and Children's Centre agree that in future they would restrict participation to specific service users, such as homeless families, special needs groups, etc.

'Boogie Babies' was designed to deliver training through practice for the Early Years Key Worker as well as empower parents by giving them tools with which to enjoy music with their babies, but she was also able to bring insight and suggest ideas for parents, too, with her Early Years perspective, for example, making home-made instruments (pans and spoons, bottles and rice, etc), improvising at bath-time with "splish, splosh games", all of which were cheap.

### ***The future***

After the success of (and clear demand for 'Boogie Babies'), The Music House has continued to work with Cathnor Road Children's Centre, this time with a specific group – deaf children and babies. Cathnor Children's centre has agreed to invest in new projects thereby acknowledging the clear additional benefits that musical experiences can bring to families. To date, this has been possible:

### ***Benefits noted***

"Families are keen to ensure a seamless, open-ended music session with out apparent pressure to 'learn' or 'educate' each other". Emma is clear about the benefits she observes: "the increased confidence shown (in particular) by different cultures and their desire to bond with their baby. They are now dancing freely, singing 'nonsense' to their child and getting the intimate responses they expect". The mutually communicative exchanges from both baby and adult are empowering, and give each a greater sense of worth, social belonging and character strength.

This type of work is likely to develop alongside The Music House's existing activities. As a thriving not for profit enterprise, they offer music classes, drop-in sessions and tutoring to children and young people between 0 and

16, with extensive experience in working with hard to reach and vulnerable groups including language delay, autism, profound cognitive impairment and others.

### ***Development of future projects***

- The Music Leader should work alongside the centre support unit to help understand and implement musical engagement in ways to nurture family attachment, social and communicative skills
- The centre team and music leader should work together to mutually embed musical philosophies and early childhood psychology to support family/child enrichment within the centre, at home, and for later life skills.
- To have mutual flexibility (thinking and session planning) and technical skills for using music to support attachment and communication with babies and very young children and their parents.
- Enabling music activities to specific groups that would not normally access musical engagement with their families.
- The work can be embedded through building in CPD and active staff involvement.
- Identifying and targeting specific groups such as SEN, newborn, single parents, vulnerable families, language delay.

### ***Changes that might occur***

- Introduce music making as an ongoing provider that immerses within the health, wellbeing and learning philosophies of the centre overall.
- Involve families (many from multi-cultural backgrounds) in material input to nurture sound-making and language development, so that family support mechanisms can be built on, and sustained.
- Better systems/filtering to ensure participants are from the identified target groups (channel demand appropriately)

### ***Relationships to be built on***

- Arts organisations, freelance practitioners and children's centres should continue to discuss and experiment with ways of working together.
- Continue to collaborate with arts organisations and other children's centres within the borough to identify future target groups in a very specific and focused way (channel demand appropriately)

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