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### **Benefits experienced by older people in group music-making activities**

#### **Abstract**

This article focuses on the reported benefits of participation in musical activities identified by people over the age of fifty, who participated in the Music for Life Project. The participants engaged in weekly musical activities offered in three locations; two centres in London and one in the northern of England. Their responses were collected through individual interviews and through written answers to open questions on two questionnaires that were filled in at the beginning of the project (October 2009) and again approximately nine months later.

Thematical analysis of participant feedback showed that improvements in quality of life were attributed to active engagement with music and a wide range of cognitive, social, emotional and physical benefits were reported. This article offers an insight into what participants said about improved health, social interactions, emotional support and learning that occurred as a result of active involvement in music and proposes ways through which these reported benefits may be maximised.

#### **Keywords**

Seniors, Well-being, Benefits, Music participation, Qualitative study

#### **Introduction**

This article presents findings from the Music for Life Project (MFLP) in relation to benefits from active music-making reported by people over the age of fifty who participated in weekly musical activities. The major demographic transition in the developed world that has seen a growing ageing population (GOScience 2008; US Census Bureau 2010) has sparked an interest in the importance of music-making in later life (McQueen and Varvarigou 2010) as a means towards improvement of quality of life (well-being). With reference to well-being emphasis is placed on aspects such as sense of control, autonomy, self-realisation and pleasure (i.e. the pursuit of pleasurable activities) in sustaining full personal and social development through later years (Deci and Ryan 2000; Higgs et al. 2003).

A growing body of research demonstrates that music continues to offer powerful potential for enhancing health and wellbeing for older adults through learning and social interactions (Clift et al. 2010; 2008; Cohen et al. 2006; Gembris 2008; Hays 2005; Hays and Minichiello 2005; Hillman 2002; Lally 2009; Pike 2011; Taylor 2011; Taylor and Hallam 2008). With regard to physical well-being Cohen et al. (2006: 233) reported ‘true health promotion and prevention effects’ on ‘overall health, doctor visits, medication use and falls’ of a group of older adults who participated in a choir (intervention group) as opposed to another group that engaged in non-musical activities (comparison group) such as crafts. In addition, Clift et al. (2010; 2008) have argued that, among other benefits, singing involves deep and controlled breathing, which not only counteracts anxiety but also provides an opportunity for physical exercise.

Social benefits derived from music-making, such as opportunities to express oneself, connect to others and put a structure in one’s life through regular attendance of rehearsals, have been described by Hays and Minichiello (2005). Furthermore, Hillman (2002) found that participation in a choral group allowed opportunities for older people to take part in performances as entertainment in residential homes and day care centres, which made the singers feel that they gave something back to their fellow citizens. Emotional support through music participation has been identified by Hays (2005) who reported that music provides people with ways of understanding and developing their self-identity and maintaining well-being. In his study with 54 older people over the age of sixty who talked about their experiences in music, music contributed to positive ageing by ‘providing ways for people to maintain positive self-esteem, feel competent, independent, and avoid feelings of isolation and loneliness’ (Hays 2005, p. 28).

Other studies have also talked about the emotional value to senior citizens of intergenerational music activities (Varvarigou et al. 2011), the sense of vitality and happiness that older people derive from involvement in an orchestral group (Gembris 2008) and the spirituality and therapeutic power of group music-making (Clift et al. 2008; Hays and Minichiello 2005). There are also studies that have focused on musical learning and cognitive benefits in later life. These studies have acknowledged that through developing musical skills such as song-writing (Lally 2009), playing the MIDI piano (Pike 2011) or the piano/keyboard (Taylor 2011; Taylor and Hallam 2008) and singing (Clift et al. 2010) older learners experience feelings of satisfaction, achievement and self-confidence, they improve their concentration and memory and they discover new possible selves as musicians.

Thus, there is a growing body of literature that demonstrates the power of active participation in music with regard to enhancing a range of cognitive, physical, social and emotional benefits amongst older adults, whose perspectives provide some useful insight into how they experience music participation. This article explores reported benefits and concludes with suggestions for maximizing these benefits.

### **The Music for Life Project**

The Music for Life Project (MFLP) started in October 2009, funded by the New Dynamics of Ageing strand of the UK Research Councils to - (1) explore the way in which participating in music making activities can enhance the lives of older people; (2) consider the extent to which this participation may impact on social, emotional and cognitive well-being; and (3) consider the specific processes through which this impact occurs. Three case study sites acted as partners in the research: The Sage, Gateshead; Westminster Adult Education Service; and the Connect programme at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama. The focus of this article is in relation to the second research question.

The musical activities that participants were engaged with included singing in small and large groups, rock groups, and classes for guitar, ukulele, steel pans, percussion, recorder, music appreciation and keyboard. A control group was made up of individuals attending language classes (two groups); art/craft classes (five groups); yoga; social support (two groups); a book group; and a social club. In total 398 individuals were actively participating in music groups and 102 in other activities. A descriptive analysis of the data that were received through a questionnaire at the beginning of the project suggested that eighty percent of the musical group sample was female (N=321), 19% were men (N=75) and the majority was white, despite attempts by the research team to recruit participants from a range of ethnic minority groups. The age range was fifty-93 (Mean age 69, SD 7.8) with 246 members of the music group in the Third Age (fifty-75) and 92 in the Fourth Age (over 75) (Laslett 1989). The majority of those participating in the music groups had been involved in professional occupations. There was no statistically significant difference in this respect between the music participants and those in the other groups.

### **Methodology**

Two questionnaires were distributed at the beginning (October 2009) and at the end (May 2010) of the project. They asked the participants to respond to two psychological needs scales related to well-being, to provide demographic information and to answer questions relating to the barriers and benefits of participation. This article focuses on the qualitative comments offered in response to open questions included in the questionnaires. These comments are combined with data from face-to-face interviews with a sample of twenty-seven participants selected randomly from a larger group of questionnaire respondents who had expressed an interest in being interviewed and had provided their contact details. The analysis of the data focused on thematic discovery from the transcripts and was achieved through open and axial coding (Corbin and Strauss 2008). The researchers identified relevant thematic codes by a constant examination of several themes and by crosschecking these through referencing to individual transcripts (223 sources including 197 questionnaire responses and 26 interview transcripts) and to ‘blocks’ of codes. The qualitative analysis software NVivo 8 was used allowing the analyst to shift concepts around until an agreed (among the four researchers) relation of the codes with each other and with the collective dataset was achieved.

## Findings

The following benefits are reported on here, drawing on the qualitative data from the study’s participants. These benefits are cognitive, social, emotional and physical.

### Cognitive benefits

Participants attributed enhanced cognitive well-being to their participation in musical activities. For example, singing in parts, memorising music and the concentration required for listening to new music and taking part in ensemble playing were perceived as stimulating cognitive challenges that contributed to feeling active and alert. Progression and a sense of accomplishment when goals had been attained were important in supporting motivation and commitment (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Cognitive benefits reported by participants**

*\*(The gender and age of the respondent is given when known)*

#### **Appreciation of music** (47 sources; 65 references)

- *The music class has encouraged me to listen to classical music and go to BBC recordings. All the classes I attend have encouraged and kept me from feeling*

*bored. (Female, 71)*

- *It keeps me active, alert and organised. It allows me to use and build on previous experience. It introduces me to new ideas and extends my appreciation of different musical genres. (Female, 65)*

**Sense of achievement – acquiring new skills** (48 sources; 60 references)

- *Learning something new at an older age can be enjoyable, successful and stimulating. (Female, 62)*
- *You feel that it's a nice ending to weeks and weeks of hard work, you know. You feel great! That's good. I feel satisfied now, you know. That you've done something and somebody else has appreciated it. And you feel 'Oh, yes we have accomplished something'. (Female, 78)*
- *They give us a chance to ... socialise as well as learning new skills which give us a sense of achievement. (Female, 63)*
- *I want to get something out of it. I don't see the point in coming back for another three terms because I'm not moving forward. I do want to progress a bit. (Female, NA)*

**Keeps me active, alert and young** (38 sources; 52 references)

- *It keeps me active, alert and organised. It allows me to use and build on previous experience. It introduces me to new ideas and extends my appreciation of different musical genres. (Female, 65)*
- *It keeps my mind active and I have felt better emotionally after singing sessions. (Female, 63)*
- *I do think that being involved in music definitely keeps you young. ... Because, like I am saying, you are using this mental ability all the time and that's got to be good, hasn't it? (Female, 78)*

**Challenge** (24 sources; 37 references)

- *I found that [singing in parts] more difficult, but I found it good because it is a challenge. It did, you know, make us think. I really say...Anyone that talks about it I'll say it's great. Really is good. (Female, 69)*
- *Music is proving to be an amazing enjoyable opportunity for me in retirement. It*

*is both mentally challenging and socially involving. (Female, 61)*

- *It's good for memory and concentration and is relaxing except when some phrases are difficult to master then it becomes a challenge.(Female, NA)*
- *I get a bit bored when the standards stride at a certain level. Would like to go into the finer points of playing and performance. (Female, 84)*
- *It's a bit difficult (learning as adult) but I don't want to give up.(Female, NA)*

#### **Helps with concentration and memory** (16 sources; 17 references)

- *I feel samba and drum-kit are particularly good for the grey cells!- have to concentrate and remember. I enjoy it all – it's fun. (Female, 65)*
- *I definitely feel that my concentration and memory have improved since joining. (Female, 59)*
- *It's good for memory and concentration and is relaxing except when some phrases are difficult to master then it becomes a challenge. (Female, NA)*
- *I've got a friend that's got that [Alzheimer's] ... it's a marvelous thing with everything he's got wrong with him, he can't remember this and he can't remember that, but ... I sang a couple of songs and he joined in, and he was word perfect. ... if you sing music to them and they know it, they'll sing it because that seems to stick in their minds, which is a wonderful thing. (Male, 87)*

#### **Social Benefits**

Participants noted that music activities gave a structure to their life after retirement, providing an activity to look forward to every week. Many participants expressed a strong sense of belonging in the musical groups. This sense motivated them to make the effort to attend the groups on a regular basis, which were described as fun and enjoyable. Through participation in musical groups some individuals fulfilled a need to socialise with like-minded people, to work together as a team and to belong to a group that supported their musical aspirations. Some participants also expressed an interest in mixing with younger people and children in joint musical activities.

Being part of a music groups also rendered opportunities for voluntary work such as the Sing for Your Life project, which supported care staff in developing their confidence in singing 'as a powerful way to engage, stimulate and communicate with people with dementia' (Equal

Arts 2009). For some participants, participation in musical groups that gave live performances in concert venues, churches, care homes or other events such as ruby wedding anniversaries and birthday parties was perceived as a great way to give something back to their communities by sharing their skills and helping to create enjoyable experiences for others. Although, there were two people who reportedly found the experience of performing ‘nerve-racking’, they, nevertheless, joined their groups in all performances in an act of camaraderie (see Table 2).

**Table 2: Participants' social relationships and interactions through musical groups**

*\*(The gender and age of the respondent is given when known)*

**Belonging** (48 sources; 69 references)

- *It has encouraged me to have higher expectations of myself and greater confidence socially. As I have no grandchildren (or children) it gives me something different to talk to people about!* (Female, 65)
- *It will be difficult to obtain more opportunities to take part in future events as there are few for those of my age group.* (Male, 76)
- *It's a positive experience for me because it gets you out of the house and into the company of others, rehearsing the music and singing the songs together.* (Female, NA)
- *I recently retired from full-time work and being involved in music making has made me feel part of an important new community.* (Female, NA)
- *I feel that the group that I'm in is – people more or less my age, we're old age pensioners, and it seems that when we're up there as a group, whether we do a single on our own or we all sing together as a group, it's got some meaning to it.* (Male, 87)

**Opportunities to socialize** (47 sources; 59 references)

- *Meeting other people, which is a great help when living on one's own.*(Female, NA)
- *Helped me to socialize with others.* (Female, 61)
- *Opportunities are also there to meet other people who often are in similar circumstances to one's own. Music being one of the common denominations.* (Female, 75)

- *Involvement in shared music ensures I get out and meet people even if the weather is bad. (Female, NA)*
- *Has helped me to stay open-minded, take risks and form new friendships...which continue to be important in older age. (Female, 65)*

**Intergenerational activities** (14 sources; 23 references)

- *Don't meet and mix with younger people, which would be enriching (Apart from my close family). Must do something to change this. (Female, 75)*
- *I love the activities but do feel I have entered an older age group. Might be nice to join forces with younger people occasionally. (One friend wouldn't join for this reason) (Female, 62)*
- *...different generation they want a different kind of music. They like their rap, they have their own kind of music what they like, so they want the modern music for the 18 year old. You know you can't get an 18 year old to learn about Frank Sinatra, they say who is he? But they might know Michael Jackson, everybody know (sic) Michael Jackson. (Male, 61)*

**Giving back to the community** (12 sources; 22 references)

- *It's just that, as in performing, you are allowing people to hear you; you want to give a rendition of yourself, you want everybody to give a rendition of everything. You want to feel that what you've learnt is going to be enjoyed by someone else. (Female, 72)*
- *I have made new friends, I am able to support people less experienced in their music making and enjoy teaching beginner recorder to adults. (Female, 69)*
- *First we sing as a choir, then on our own. It gives me, at my age [tearful] I'm 85, it gives me a great feeling inside me that I can sing and it makes other people happy. (Male, 87)*

**Activities give structure to my life** (16 sources; 20 references)

- *I have only been with the Silver Singers 2 weeks but love every minute of it. Cannot wait for each Wednesday morning. Thank you! (Female, 58)*
- *My activities at the Sage help to keep me motivated, otherwise I think I'd become a television addict. I have to get up at a reasonable hour to allow for travelling*



*time from home, and plan other appointments round Breves, Divas and Pans.*

*Even holiday breaks come second! (Female, 75)*

- *It has also taught me to arrange my other activities in such a way that I can fit in time for practice and consolidating my skills. (Male, 65)*

#### **Fun – Laugh a lot** (11 sources; 11 references)

- *It is such fun and I love being surrounded by like-minded people.(Female, 71)*
- *It got us together to sing and play and we have a good laugh. It has been good for us and we say how much we enjoy it. (Female, 69)*
- *Takes me to another world. Some discipline but a lot of fun and laughter, coming together as a group. (Female, NA)*
- *Can be or is fun and have a laugh while still taking the music seriously.(Female, 77)*

#### **Emotional benefits and mental health**

A wealth of quotes and comments linked music participation and positive mental health. Individuals described how participation in music had helped them to cope effectively with stress, depression and bereavement. The participants attributed many positive feelings such as a sense of rejuvenation, an emotional ‘lift’ and spirituality to singing and playing musical instruments. Participation in music-making and performing offered opportunities for creative expression and in some cases provided a sense of purpose in life (see Table 3).

**Table 3: Emotional benefits and positive mental health reported in individual interviews**

*\*(The gender and age of the respondent is given when known)*

#### **Music and positive feelings** (72 sources; 83 references)

- *It has helped me come to terms with retirement following a long and fulfilling career. (Female, 62)*
- *When I participate in music making the rest of my life gets left behind and I become totally involved. It lifts the spirits and facilitates connection with other people. (Female, NA)*
- *I can go to Divas feeling really fed up with myself as I do have several health problems. But spending time with the Divas and E. gives me a good boost and simply makes me feel good. (Female, 65)*

- *Benefits – singing gives me a real ‘lift’. Makes me feel great!* (Female, 64)
- *Music brings joy into my life and particularly singing in choirs lifts me up and takes my mind off any problems* (Female, 59)
- *It’s one of the best things that has become part of my life. It’s not always easy to get to the sessions but once there it’s good. Very therapeutic and soul stimulating.* (Female, 71)

**Confidence growth** (34 sources; 48 references)

- *I think I may be a better singer than I thought I was. Have gained confidence in the activity.* (Male, 78)
- *My experiences with music have given me strength and confidence in myself, the laughter, the fun and also when I can associate certain pieces of music with things or people in my life.* (Female, NA)
- *People grow in confidence as they are able to have a go at a wide variety of activities and learn new skills.* (Female, 62)

**Protection against stress** (19 sources; 19 references)

- *It gives pleasure and as you become involved you forget the stresses in your life.* (Female, 63)
- *Participating in music has enriched my life by relieving stress, and my experience of this wonderful class has been a very positive one. I hope it will continue next term.* (Female, 80)
- *I think as far as I’m concerned, the benefit of music is for everyone. If you’re stressful it’s a wonderful feeling just sitting down and listening to music, it calms you down, it gives you a centre point. Not everybody because other people have a way of relaxing by exercise or doing manic running around, but I think music is the best, apart from painting. Those two things because they’re artistic, painting and singing are the most wonderful things to get into people’s soul, shall we say, or heart.* (Female, 80)
- *Participating at events and activities... has added a new dimension to my life! ... All stress leaves me when participating in musical activities and I leave with a spring in my step. This rubs off on my parents as I often sing to them or play my ukulele for them when visiting or having them to my house!* (Male, 80)

**Protection against depression** (10 sources; 11 references)

- *I have been suffering from depression. Singing has had a really good effect on me. I feel more positive.* (Female, NA)
- *For many years I have suffered periodic bouts of depression. Since being welcomed into the Silver Programme at the Sage Gateshead, I am happy to report that I have been 'depression-free'. Unless you have had this condition you cannot imagine what a blessed relief it is to be without it for almost a whole year!* (Female, 65)
- *Well, I have to say that because I was already...I had had a bit of a break down but I was still, sort of, climbing out of it when I joined. And so now that I am sort of out of it life is just definitely for living myself as much as I can. So, it was more part and parcel of the general recovery from that.* (Female, 80)

**Sense of purpose** (8 sources; 8 references)

- *It has given more purpose to my life and given me reasons to meet each day as it comes.* (Female, 75)
- *Given me one morning per week that is me time.* (Female, 72)

**Creative expression** (7 sources; 7 references)

- *Enjoy the opportunity to sing, express myself and be creative. Now retired and can get back to participating in music. Before my professional career took over my life.* (Male, 69)

**Support after bereavement** (6 sources; 7 references)

- *Following the death of my husband, our close and loving relationship over almost fifty years, has left me with some very negative feelings. My answers would have been quite different before my bereavement.* (Female, 72)
- *My mother died but I only missed a couple of sessions. I wanted to get back to singing – where I can forget the outside world.* (Female, NA)
- *After the loss of a daughter – 12 months ago.... Singing is the best anti-depressive in the world!* (Male, NA)
- *My husband died suddenly over 2 years ago and I found the participation in the singing and an instrumental group was one of the greatest supports in my life.*

*Singing is always uplifting and it is difficult to be sad while playing the ukulele!*  
(Male, 65)

**Feeling rejuvenated** (3 sources; 3 references)

- *Because they encouraged us, you know, to dress like rock in leathers and other stuff and you should see the pictures...I am seventy-two, you know and we are all at that age and you should see the way we come from the start. Very nice.*  
(Female, 73)
- *Whoops – I don't consider myself old.* (Female, NA)
- *When I play the tambourine the backing singers are all ... (laughing) and you think we are about sixteen!* (Female, 73)

**Physical health benefits**

The participants also talked about health constraints such as hearing, arthritis and other mobility problems that sometimes made participation in and enjoyment of music difficult. However, improvements to physical health were attributed to participation in music. These physical benefits included respiratory benefits, physical exercise and increased use of joints. During the interviews the idea was floated that musical activities should be available on prescription from the National Health Service (see Table 4).

**Table 4: Physical health benefits reported by participants**

*\*(The gender and age of the respondent is given when known)*

**General positive physical health** (38 sources; 52 references)

- *Would like to see 'singing as prescription' being offered by GPs. Newcastle has 'exercise as prescription' – singing could be offered, too. Maybe with a friend to link the referred person.* (Female, 63)
- *Playing the ukulele is good exercise for my finger joints.* (Female, 88)
- *Exercise, walking down to the Sage 2-3 times a week.* (Female, 65)

**Health – good for asthma and breathing** (18 sources; 19 references)

- *Always feel better after singing. Asthma has almost disappeared.* (Female, NA)
- *Helps in my control of breathing.* (Female, NA)
- *Since becoming a member of the Sage Silver Singer (2004) my lung capacity and*

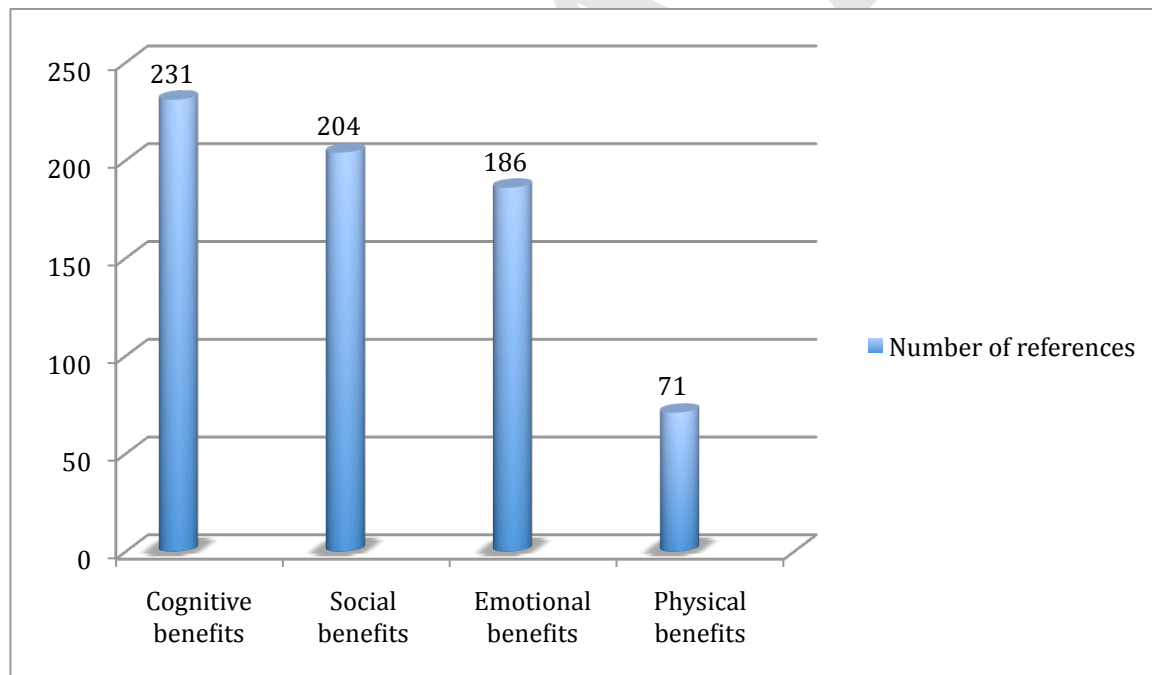
*singing voice have improved, in my opinion (Never sung publicly or at home previously). (Female, 75)*

- *Singing in choirs has helped me relax and feel more healthy – those breathing exercises really are good for you! (Female, NA)*
- *It has improved my breathing and helps me to relax and feel less anxious. I can sing with my grandchildren (which I couldn't have done prior to the Silver Singers) (Female, 69)*

## Discussion

All of the participants including those in non-musical activities agreed that they participated in group activities for a variety of reasons associated with positive cognitive, social and emotional outcomes. The music participants agreed most strongly (and more strongly than the control group participants) that a reason for participation was the enjoyment they experienced.

**Figure 1: Number of references per category of benefits**



A wide range of social, emotional, cognitive and health benefits were attributed to participation in music-making and were drawn from the participants' own experiences. Social benefits included a sense of belonging, a sense of playing a valued and vital role within a community, having fun and having contact with younger people in intergenerational groups. Participants also noted that being a member of a musical group helped to provide a routine

and structure to their daily lives, providing motivation for leaving the house and for engaging in daily individual music practice (see Figure 1).

Cognitive benefits included rising to new challenges, acquiring new skills, improved concentration and memory and a general sense of achievement in all of the above. Progression played a key role in underpinning these benefits. Participants spoke of how they valued remaining mentally agile and how they derived great pride in their musical competencies and achievements. Participants also noted many examples of improved mental and physical health. Physical health benefits included a renewed sense of vitality and rejuvenation and improved mobility. Many mental health benefits were also reported, including protection against stress and depression, a sense of purpose in life, enhanced confidence, positive feelings about life in general and support following bereavement. Overall, when questioned about what was special about music as opposed to other activities, many participants attributed positive benefits to the creative and expressive qualities of music.

The participants in this study as well as in other studies that have explored benefits from music participation for older people's well-being have reported a wealth of benefits which are not restricted to emotional and social. Although there was considerable mention of the social benefits of participation through groups where participants established a sense of belonging and had opportunities for giving and receiving care and support, the physical and, in particular, the cognitive benefits, as shown in Figure 1, should not be overlooked or underestimated. Existing literature on music education puts emphasis on the high levels of achievement that young learners, especially children and adolescents, can attain through their engagement in music (Hallam, 2010) but there is limited research that focuses on musical achievements in older age. Those studies that have focused on this area have emphasised older learners' musical outcomes and creativity in learning an instrument, song-writing and singing (Clift et al. 2010; Gembris 2008; Lally 2009; Taylor and Hallam 2008).

Our study reported here adds to the existing body of knowledge on music learning in later life offering further evidence that learning an instrument, singing in a choir or playing in a samba group can be a demanding but fulfilling experience. The authors of this article place particular emphasis on the learning benefits from music participation, for they wish to stress that learning in later life is not only possible (Cohen 2009) – you can indeed teach ‘an old dog new tricks’ – but to continue being engaged in learning seems, according to our findings, to

be a vital component of preserving well-being and high quality of life. Lowis et al (2011) found that artistic interest does not decrease with age, echoing Lanslett's (1989) argument that learning in later life can lead to the development of musical skills, awareness and understanding, the development of a new possible self after retirement (Hallam et al 2011) and new opportunities for voluntary work (Aldridge and Lavender 2000; Equal Arts 2009). All these dimensions can support increased well-being.

Our study highlighted practice-related issues that may contribute to maximising the various benefits reported earlier. Existing programmes can retain their participants and those who cannot participate can be encouraged to do so when centres that offer learning opportunities in music also provide social and pastoral support. Some of the groups involved in the MFLP had set up buddying systems and absences were noted and followed up. It may not be a coincidence that very few people dropped out from these groups. Participants were also encouraged to bring friends or relatives along during the rehearsals. In addition, regular social events were organised and in some afternoon rehearsals tea and cakes, made by the participants, were served on a weekly basis.

### **Conclusion and implications for further research**

More opportunities for active music-making need to be made available close to where potential participants live and they need to be supported by Local Authorities, music education organisations and adult education programmes so that regular provision is maintained. These opportunities need to be open access (no prior experience required and no auditions) and there need to be opportunities for progression from beginner to more advanced level, so that the learners feel that they are challenged and that they are treated by their tutors or facilitators as individuals with the potential to grow in musical expertise. In addition, active music making for older people should not be restricted to choir. Opportunities should be available for participation in various instrumental groups. Some participants in the MFLP took advantage of the option to join several groups such as ukulele, guitar, recorders, steel pans, hand bells and rock (instrumental and vocal) groups. Furthermore, a range of musical genres should be included so that participants can express their musical preferences and re-engage with music from their youth. More opportunities for intergenerational collaborations with children or younger adults need to be made available (also see Varvarigou et al. 2011) through community music projects or school projects. For example, there is a seniors' choir in North London that visits local schools as part of the choir's 'sharing skills across generations'

programme; where the seniors sing with and for the children and feel that their contribution to the local community is valued. Finally, opportunities for performances, where the learners can share the results of their work with friends and relatives need to be offered.

The findings described in this article provide a foundation on which additional and more extensive research can build. Three areas seem to the authors to bear potential fruit for further exploration. Firstly, opportunities for training community musicians to work with older people need to be offered. This training should reject a 'deficit' model of ageing, which can lead to the underestimation of the capabilities of older people and insufficient challenge being provided. Secondly, musical materials that are enjoyable but challenging and offer opportunities for progression need to be developed and disseminated among community music leaders' networks. Lastly, ways for engaging more elderly people in musical activities should be explored with support from local authorities, schools, universities and organisations that cater for activities for the elderly. In that way the benefits that active musical engagement can have on older people's cognitive, social, emotional and physical well-being could be fully realised.

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