

Intergenerational Music Making Project - "Making Musical Bridges"

by Charlotte Miller



What is Intergenerational Music Making?

Intergenerational Music Making (IMM) is one of the UK's pioneers of intergenerational music projects and was born from Charlotte Miller's passion of working as a music therapist with the elderly and the very young in a variety of different settings. Her grandmother, 'See-See' suffered from Dementia and she found that music was the bridge that could connect them in challenging times. So, IMM was created to bring about positive social change for local communities and especially those suffering with Dementia. IMM brings together local schools, care homes, colleges and universities to create exciting and meaningful music therapy projects to improve well-being, mental health, tackle loneliness and help integrate local communities. We are passionate that everyone should have the chance to live life to the full and our intergenerational projects give older people and children the opportunity to do so. Working together they co-create music projects that they can feel proud of, gaining an increased sense of belonging and feelings of wellbeing.



The projects are set up between an IMM music therapist, the local care home and their local primary or secondary school. In discussion with IMM music therapists, SENCOs, head teachers and care home managers or well-being co-ordinators, a group of 10-12 children and residents are referred into the group. Reasons for referral may vary from a lack of confidence, self-esteem, depression, isolation, behavioural difficulties, Dementia etc. The group meet weekly for a six to eight-week treatment block and each session is an hour long. Each project is unique with regards to the music making they co-produce. Some of our past projects have included a variety of pre-composed and improvised music making, interactive musical and sensory activities, song writing, choral works, musical performances from both the young and the elders and listening to recorded music. The sessions end with a period of talking and reflecting, usually accompanied by juice and biscuits, giving both groups time to verbally interact, share stories, ask questions and discuss the week ahead. This period in the session is an important one in relation to the development and process of the young and elder relationship.

Once completed the projects are sustained in a variety of ways including other weekly activities such as craft making, story-telling, Christmas performances and choirs. Some of our residents and children have even become pen-pals and reading buddies!

We have found the sessions have led to a number of positive outcomes including:

- a sharing of cultural heritage;
- increased confidence in both the old and young;
- improved physical ability in the elders;
- empathy resilience and self-esteem developed in particular in the younger participants;
- improved mood with less sense of isolation.

Intergenerational activities are social engagements and interactions that bring together the older and younger generations for a common purpose. They build on the strengths that different generations have to offer, nurture understanding and mutual respect, and challenge ageism. Both parties have the opportunity to give as well as receive, and to feel a sense of ownership and achievement. IMM have carried out several pilot projects which have been evaluated, sustained and replicated. Our work is meeting local and national agendas, improving the mental health and wellbeing of both generations and is proving to be cost effective whilst creating community music positions and new skills for students plus for care home staff. Recently one of our projects was nominated in the Guardian Mental Health Awards AHP for innovative practice and this has contributed to support from several MP's and policy makers, we are keen in looking ahead to deliver this model on a larger scale whereby we are targeting larger numbers of those who are vulnerable and in need.



In conjunction with Age of Creativity IMM are thrilled to be holding the next Intergenerational Music Therapy Conference in London on May 23rd, **Bridging the Years with Words, Music and Action** with expert presenters Grace Meadows, Doctor Charlotte Lance, Olivia McLennan and Charlotte Miller to share practice, inspire new work and explore current intergenerational opportunities,

For more information or to book please visit

www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/bridging-the-years-with-words-music-and-action-tickets-59373789603

Some Recent Feedback

"It is always so important to bring generations together and the 'Making Musical Bridges' project

sounds like a fantastic way of doing so". The Rt Hon Anne Milton MP, Member of Parliament for Guildford, Minister of State for Apprenticeships and Skills

"Intergenerational Music Making seems like an amazing initiative and we were delighted to learn about it." Hortense Humeau, Project Assistant, Jo Cox Foundation

"Half the time I don't know if I'm coming or going but when I'm here with the children in the music I know I'm supposed to be here and I know where I am" Annie, care home resident with dementia

"The sessions were MIND BLOWING!!! I loved visiting the elderly each week and especially after the music we sat and talked with them whilst having some juice and a biscuit." Year 7 Student

"There's something about having children on site which makes residents feel more human and gives them permission to care about others. It boosts their confidence and feeling of self-worth, when I tell them the children are coming their faces light up." FOTE Activity Co-ordinator