

The Lullaby Project five years on:

# Evaluating the well-being, impact and legacy of singing a child's story

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### Introduction to the project

The Haringey Lullaby Project (LP) is an arts-based intervention for pre-school children devised by Angeline Conaghan one of two lead practitioners of Groundswell Arts. Based in local authority Nursery Schools and Children's Centres and using the medium of song, **the aims** of the LP are to enhance children's social, psychological and educational well-being. Each intervention generates an original song or lullaby for a focus child through an extended process of conversation and co-composition between practitioner and carer. The songs describe the child's life, loves and character in highly original and culturally sensitive ways. **Specific objectives** for children and carers' are to increase their sense of social connectedness and reduce social isolation through shared and personalised musical experience. Additionally, the programme offers:

- An extended variety of participatory musical experiences to teachers, carers and children
- improved language and communication skills of the young children involved in the project
- increased health and well-being to both adults and young children through participation in creative music making.
- enhanced capacity in the local early years workforce for music making with a particular focus on links to speech and language and carer engagement
- stronger links and ongoing successful relationships between the families of vulnerable children and their school settings.

**The target population** for this project was initially 2 – 4 year olds in particular need of support. After informal discussion and initial recommendation by school, keyworkers or carers themselves, children and their carers were invited to engage in informal, supportive and positive conversations about individual children's lives. During these conversations illustrated records and notes were made on large sheets of paper in the form of a 'spider diagram'. The negotiated quotes and notes were used to generate bespoke lyrics and melodies. These unique songs were subsequently completed in draft form by the composer, then performed for carer and child for verification and corrections of fact and detail and finally shared live with the rest of the child's nursery or playgroup class. A recording of the song was then given to the family on CD or data stick and more recently is available on a private link on Groundswell's website. Often CDs are duplicated for other family members.

**Funding:** The Haringey Lullaby project was funded by Youth Music (see website), Haringey Local Authority and the schools and centres themselves. It was initially delivered between September 2013 and July 2016 and three nurseries were involved in the pilot. Excellent feedback, positive responses from schools and carers have ensured that funding has been granted for broadening the scope of the LP. New practitioners have been trained in the method and values of the project and this has allowed it to flourish in 27 nurseries in Haringey (some of which have had multiple inputs over several years) 12 Early Years settings elsewhere in London and three in the Republic of Ireland.

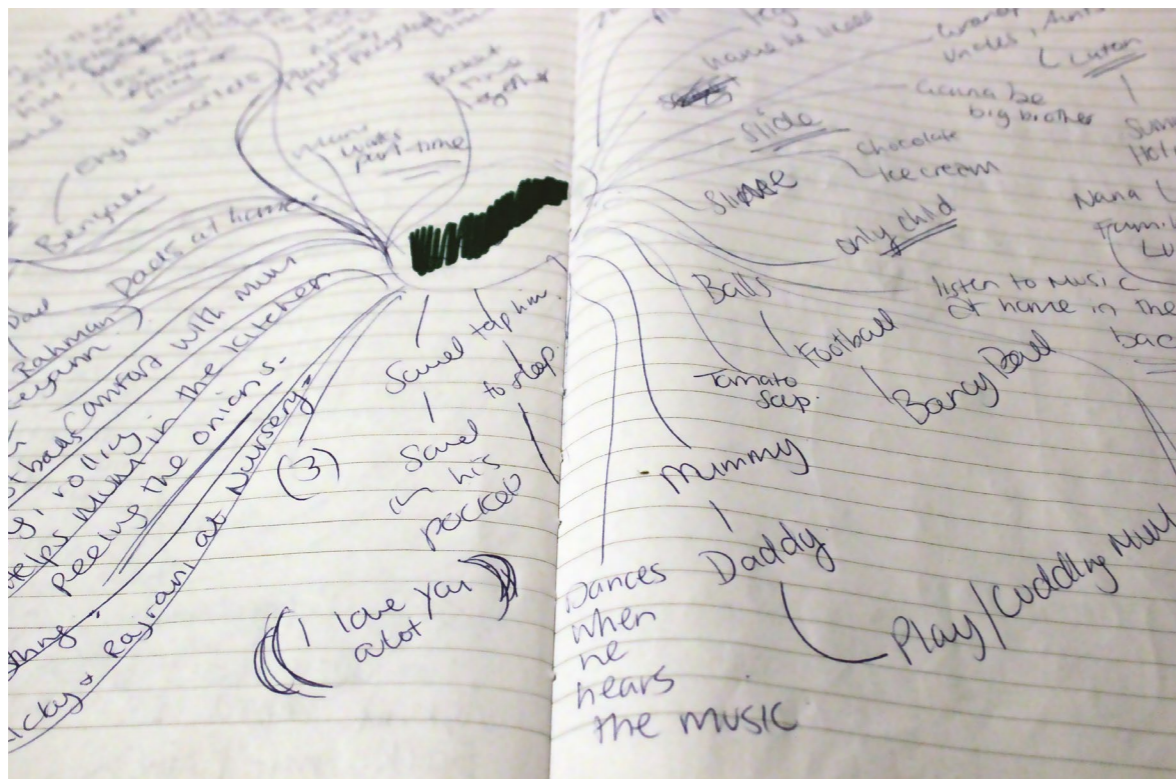


Infant and mum contribute words and sounds for a bespoke lullaby

**Location and setting:** The song writing sessions were held in meeting rooms or private areas of the centres. Conditions were made relaxing and informal through the presence of soft furnishings, warm temperatures, tea/coffee, biscuits, toys instruments and artefacts scattered around carpeted floors and furniture. Each carer spent about an hour on two separate days in conversation and after initial prompting often led discussions about their child. Angeline or another practitioner might introduce the project by saying, 'I want to make up a lullaby or very personal song for your little girl with all the things that really matter to her in it.' From the interactions generated by this invitation, Angeline gathered words, tune and chorus for the song. The interview style in each interaction was consistently relaxed, gentle, supportive and un-authoritarian. Meetings were peppered with sung and played musical interactions in which Angeline sang or carers played particular accompaniments, phrases or fragments from a favourite tune on Youtube or their private playlist.

**Quality assurance** was addressed through the use of a standard process of friendly ice-breaking conversation leading to more focussed questions. As part of the note-taking, large 'spider diagrams' were made with a symbol for the child at the centre with various aspects of their life branching out. These written records were retained and form part of the wider archive of the project.

1. The term 'carers' is used throughout because of the wide range of family set ups represented



An example of a spider diagram made during an initial lullaby conversation

**Recruitment:** Children were recommended for a wide range of reasons. Some had been newly adopted, some suffered illness, bereavement or other trauma, some were showing early difficulty with communication, others had multiple needs. Quickly carers recognised the personal and relational benefits of the intervention and communicated this to other parents. Soon carers outside the focus group began asking for lullabies for their children and the project widened rapidly.

**The cost** of the intervention is roughly £1000 per school and pays for about six weeks of inputs. This funding is covered by Youth Music, Local Authority and other budgets but there are no costs to individual participants. The project requires few resources apart from a highly talented and humane musician, guitar or other accompanying instrument, a voice, some paper and a large notebook.

The evaluator has followed the Lullaby project (now called *Sing Our Story*) since its inception and was familiar with Angeline's earlier arts-based work. In the first decade of the 2000s she was working on a number of exceptional projects with Creative Partnerships London North. The first evaluation of the Haringey Lullaby Project came in 2014 under the auspices of the Sidney de Haan Research Centre for Arts and Health (SDH, see website). The first study concluded that the Haringey Lullaby Project:

*...offers a low cost, high impact route towards significantly improved social and psychological health for vulnerable young children and their immediate family. It provides important additions to the professional development and training of staff in each centre and powerfully demonstrates new and beneficial functions for quality music making in Early Years settings. (p. 33)*

The current evaluation is funded by both Youth Music and the SDH centre both of whose mission is to advocate for arts experience as a significant contributor to social, physical, psychological and intellectual health.

## Background

The last 20 years has shown increasing interest in well-being. Most recently (2019) New Zealand's government followed lead of the kingdom Bhutan in making societal well-being or 'Gross National Happiness,' the leading measure of governmental success. The UK government started its 'Measuring National Well Being' (MNWB) programme in 2010 (see ONS, 2019 for latest Report) and since then has published, twice yearly assessments of national well-being against 42 aspects which include:

- people to rely upon,
- relationships,
- anxiety,
- life satisfaction,
- feeling safe,
- belonging,
- access to key services and
- participation in arts and culture.

The LP specifically targets the well-being of pre-school children (0-4 years). Participation in the art and culture-building activity of singing has been shown to play a major role in developing positive attitudes and relationships (Clift and Hancox, 2000, 2010), encouraging more fluent and confident language use (Tregarthen, 2003), building personal life-satisfaction (Barnes in Clift and Camic, 2015) and generating a sense of belonging and security within cultures (Dunbar, 2013). The intimate, supportive conversations and resultant lullabies themselves were directly intended to help build or strengthen links between families and the key services of health, social services and education offered by each Children's Centre.

Science offers increasing evidence to support this focus on well-being. Seminal treatises on happiness by psychologists like Csikszentmihalyi, (1997; 2002) Seligman, (2004) and Fredrickson (2009) have long established links between creative activity, warm relationships, a sense of purpose and subjective feelings of well-being. Neuroscientific research on the 'feeling brain' (LeDoux, 2002; Damasio, 2003) and its fundamental role in learning (Immordino-Yang and Damasio, 2007), culture-building (Damasio, 2018) and general health confirm the importance of simply 'feeling' happy. Research into subjective well-being continually affirms its mental, physical, social and intellectual health benefits (Clift and Camic, 2015; Barnes in David, et al, 2016). We know from research into inequality shows that lack of well-being shown results in very significant social and economic costs (Layard, 2005, Marmot, 2010). On the basis of his report to government on health inequalities, Sir Michael Marmot for example, drew attention to the lack of developmental well-being amongst a high percentage of children in England:

*'...a staggering 41% of children are NOT achieving a good level of development.... we are doing very badly indeed. Poor early child development and socioeconomic disadvantage predict poor performance through children's whole school careers, (Marmot, M. Fair Society Healthy Lives 2012).*

Arts interventions are one way of addressing this growing issue. The children supported by the Lullaby Project from its beginning were almost certainly part of Marmot's 41%. At 2,3 or 4 years of age their social, physical and intellectual performance was already measurably adversely affected by poor levels of economic, cultural, linguistic and relational development. Addressing these needs early is of paramount importance (Bercow, 2008). On a purely financial level, failing to support children in the early years means that the educational, health and social costs of supporting them later in life spirals upwards. Yet we know that targeted arts interventions in the early years can be highly cost effective (Roberts, 2006; Bubble, 2016) and save spending on increasingly complex needs as children grow older. On the more fundamental humanitarian level, failure comprehensively to support disadvantaged infants sentences many to vulnerable, unfulfilled, unhappy lives (Nutbrown, 2012).

The Lullaby Project argues that singing is an effective means of addressing well-being issues. Music making is common to all human beings (Brown, 2002). Song probably developed well before spoken language (Mithen, 2005). In hunting and gathering groups of humanoids the world over there is evidence that it was used to express and share powerful emotional messages of relationship, love, sadness, anger and joy. As humans today we continue to respond to songs on profound, wordless emotional levels as individuals and in groups. Singing and music sharing has developed in all societies as an essential social bonding, healing and teaching tool (Dunbar et al., 2014) and popular music fulfils the same purposes today as it did with our stone-age ancestors. Despite this exceptional heritage, music education and participation in music making is often seen as an 'extra' (Psychologist, Pinker famously called it 'auditory Cheesecake', in 1997) and under threat as a school subject in many western societies.

Whilst musicians and music educators daily experience the wide ranging positive effects of participation in music, the wider world has slowly moved away from appreciating its value in education, community and individual well-being (Hallam et al., 2010). In general, young children hear fewer nursery rhymes than in the past, and are less likely to hear their mothers sing to them as babies. Songs and wider musical knowledge are given very little, if any, time in teacher and nursery nurse training and fewer students study it at examination level. The reasons for and details of this decline are complex and contested, but many argue that well-researched and parallel declines in social, language and communication skills are related to the dearth of song in the lives of significant numbers of children (Nutbrown, 2012; Bunt and Hoskyns, 2002; Gooch and Powell, 2013; Communications Trust, website). Others use research on the measurable well-being effects of group and individual singing (e.g. Clift and Hancox, 2001, 2010) to suggest that its absence limits chances of positive experience of schooling and childhood.

Communication, child well-being, mental health, improved access to support services for young children and the musical education of teachers and carers are each major factors in current educational discourse. Each issue constitutes an area of stress for developed economies; each requires solutions that involve personalised, complex, integrated and humane responses across domains. Arts practitioners and particularly musicians argue they should be central to this task.



The first sharing of a newly written lullaby

## The evaluation

*The main evaluation question concerns the effectiveness of the project in achieving its aims and objectives. It asks 'Has the Lullaby project left any form of legacy five years later, in the lives of the children and families initially involved'.*

## Methods

Informal semi-structured conversations were held with a convenience sample of 7 primary carers. Records of these conversations form the main data for this evaluation. Other data arose from nursery school reports, additional enquiries, children's own words regarding their songs and formal observations of the project in the years between 2012 and 2018. The seven adults interviewed by Angeline represent 11 children from a cohort of 80 who had lullabies composed for them in 2012/15. The follow-up discussions took place between January and June 2019. The framework for the evaluation was heavily influenced by the essentials recommended by Daykin and Joss (2016) and HM Treasury's Green Book (2018).

**Data collection:** Recorded conversations were transcribed, printed out and subjected to two different sets of analysis. Firstly, a simple discourse analysis separated descriptive and expository aspects of the conversations and sought examples of hidden power relations, and indications of who the audience was perceived to be. It also looked for indications of things left unsaid or repeated, enthusiastic or colourful language. After initial discourse analysis the transcribed texts were systematically analysed using a Grounded Theory approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Here themes, categories and properties were identified by multiple re-readings of the texts, coded and highlighted accordingly. Grounded theory was chosen to minimise researcher bias, honour the subjective views of the participants and fit the qualitative nature of the data.



## Ethics

**Consent** was sought for recordings and transcriptions of the semi-structured conversations. Discussants knew that transcripts and photographs would be shared with the researcher and used to find commonalities and suggest theories. It was also agreed that the names of children and carers would be anonymised and that all would have the opportunity to redact, change or add to aspects of the report that referred to them and to read the final report. Conversations were conducted in relaxed and familiar settings with an interviewer, contemporary to and well-known to the interviewees. Interviewees were also aware that the anonymised findings and photographs would be published and shared with funders, local authorities, academics and other interested parties.

**Conformity and quality** were assured by the repetition of the same process of data gathering. A detailed diary and spider diagrams summarising each interaction were kept for each song, together with initial and revised recordings of the words and music at various stages of production.

**The validity** of findings (perhaps unusually) involves reference to the unique, very personal, emotional and meaningful nature of the songs themselves. Indications that they were treasured by both children and adults established a shared assumption that the process of Lullaby-making was important on personal, educational, family and social levels. Conversation transcripts continually affirmed the song's continuing importance to the individual and individual family. The Informal conversations were held between the originator of the project and carers who had known her for the past five years. All had extended experience of working with her in composing and producing the recorded lullabies that clearly remained significant in most children's lives.

Validity of the findings was ensured by the following ways:

- The questions and discussions were founded on the participants' experience of an established process
- Each carer was asked similar questions
- The unique lyrics of the lullabies written 4 to 5 years ago formed the basis of the recorded conversations
- Children were also actively involved in the conversations and encouraged to make their own comments and additions and add to them on subsequent unplanned meetings
- Interviews were individual and conducted in a familiar atmosphere of friendship already established by the practitioner
- Interviews were transcribed verbatim

## Findings

Multiple re-readings and coding of conversation transcripts generated many common themes. These are summarised in the table below together with their sub-categories and distinctive properties (Table 1). Some themes, such as *Feelings*, *Meaning*, *Identity* and *Connections* overlap, but have been kept separate to allow greater clarity.

**Table 1: themes, categories and properties arising from evaluation conversations**

EMERGENT THEME	CATEGORIES	PROPERTIES
<b>Continuity</b>	For child For family of character of behaviour	Security comfort
<b>Connections</b>	with Other children with Family with the past	Remembered Affirmed Growing maturity Doubts insecurities
<b>Feelings</b>	Love Sorrow Happiness Security Hope	
<b>Place</b> (related to listening to the song)	Bed Bedroom Car	
<b>Meaning (for adults) and identity (for child)</b>	Individuality Personal focus Words and phrases Particular people Physical Location Characteristics in childhood Reflection on wider purpose Carer/relative/friends/siblings' role Talking about lost family members Family position Bonding Container of key stories composer Lyrics Alterations control/choice Security blanket	Funny Serious Non-verbal Embarrassment Endorsement Detail Making sense Bonding identity Addressing 'issues' Building Sensitivity Hard work Appreciation Love Enthusiasm self control/efficacy Dynamic
<b>Music</b>	Song Instruments Rhythm sounds	Interests in later and Life Confidence Knowledge
<b>Language</b>	Repetition Detail Stability	Supportive Expressive symbolic
<b>Physical activity</b>	Dance Jump Spin	Spontaneous Wordlessness

Common themes like: continuity, connections, emotion, place, meaning (for adults) identity (for children), music, language and movement/physical activity are illustrated by direct quotations (shown in italics below) from the transcripts.

**Continuity:** Every carer and child agreed that their song continued to be listened to. Carer, Nazreen commented that the songs, *'... get listened to ...it's so nice that these things are still valid.'* Some only occasionally – Ramli commented for example that his adopted son Mahmud, *'only rarely'* asks for it, but added, *'...mostly it comes on in the car as part of his mixes, however he is definite about tracks he doesn't like anymore and that is not one of them'*.

The unchanging nature of the song is however very important in some lives:

*'...the song is helpful in that sense because it doesn't change...so there's little reminders and it's always the same it's just that reaffirming of his life that is really important and he'd always smile...It is still as relevant and meaningful as it was then – It doesn't age – It will grow with Marta.'* (Nazreen)

Five years after their composition these songs have taken on additional meanings for many, though their ability to mark things that have remained in children's lives continue to be remarked upon by children and carers. Speaking of his son's song having a 'second life,' Ramli remarked:

*...now when we listen to it there is elements of things about it being about what he did as a baby and now he has more words and there are things that he doesn't do... but we can think of him back them fondly but in the same way it's the same, the people are the same, some of the things he does are the same* [Ramli]

Many carers expressed pleasure that their song continued to mean something to their children. For some children the song had grown with them and taken on new functions - Simon for example spoke of his song as a, *'... really nice song, I listen to it most times when I think I might want to stay up in bed.'*

Others spoke of the continuing and comforting role of their song – one carer commenting on a special word ('doo doo') contained in the lullaby, simply stating, *'...he still has his doo doo (special soft toy) because that is what the song is about.'* The stability aspect of the song was mentioned by the father of a boy with autism, *'He mentions the same thing over and over but for Mahmud that kind of consistency is important.'* [Ramli]

Asked if her song would still, five years later, be about her love of phones, Liah answered, *'...Yeah it would talk about phones and Netflix ....it's so addictive.'*

Speaking about her song, Alanah, Liah's older sister remarked, *'... I know it says that I have sparkly eyes and that's the main thing....'*. Alanah's mum then added:

*'...we talked about her beautiful eyes when you [Angeline] wrote the song, the song itself it's now come into our family folklore and she gets called 'beautiful eyes', or 'sparkly eyes' a lot.'*

A certain continuing importance of individual lullabies is suggested by the fact that three carers mentioned that their children knew their song's, *'track numbers (on disc or Mp3 player) and how to get to their own song.'* (Nazreen)

**Connections:** associations between individual children and their physical, emotional and social environment characterise each song. The memories they evoke formed the core of most of the evaluative conversations. Most 'lullabies' (many of which are so lively that they are more properly called 'songs') were written when their subjects were just 3 years old and connections between their past and present selves, form an obvious and heavily represented category of responses to the project.

One child, according to her mother links her song, *'...with all of the other children in the nursery who were on the CD (containing a lullabies written for others) ... she was like "Yeah that's Helene who had the song." Another parent related how she had shared a CD of her child's song with her mum, '... and all the grandparents, uncles and all the ones who were in the songs* [Nazreen].

Family connections were inevitably major themes in most songs, but connections were also made through the process of song writing involving other children. One carer for instance said:

*'...we made Hanna's about the connections with other parents and Mums for the first time, and some of those people I still know... she will remember who they are based on the song linked to them.'*

The idea of connecting or linking was notable in many interviews, for example:

*... it makes me very emotionally connected (Esther)  
... I don't think the connections (with key workers) are there anymore (May)  
...Hanna loves things that link with her past so for Hanna the listening to all of it is very important.*

Connecting the members of a new family was an unexpectedly significant role of the lullabies, beautifully expressed by one adoptive carer:

*'...we were a new family and we were really trying to bed down, because they [the adopted children] had had some difficult times and they had had a lot of moves ...I think we were looking for ways to really get into their hearts that this was different and this [family] was where they would stay and that they were safe and I think it really helped ,... but I think it was incredibly helpful to us too...'*

**Emotion and feelings:** Many carers remarked on the strong emotional content of their children's lullaby. One whose child was very ill at the time of the composition said:

*'...his song is very emotional because of the fact that he was ill and the song was made after he had just got better.... and therefore the emotions that run through the song are about how proud everyone is of him – so that just makes me want to cry every time I hear it*

*I listen to it and still now it makes me very emotional, it's a song full of hope... with his I had a lot of messages back saying I listened to this and this made me cry and you know there was a very emotional response to it across the whole family.'*

Others, especially the children themselves, used words like sad and happy to describe their feelings whilst listening to their songs. For Simon his song, *'Makes me feel happy and sad at the same time.'* His mum also noticed that he played his song, *'...if we have been a bit cross with him as well sometimes loudly to make a point!'*

Powerful emotions like love were predictably frequently present in the lullabies. Sometimes however, the significance of this emotion was lost or rejected by the child-subjects of the songs:

*'...it [the lullaby] just talks about how loved Lenny is and sometimes I feel that Lenny doesn't really trust that - perhaps I should play him the song again.'* (May)



**Place:** An unexpected commonality for most interviewees was that the songs were frequently listened to in the car. One carer represented in the initial research (Barnes, 2014) spoke of her child's lullaby being a 'get out of jail free card' on long and fretful journeys. Another spoke of the instantly calming effect on disgruntled children in the back of the car. This link with car CD or mp3 player continued in the lives of some. Ramli, Mahmud's dad said they listen to his song, *'...especially when we are in the car which...its always a good place to listen to music.'*

Bedrooms were the other common and private place in which children could listen to their songs. Used less frequently now, but many of the children still knew exactly where they could put their hands on the CD when they wanted them:

*'...in their bedroom they have this stereo and basically they listen to stuff like this and they have a little radio with a CD player so sometimes they will put them on themselves, they know where to find them, they know where they are.'* (Nazreen).

**Adult meaning and child identity:** In the words of one carer, *'children are obsessed with seeing themselves and who they are'*. The songs composed by Angeline give children opportunity repeatedly to hear their lives and stories immortalised in song. That these songs and lullabies established or confirmed a sense of meaning to both carers and children is well-evidenced. Every conversation involved discussion on the special sense of meaning held in these bespoke creations. Many quotations capture the significance of the lyrics, from simple statements about their accuracy, *'...really spot on,'* (Nazreen), to expressions of the importance of the song in building a new family:

*... it served the purpose of having Mahmud, having us all reflect on him and focus on him and having this way of talking about his life and listening to his life in a way that is really positive and fun but also not direct.*

*...in all this information about himself, and reminding him that he has all these people he loves and he has his relationship with his brother and that he's known and thought about by people and just solidifying that sense of family...I like the bit where it says, umm sings 'Daddy and Papa love you too...'*

*... I think it (the song) also served a purpose of having him feel like an individual within a family of people and in a nursery of multiple children. I don't think (then) he could comprehend that he is Mahmud in this world (Possibly he still doesn't know it now) we all know it but his sense of self wasn't that strong (Ramli, Mahmud's dad)*

Recalling funny stories is also a common feature of family cultures. Lines in the songs about, *'eating yoghurt in the bath', 'racing on a tiny bicycle',* being always *'on the go', 'carrying a brown bear everywhere,' 'here comes speedy Lenny!'* *'trying to get on everyone's phone, 'or 'tying people's shoe laces together,'* underscore the one-off nature of the songs and establish their personal relevance.

For some the meaning expressed in the songs is profound. *'A reminder of how lovely you are,'* said one respondent, *'people saying kind things [about you],'* another. Simon used his lullaby as a way of remembering in love, relatives who have died. His mother recalled, *'It was interesting when my brother died, that Simon started to play his song and he wasn't encouraged to do that by us but he seemed to be comforted by it.'* For Connor's mum the song recorded his delivery from serious illness. Another's lost grandfather was remembered in a Lullaby that was, *'... actually adjusted [by Angeline] it to reflect his life in the song and I thought that was very special and touching,'* (May). The song had become a way of talking about these serious, life-changing events and people. One grandparent – himself brought up in care, remarked on hearing his grandchild's Lullaby, *'...had I had a song like this it would have changed the life I had.'*

The songs were also used by some to remember friends and carers who are no longer part of everyday life:

*'...she will remember who they are more based on the song linked to them.... her memory of Helene was linked to Helene's song - even though she hasn't seen her since they were about 3 or 4 she knew who she was because of the song'.(Esther)*

For others the meaning of the song is confirmed in the way that its words have become changeable:

*'...Yeah Faizal was sort of changing the lyrics yesterday - they were a bit rude, but that was very Faizal just having fun with it.'*

*'[Mahmud] often sings bits of his song to me and sometimes updates the lyrics to include interests of things he does now.'*

Hanna, when asked in the school playground recently called the three songs composed for her and her two brothers *'very family,'* and said she hopes, to have hers until she is old.

**Music:** Listening is a key musical skill. Words related to detailed listening and sound making coloured many participant's responses. These references included descriptions of wordless reactions to the songs, like the way Mahmud, *'...keeps making these high pitched squeals and sounds ...., and whistles .... I think he likes the resonance.'*(Rami)

Some chose musical instruments to accompany their song, others used their experience of song making to spur a prolonged interest in *making music with others:*

*'...it's really impacted on her creativity and opened her up to things musically – definitely as you know she loves any kind of music, she loves your [Angeline's] family jams when you have them on as well and listening to different types of music like the Irish music and the African drumming etc... So everything that she's done all those years ago is still happening now which is great plus she is doing extra things like learning to play the guitar, the ukulele, the recorder'. (May).*

One carer noted differences in the musical character of songs written for each of her three children.



**Language and physical activity:** One session observed in 2013 made a whole song for a selective mute child, built around her mother's mention of her lovely smile. This song and its chorus prompted speech for that child as for the first time in school as she joined in and enjoyed the verbal communication of her song. Another whose carer said she didn't speak at all at school now remarks, *'...some of my teachers can't shut me up now!'*

Junior's quiet song was composed to help him go to sleep and was used by the nursery and at home often when he was younger but though he still has difficulty sleeping it is used less. Three carers mentioned

physical responses to the songs *'...they would dance on the spot to the songs both of them which is quite funny,'* remarked one. Another described her children, *'jumping, jumping up and down,'* as they listened to their songs.

**Frequency of listening:** It was clear from the language chosen by interviewees, that not all children continued to listen to their songs regularly though all knew their key phrases, where to find them and the number of their specific track. One child excused herself for not remembering the words by blaming her *'bad memory,'* another *'vaguely remembered,'* the phones referred to in her song. When asked if he remembered words Lenny, simply said, *'not really,'* but these negative answers do not convey the sense of ownership held in subsequent responses from the same children like, *'I choose to listen to it when I feel sad really ... it cheers me up I think,'* (Liah) or Simon's moving statement that he listens to his song, *'when I mostly think about Uncle Richie and Papa Terry.'* It is perhaps significant that those who like Lenny and Alanah who did not have their songs publicly performed, showed evidence of being less connected with their lullabies.

Some carers saw the interview as an opportunity to thank Angeline for her work and care in producing the songs others evidently enjoyed the chance to speak in detail about the wider and enriched development of their child over the years. There was little doubt that all those interviewed valued both their lullabies and the process that led to them.

Though most carers admitted they listened less now than they did initially, they insisted they were still played, *'from time to time'.* Words like *'definitely,' 'certainly,' 'clearly'* were used to confirm their continued relevance, *'...even though we might not have listened for a while.'* The numerous references above to the continuing high personal and family value of the project affirm its legacy. One carer described her child's recent response on hearing her song after a long break:

*'...she heard your [Angeline's] voice and her name, I looked in the mirror and her little face lit up like Ohhh and because it says Marta on the player she says 'I want the Marta song' she was in the back soaking up all the words.'* (May)

## Discussion

The Lullaby Project took place against a background of the decline in music education described in the **Introduction**. Anthropologist, Robin Dunbar expresses a weakening of the role of music in western societies thus :

*'...we have lost the sense of the central position that music once occupied in communal life and still does in most parts of the world today....'*

*It has a vital way of binding people together helping them to be aware of shared humanity, shared feelings and experiences and actively drawing them together*  
(Dunbar, et al, in McGilchrist, 2019, p.104).

It is apparent from the evidence that the LP positively changed children and their families. Adult carers spoke of their children becoming more confident and settled, others referred to the ways the project helped them cope with unexpected changes and sadnesses in their lives. The fact that every child remembered key phrases in their song demonstrated that they had become part of their identity - positive connections to what, (for them) was a distant but highly personal past. These memories did not require the constant replaying or re-singing of the lullabies five years later, but seemingly operate at a more profound level. They appear to have affected the very being of the children concerned and that of their closest family.



**The importance of music education:** In 1983 Howard Gardner, identified a ‘musical intelligence’ physically evident in the human brain and behaviour across time and cultures (Gardner 1983/93). Gardner also noted that some societies prize musical skills and sensitivities at similar levels to our current Western esteem for logic and language. His theory of Multiple Intelligences was intended to help teachers and others working with young people recognise and celebrate the wide range of different ways humans show and use intelligence. Research since those days has shown just how deep music is in the make up of every human being. Music probably existed as long as the ‘Homo’ genus has existed (ie well before Homo Sapiens). The fossil record of early humans show that the areas for control of voice and respiration needed for singing came into being long before those required by language (McGilchrist, 2019). Today, music making and sharing is part of every known society. Musical intelligence remains in the brain long after it loses rationality and memory in Alzheimer’s and other forms of dementia (Sacks, 2011). It can survive strokes and other brain trauma in which the ability to speak may be lost (Damasio, 1994). Musical understanding is recognisable within days of birth, long before speech and worded thought develops (Tregarthen 2003; Gooouch and Powell, 2013). Children sing before they can speak. It is surprising therefore that music making and sharing is not a central activity in all education and research.

From the first weeks of a child’s life and across cultures, they display schemas for processing music. These develop before birth and allow the child to have ‘expectations of what a well-structured musical phrase should be,’ (Gardner 1993, p107). Musical ability is in evidence earlier than other abilities. As young as 2 months infants are able to match, ‘the pitch, dynamics and melodic contour of their mothers songs’. Infants of 4 months can match rhythm as well (ibid. p 108). By 2 years of age children can independently identify sounds and explore small intervals in pitch (seconds, minor 3rds, major thirds and fourths). They invent spontaneous songs, repeat musical phrases and by the time they are 4 can imitate melodies of the dominant culture (ibid. p109.). This evidence corroborated by music educators worldwide (Swanwick, 1994, Blacking, 1970) confirms the appropriateness of the target age of the LP (0 – 4 years).



A mum shares what is really important for her child

**Language and music:** Gardner showed that music and words sung or chanted are stored in a network of brain areas distinct from those that store pure language. Significantly Gardner also found:

*‘music can serve as a way of capturing feelings, knowledge about feelings or knowledge about the forms of feeling...musical competence depends not upon cortical analytic mechanisms alone but also sub-cortical areas of the brain, those...central to feeling and emotion, p.124*

Repeated chorus phrases such as ‘Watch out! Here comes speedy Lenny’, or about Alan’s ‘Upbeat personality’ were sung frequently by all children in their classes. They were further repeated in family interactions, on journeys in the car, during family ‘get togethers’ and in private times in children’s bedroom. The choruses also became a framework for later additions, amusing (and rude) changes and adaptations, even four years after their composition. Repetition, especially in rhythmic or sung form is known to consolidate language acquisition and language ‘play’ and examples of both were abundant in the evaluation interviews.

**Emotion and learning:** The LP served different purposes for each child and family. The specific personal/emotional effects directly ascribed to the project are summarised **Table 2** below:

**Table 2: Responses to involvement in the Lullaby Project**

CHILD RESPONSES		ADULT RESPONSES	
positive memories of infancy	(11/11 <sup>2</sup> )	articulation and affirmation of special characteristics of their child	11/11
‘word for word’ recall of part of song	11/11	increased awareness of the uniqueness of each child	8/11
Conscious of affirmation of positive identity traits	8/11	sustained social contact with other families	6/11
increased sense of agency	6/11	Mention of tears	4/11
appreciation of being valued	5/11	increased contact with school /supporting authorities	3/11
sense of having a ‘shared family narrative’	5/11	enhanced confidence about the future	2/11
ability to come to terms with trauma or death	4/11	gratitude to the practitioner	2/11
ability to deal confidently with transitions	4/11		
increased general confidence	3/11		
consciousness of carers’ love	3/11		
positive awareness of the detail of others’ lives	3/11		
increased interest in music	2/11		
improved sleep, calm or security	2/11		

2 Fractions indicate the number out of 11 that indicated a particular effect generated by LP involvement

The wide range of outcomes captured in *Table 2* confirm the strength of the project in evoking, expressing and extending the emotions in every family story. The frankness of the recorded conversations would be unlikely without the supportive, confidence-building and equal atmosphere Angeline carefully constructed in each setting. Secure surroundings are the foundation of all good communication and, longer term, essential to the attachment of children (see Communication Trust Website; Young, 1989; Bowlby, 1988). From the outset of the LP Angeline was keen to establish an inclusive atmosphere in which to talk to often vulnerable, reticent and suspicious participants. Photographs of the original LP interviews illustrate through body language and facial expression some of the successes of attempts to engender an atmosphere of conversations between equals.

If music is strongly associated with emotion as Gardner and others suggest (McGilchrist, 2019; Jensen, 2001; Pangsepp, 2004; Le Doux, 2002) then the aims of the LP are entirely appropriate too. Enhancing relationships, promoting engagement and participation, improving experience and reducing feelings of isolation fundamentally involve feelings. The evidence collected in the **Findings** above, demonstrate ways in which individual songs touched the emotional lives of children and families.

Feelings are central to the musical experience. It is probable that feelings drive attitudes (see Claxton 2018; Claxton and Lucas, 2015), learning, value creation and even culture (Immordino-Yang and Damasio 2007; Damasio, 2018). Conversations with a caring equal about what is unique and lovely about your child are likely to have a sensitising effect, but when turned to song, those feelings usually become even more powerful. Reports of carer's tears were almost always reported when describing the first iteration of the song, but *Table 2* summarises longer term feelings like appreciation, awareness, confidence, calm, security and interest. Neuroscientists (LeDoux, 2002, Damasio, 2003, Blakemore and Frith, 2005) show how such responses not only arise from affirmative, secure environments but also result in affirmative, trusting and collaborative approaches to life.

**Positive attitudes:** The range of positive responses represented in *Table 2* is wide. There were few negative turns to the recorded conversations. Neuroscience suggests that even mild positive emotions involve networks of neural activity that tend to prolong and build positivity in relationships, attitudes to self and the past (Panksepp, 1994; Fredrickson, 2009; Hefferton, 2013). Fredrickson offers powerful research evidence of the crucial role played by experience of such positive emotions in early life. She argues that a store of positive memories and experiences of love, compassion, care, kindness, joy, peace, patience, trust, hope empathy, helps build the resilience needed to face times of trouble and trauma. By inference, those who early lives are devoid of such happy memories suffer disproportionately from depression, anxiety and inability to cope. Researching psychologists, Seligman, Csikszentmihalyi and Diener (2010), arrive at similar conclusions about the importance of positive experience. The opportunity through song to name, honour and preserve happy memories appears to have extended their affirmative impact.

There are arguments against this position. Hirsch and followers like Willingham suggest heightened concern for attitudes to learning, happiness and introspection, have resulted in declines in educational standards. They argue rather for a 'knowledge rich curriculum' (see Hirsch, 1998) and for simple 'knowledge learning' to start very early:

*'...the earlier students add to their database of knowledge, the better. This process begins at home, long before children attend school. (Willingham, 2016)*

They claim that even pre-schooling should be largely about transmitting knowledge, through, '*... listening to fiction and nonfiction books read aloud, by watching demonstrations, through hands-on experiences,*' (Willingham, 2016). Without deep funds of knowledge they argue that later creative, scientific, and other types of thinking and learning are difficult if not impossible. The theory that there is a 'core knowledge' depends upon acceptance of one dominant culture and suggests that all children regardless of *their* culture ought to be taught it. In highly diverse societies well-represented by the 7 volunteer discussants, there are multiple types of family, different value sets and highly contrasting ideas about *what* knowledge matters. Agreement on one standard canon of knowledge in such diverse contexts is unlikely and inevitably excluding. With rising mental illness rates, high percentages of poorly developed children and growing disaffection with

education, positive attitudes to self, life and learning may be at least as important as knowledge (Resnick, 1999; Shayer and Adey, 2002; Claxton, Costa and Kallick, 2015). Positive mind-sets, effective learning skills and relevant knowledge are equally important (Dweck, 2017) but for the children targeted by the LP, a sense of the self as precious, able and with agency is probably fundamental to all subsequent thinking and learning.

**Learning to cope with transitions:** The LP songs often acted as a kind of '*sonic security blanket,*' for both children and their carers. 5/11 children in this sample had recently faced the transition of adoption, two of the families were headed by same sex couples, one was being cared for by grandparents. In each case the adults were striving to establish a secure base and common family narrative to support their children. Some before adoption had already suffered significant trauma. Security for vulnerable children in new families, support for them as they faced changing schools and friendships was essential to their mental, social and intellectual health. There is ample evidence that the LP songs played these roles in the target children's lives. One especially poignant, illustration of this relationship relates to how a children's centre responded to the tragic death of a four-year-old child in 2016. The centre brought together the child's primary carer, her grandmother and Angeline to compose a special Lullaby to be sung by children and adults at her memorial gathering.

Singing a child's special song was in the words of one parent, '*like bringing out an old family photo book.*' We know that the songs in their time were heard frequently in the centres and their choruses enthusiastically joined in by the child's whole class. The evidence from contemporary videos and photos is that the child subjects were proud to share them. Five years later the children have changed classes and even schools a number of times. Transitions have become normal for them, but their songs still play a part in their lives.

All 11 children confirmed how their song affirmed what was unique about them, and many touched upon how the song travelled with them, softening their transitions. One child even asked for the names of her new adoptive parents to be inserted into her already completed lullaby to mark and preserve that transition. Another contrasted the kind things people said in her LP song with the '*weird stuff*' she encountered in her junior years. The lullaby had become the marker of transitions into good things as well as a safe bridge to unfamiliar and unsettling new worlds.

There are those who would argue that such sensitivities pander to the construction of a 'snowflake' generation of un-resilient, highly dependent individuals (See Telegraph, 2017 for example). This would be a valid point of view in an equal and homogenous society, but the UK is not. Rates of inequality have steadily risen since 2000 (Guardian, May, 2019) so that the gap between the richest and poorest in the UK are close to those in the USA – probably the most unequal society in the world (WHO, 2016). This inequality in health, education, income, mobility and participation means that resilience tends to be unequally distributed, favouring those at the rich, healthy, educated mobile end of the scale. Resilience and value for self may need to be taught to those whose life experience could push them in the opposite direction (Richhart, 2002, 2018). The Lullaby Project has shown a powerful way to kindle the ability to be strong in adversity, and grow the confidence and pride that so many vulnerable infant children need.

**Improved communication:** Linking the emotional, positive and transitional aspects of the project, communication arose as the fourth general outcome heading. Communication was inherent in several aspects: children's language development, contact between carer and children's centre and between carer and child.

#### (a) Between carer and children's centre

Word gathering, song writing, checking and performing each required the presence and verbal participation of a carer and usually their child. This meant that they attended meetings at the children's centre 3 or 4 times in non-threatening, affirmative and very child-centred contexts. In some centres these meetings grew into opportunities to share lunch and teach each other songs from their 'home' culture. For some carers these were the first times that 'official' meetings were not stressful or embarrassing. The supportive atmosphere of the LP meetings and the frequency that the carers were around the centre created a confidence in some that meant that other interactions became in the words of centre staff, '*more relaxed.*' The language used in such interactions is important – especially for the many for whom English was a second or third language – the

but the LP conversations about their children's lives provided a useful model of communication with doctors, social workers teachers and key workers at the centres.

#### (b) Between carer and child

Many of the children represented in the evaluation had had difficult lives. Communication was not always easy between them and their very loving carers. One summarised the difficulties by saying simply, '*...we struggle and we struggle with the same things still.*' Another remarked on the difficulties one child had to accept the love mentioned in their song. However one of the same carers also said of their song and efforts to build a new family:

*'...at the time when we were a new family and we were really trying to bed down , because they had had some difficult times and they had a lot of moves ... we were looking for ways to really get into their hearts that this was different and this was where they would stay and that they were safe and I think it [the LP song] really helped.'*

This evaluative discussion rightly ends with the words of Ramli parent of an adopted, autistic child supported by the LP:

*'...when it [the song] was new to us and it was helpful - well along it's entire life it has been fun to listen to...it served the purpose of having Mahmud, having us all reflect on him and focus on him and having this way of talking about his life and listening to his life in a way that is really positive and fun but also not direct... still now doesn't like direct conversation so when we questioned him it doesn't work so well - it has to be more circular the route into things...so for him having that playing when we were in the car or in the house was a way of taking in all this information about himself, and reminding him that he has all these people he loves and he has his relationship with his brother and that he's known and thought about by people and just solidifying that sense of family... [the LP song] is Very, Very, Very simply reaffirming. And with so much affection and I think that's nice to this day.'*

#### Limitations of the evaluation

The word '*affection*' used by Ramli above captures both the huge benefit and an obvious limitation of this evaluation – it was difficult for the evaluator *not* to be personally affected by observing sessions and outcomes of this musical intervention on the lives of so many vulnerable infants. This will have coloured interpretations. Parents and carers continually expressed positive experience of the sympathy, sensitivity and caring spirit of the project leaders (others trained by Angeline were also involved in some of the interventions recorded in this evaluation). The verbatim and less 'polite' voices of the children were therefore highly necessary for balance in this evaluation.

The interviews were also conducted with individuals who had volunteered to be questioned by Angeline. They clearly wanted an opportunity to express the benefits to family and the children themselves and the length and complexity of their answers testified to their commitment – five years later, to the aims of the project. Gathering the responses of the child subjects of the lullabies, now between 8 and 12 years old, was considered an important way of modifying the bias that might arise from a self-selecting group of adult respondents. The fact that all 11 children remembered key lines, words and themes from a song some of them last sung over five years ago seems a highly significant confirmation of the aims of the project. Every child knew where the Lullaby CD was kept and what track held theirs. Similar positive messages were conveyed by nursery staff who, despite busy and stressful working lives, repeatedly reiterated lines and tunes from individual lullabies when referring to infant 'charges' long since graduated from children's centre to primary school.

After a gap of five years and in an often geographically mobile population, it was difficult to get large numbers of carers to interview about the project so we were happy to find 7 representing 11 children between them. This number represents more than 10% of those worked with in the first years of the project, but their replies regarding its ongoing impact on the sense of belonging and identity in their children were clearly corroborated by the children themselves. In conversation, the children often elaborated on particular themes, (like earphones and speediness and sparkly eyes) to bring them up to date. The fact that many no longer listened to them was perhaps inevitable, though three carers said they had played them recently – perhaps because they knew they were going to have to talk about them. There is however, strong evidence of the lasting impact of the 'life story' aspect of the songs, whether marking recovery from illness, a growing understanding of self, the missing presence of a loved one or a place in a new family.

Ramli's extended comments about the lullaby's importance in developing his child's awareness of others, his position in a new family and his developing understanding and mental health, reveals a significant role of the lullaby in the support of young people with social and communication difficulties. His and other evidence raise the issue of the use of song and singing in the support of those with additional educational needs. The scope of this evaluation has not been wide enough to focus strongly on the impact of music on this growing area of vulnerability.

The impact over time on the standards of music delivery of nursery staff has been less easy to assess. Many original staff had moved on, but in nurseries where the project continued to be operative staff made it clear that song and music-making were alive and well and being used considerably more than in the study in 2014. There have been Lullaby-inspired staff development music sessions and practitioner training sessions in all the children's centres in between 2015 and 2018. The family focus of the project has extended beyond Lullaby sessions to informal singing and lunch-sharing groups in some centres, and has further developed the aim to use music '*as a catalyst for building closer dialogue between parents and practitioners.*'

#### Conclusions and recommendations

There is little doubt that the Lullaby Project (now called *Sing Our Story*) has been of great importance to the scores of families that have been involved in it. It has built confidence, established and enriched contacts, positively contributed to language learning and supported parenting and family building. Its effectiveness is underscored by dozens of favourable feedback letters and reports from carers, Children Centres and nurseries. No negative responses have been gathered though some offered the chance to participate have refused.

**Dissemination:** It is intended that a summary of this evaluation and research will be submitted to a public health journal such as *Perspectives in Public Health*, the journal of the Royal Society of Public Health.

This evaluation has raised the following issues that are offered as recommendations:

1. That the Lullaby Project/ *Sing Our Story* is supported to work with children in nurseries and Children's Centres further areas of London and elsewhere
2. That more music practitioners are trained in the Lullaby Project/ *Sing Our Story* method
3. In training, that particular attention is paid to values especially those of non-judgemental support, gentle inclusive attitudes and emphasising positive mindsets.
4. That this evaluation and further evidence of Lullaby Project/ *Sing Our Story* impact is used provoke further development in using arts, particularly music and song to:
  - (a) enhance the mental and social health of children, their carers and teachers
  - (b) enable and support more confident access to public services among carers
  - (c) develop language and other forms of communication among vulnerable children
  - (d) promote communication within families
  - (e) significantly increase the musical confidence and well-being of staff of Children's Centres and nurseries

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