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<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13676261.2018.1445205><http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/13676261.2018.1445205>. and is licensed under All Rights Reserved license:

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**Parker, Andrew ORCID logoORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6842-3067>, Marturano, Naomi, Lewis, Gwen and Meek, Rosie (2018) Marginalised Youth, Criminal Justice and Performing Arts: Young people's experiences of music-making. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 21 (8). pp. 1061-1076. doi:10.1080/13676261.2018.1445205**

Official URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2018.1445205>

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2018.1445205>

EPrint URI: <https://eprints.glos.ac.uk/id/eprint/5409>

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Journal of Youth Studies

**Marginalised Youth, Criminal Justice and Performing Arts:  
Young people's experiences of music-making.**

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## **Abstract**

In recent years a plethora of arts-based projects and interventions targeting marginalised children and young people have emerged a number of which have focused specifically on music-making. Resulting research has often highlighted the social, psychological and emotional benefits involved (see, for example, De Viggiani *et al.*, 2013) although few studies have explored the connections between music-making and mentoring with young people in educational contexts. This paper comprises a small-scale, qualitative study of one such intervention in a secondary school in the South of England. Analysis of transcripts from one-to-one interviews with participants (pupils) aged 11–17 years reveals various ways in which music-making facilitated positive change such as increased confidence, improved attitudes towards teachers and peers, feelings of calm, and better communication skills. The paper concludes by suggesting that music-making activity may confer significant psycho-social benefits for young people, particularly when combined with mentoring support.

**Keywords:** Performing arts, music-making, mentoring, marginalised youth, qualitative research.

## **Introduction**

Delinquency and anti-social behaviour amongst young people has long been regarded as a problem in the UK (see Cohen, 1972; Hagell *et al.* 2000; Hagell and Hazel, 2001; Hall and Jefferson, 1976; Hazell *et al.* 2002; Hanson, 2008; Bateman *et al.* 2014, 2017). Recent figures show the number of people entering the youth and criminal justice system in England and Wales is declining (Ministry of Justice, 2018). Specifically, where young offenders are concerned there has been a fall in the number of first time entrants, down 85% over the last decade and 11% between 2016-2017 (Ministry of Justice, 2018). Whilst at one level such figures are encouraging, data also show that rates of re-offending have increased. Of those under 18 who were released in the period April 2016 - March 2017, 42.3% reoffended within one year, representing an increase of 4% compared with 10 years ago. The reoffending rate for adult offenders during the same period was 28.2% (Ministry of Justice, 2018).

Research findings suggest that whilst the amount of people entering the youth justice system is decreasing, those that remain have more complex needs, are likely to display more entrenched patterns of offending, and commit more serious crime (Bateman, Hazel & Wright, 2013; Bateman, 2017). This is partially supported by the fact that re-offending rates are higher amongst those with a greater number of previous offences. For example, the re-offending rate for young people with no previous offences is 24.7 % compared to 75% for those with 11 or more (Ministry of Justice, 2018).<sup>1</sup>

Needless to say, youth offending and anti-social behaviour remains an issue of serious concern for practitioners, politicians and policy makers alike and strategies to manage such concerns have more recently included interventions around performing arts (see, for example, Hickey-Moody, 2013; O'Brien and Donelan, 2007). This paper presents the findings of a small scale, qualitative study of an arts-based intervention delivered to young people in a co-educational, comprehensive (secondary) school in the South of England which was structured around music-making opportunities. The primary aim of the intervention was to introduce pupils (aged 11-17) to music-making via a 10-week curricular programme delivered by a team of young people (aged 18-25) the majority of whom had previous experience of the criminal justice system. A summary of the existing literature concerning criminal justice and arts-based interventions is presented which highlights the possible social, emotional and psychological implications of such work. In turn, the paper outlines the impact of the featured intervention on pupil behaviour including reductions in anger and aggressive behaviour, improvements in self-concept, and the facilitation of wider school/curricular engagement. The paper concludes by suggesting that arts-based initiatives for young people can confer significant psychosocial benefits particularly when integrated into wider mentoring support and provision.

### **Young people, criminal justice and arts-based interventions**

Research suggests that leisure-time activities can be used as part of strategies within both custodial and community settings to inspire positive change in marginalised young people and alleviate offending or anti-social behaviour (Lewis and Meek, 2012; Meek and Lewis, 2012; Meek *et al.*, 2012; Morgan & Parker, 2017; Parker, Meek & Lewis, 2014). Particular

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<sup>1</sup> In line with the work of Halsey (2007), we acknowledge that processes of incarceration and re-incarceration (and related statistics) should be viewed as the collective responsibility both of the individual concerned and the formal (administrative/bureaucratic) and informal (social/familial) structures and mechanisms in play.

attention has been paid to the potential of arts-based interventions in preventing offending and promoting desistance through improving skills, attitudes, behaviour and wellbeing (Hughes, 2005; Papinczak, et al., 2015; Hense & McFerran, 2017). Amidst the UK government's 'Transforming Rehabilitation' initiative, Bilby, Caulfield & Ridley (2013) note that there is increased opportunity for the arts to play an innovative role in bringing about the 'intermediate' outcomes that aid rehabilitation, whilst also tackling issues of responsivity and diversity. Research has also shown that the arts can reach young people who are disengaged from school and community and help them to connect with peers (Fiske, 1999). Although approaches and underlying processes may be different, existing literature demonstrates that positive outcomes can be experienced by young people taking part in arts-based interventions (see Gallagher, 2007; Hickey-Moody, 2013; O'Brien and Donelan, 2007).

There is a wealth of evidence to suggest that participation in the arts can raise confidence and self-esteem with studies of community and educational settings reporting positive results, especially with offenders and/or those at risk (Heath & Roach, 1999; Daykin *et al*, 2011; Centre for Applied Theatre Research, 2003; Clennon, 2013). For example, Hirst & Robertshaw (2003) investigated the impact of the 'Otherwise Creative' project, an intervention which involved a wide range of arts activities, including music production and song writing and which targeted young people in Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) with a range of emotional and behavioral difficulties. Following the project, participants demonstrated growth in confidence and self-esteem and this manifested itself in ways such as their ability to communicate with staff and resist negative peer pressure. These findings have been replicated within custodial environments (Baker & Homan, 2007; Bilby, Caulfield & Ridley, 2013; Cox & Gelsthorpe, 2008; Daykin *et al*, 2011; Eastburn, 2003; Mendonça 2010; De Viggiani *et al*, 2013). For example, Maruna (2010) discovered that increased confidence was the most commonly cited long-term benefit of participation in the 'Changing Tunes' project which teaches music in custodial settings. As a result, many participants felt more optimistic about their futures.

Of course, the cultural significance of music for youth populations has long since been recognised both in terms of the performance and production of music itself and the stylised identities surrounding its consumption (see, for example, Baker et al., 2009; Bennett, 2000;

Chambers, 1999). Given these resonances, it is perhaps unsurprising that music-based interventions have been particularly effective at positively impacting the mental health and wellbeing of young people. For example, lyric writing appears to allow those in custody to explore and express thoughts and emotions which may otherwise be repressed (Baker and Homan, 2007). Participants on such programmes routinely report how music-related activities help them to reflect and ‘get things off their chest’. Additionally, participants on a number of projects have commented on how writing and performing music provides an escape from the hostile environment of custody and allows them to cope more readily with the everyday struggles of incarceration (Baker & Homan, 2007; Cox & Gelsthorpe, 2008; Maruna 2010; Mendonça 2010; Moller, 2011; De Viggiani et al 2010; 2013). Respondents in these studies frequently stated that they left intervention sessions feeling ‘lifted’ or ‘happier’ with others stating that they came away feeling ‘relaxed’ and ‘de-stressed’. Likewise, some participant’s reported that sessions had a calming effect and allowed them to better manage their anger (Baker & Homan 2007; Cox & Gelsthorpe 2008; Bilby, Caulfield & Ridley 2013; Daykin *et al* 2011; Maruna 2010; Moller 2011; De Viggiani *et al* 2010; 2013). A small number of participants reported that taking part in music sessions had improved their symptoms of depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (see Maruna 2010; Daykin *et al* 2011; Wilson, 2006).

What is also clear from these studies is that arts-based interventions have a significant impact on personal identity. For example, respondents often speak of the respectful way that they are treated by project leaders and the humanising effect that this has. (Cox & Gelsthorpe; Maruna 2010; De Viggiani *et al* 2010; 2013). Participation in arts programmes also appears to provide prisoners with new ways of thinking about themselves, allowing them to move away from previously entrenched offender identities by assigning more pro-social labels such as ‘musician,’ which often bring with them new aspirations (Bilby, Caulfield & Ridely 2013; Maruna 2010; De Vigianni *et al* 2013). Similarly, the process of music writing (and the discussions which it generates) can help young people to redefine themselves especially where projects promote positive expression and seek to challenge lyrics that glorify criminal lifestyles or contain profane, sexist and/or discriminatory language. Findings show that such censorship is often met with resistance from young people who feel that it serves to diminish the truth of their feelings and experiences (Baker & Homan 2007; De Viggiani *et al* 2013).

Arts projects are also cited as helping offenders build new relationships, with many participants stating that they enjoy the opportunity to meet and socialise with others. Participants on the 'Music in Prisons' project stated that they were better able to work in a group as a result of taking part in such activities (Centre for Applied Theatre Research, 2003; Cox and Gelsthorpe, 2008; Maruna 2010; De Viggiani et al 2010). Oreck *et al* (1999) report similar findings for disadvantaged young people where participants in an arts-based programme stated that their involvement enabled them to make friends, establish support networks, and feel accepted and valued (see also Smith, 2009). Students on school-based mentoring programmes have demonstrated an increase in peer connectedness post-intervention (Karcher, 2008; King *et al*, 2002) although contradictory findings have been put forward by Herrera (2011).

### **Arts-based interventions and mentoring**

Thus far, we have considered the impact of arts-based interventions on participant behaviours. In addition, a small number of programmes combine music-based activities with structured mentoring schemes for young people engaged in or at risk of offending behaviour. The progression from child to adulthood has traditionally proved to be one of considerable tension and frustration especially for the vulnerable and marginalised (see Barry, 2010). In recent years, mentoring has been put forward as one way to help young people navigate this transition and encourage positive youth development (see Dubois and Karcher, 2005, 2014; Dubois et al., 2011). Dubois and Karcher (2005) identify three core characteristics of mentoring. Firstly, the mentor is someone who possesses greater wisdom than the mentee. Secondly, the mentor typically provides guidance intended to facilitate the personal growth of the mentee. Third, the mentor and mentee share a bond characterised by trust. Most related interventions have a tendency to be based on a conventional one-to-one model of interaction, however research has also supported the effectiveness of group mentoring formats. Additionally, mentoring appears to be effective across different settings regardless of whether goals are instrumental, psychosocial or a combination of the two (Dubois et al., 2011) and has come to comprise a popular intervention in community, educational and criminal justice settings in the UK. More recently it has formed part of government strategies to transform rehabilitation and reduce reoffending (MoJ, 2013a, 2013b; Aitken, 2014) and prior to this was recommended as a preventative tool to address the problem of gang and youth violence (Home Office, 2011). However, it was under New

Labour that mentoring initially gained traction, particularly as an intervention to tackle social exclusion (Lonie, 2011; Philip & Spratt, 2007).

For the most part, projects which combine arts-based interventions and mentoring corroborate the positive findings outlined thus far. For example, the South African-based DIME (Diversion into Music Education) programme aimed to teach young offenders how to play African marimba or djembe. Participants were matched with mentors and reported enjoying the sessions and that music-making helped them to stay away from crime, providing them with a sense of purpose and alternative ways to spend their time. Having someone listen to them and to confide in was important to mentees. A year after completing the project, none of the young people had reoffended. DIME also allowed participants to take on new identities as a result of sharing their skills with others and having them respond positively. Researchers observed that music-making had a therapeutic effect on participants by triggering positive emotions and by giving them a chance for self-expression. In turn, learning a new skill gave mentees a sense of achievement and increased their self-esteem (see Woodward *et al.* 2008). Similarly, Deanne *et al.* (2011) and Lonie (2011) evaluated ‘Youth Music’ mentoring programmes which targeted young people in challenging circumstances. Results showed that young people gained a sense of belonging from being involved with 89% stating that they had learnt to work better with others. Music gave young people a chance to reflect upon (and articulate) their emotions with 95% reporting that they were better able to express themselves as a result of being involved in the project. Consistent with the findings of previous research, participants also felt a sense of pride by way of sharing music with others and many commented on their improved confidence levels. The present study similarly aims to qualitatively explore the potential benefits of a school-based mentoring intervention for pupils engaged in, or at risk of, delinquency both within and outside of the school environment.

## **Method**

The empirical findings featured here are derived from research carried out between September 2013 – July 2014 with a youth-focused, mental health charity located in a large city in the South of England which delivered 10-week, music-based interventions in secondary schools, Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) and custodial settings (i.e., Young Offender Institutions). This paper focuses on one of these delivery sites, Burton Grange



secondary school, a large co-educational, comprehensive with a population of approximately 1000 pupils.<sup>2</sup> Adopting an interpretivist epistemological standpoint, the study utilised those methods of enquiry traditionally associated with qualitative research (i.e., participant/observation, semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis) in order to explore respondent experiences of the intervention. A fieldwork journal was used to record observational events and one-to-one, semi-structured interviews were carried out during lessons where music-making activities took place (Bryman, 2015).

### **The music-making intervention**

The music-making intervention was part of a broader portfolio of services offered by the host charity whose core business surrounded mental health support for young people (aged 18-25) involved in anti-social behaviour and/or criminal activity. Having engaged such young people, the charity provided tuition in music-making (alongside intensive mental health and mentoring support) with the aim of training and equipping participants as ‘tutors’ to deliver music-making sessions to other young people/pupils (aged 11-17) in educational and criminal justice settings (schools, PRUs, YOIs) who were facing challenging life circumstances. Assisted by members of the charity’s mental health practitioner staff team and youth workers, tutors prepared and delivered a 10-week music-based programme, teaching young people (male and female) how to write, produce and perform music whilst at the same time acting as personal mentors to them. The intervention aimed to: develop pupils’ musical ability, creativity and expression; improve their mental health, confidence, self-esteem, self-efficacy, resilience, skills and engagement; use music to promote positive mental health in a way that was relevant to them, and to break down the stigma surrounding engagement with mental health professionals. The data presented here chart the work of the tutor delivery team at Burton Grange school during the spring term (January-March) of 2014 where they delivered a single, two-hour music session once per week to approximately 15 pupils. All sessions took place during the course of the normal school day and consisted of a series of pre-determined activities which involved pupils in: (i) lyric writing (in the style of the young person’s preferred genre – usually rap), (ii) composing beats (mostly using Logic Pro software on Mac computers (those pupils who could play musical instruments also did so in sessions), and (iii) recording and/or performing the music which they had composed.

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<sup>2</sup> In order to preserve anonymity, pseudonyms have been used throughout.

## **Participant sample**

Pupils at Burton Grange were selected (i.e., referred by their teachers) to take part in the intervention for a variety of reasons, most typically because either: (i) their general behaviour had been disruptive over time and they had accumulated a large number of ‘concerns’ (formal in-house behavioural alerts) around disruptive, defiant behaviour, (ii) because they had manifested angry or aggressive behaviours towards pupils or teachers, and/or (iii) because they had demonstrated intimidating or bullying behaviours towards peers. Likewise, in order to be accepted onto (and remain part of) the intervention, pupils were required to maintain positive behavioural standards in their relationships with other pupils and in their daily interactions with teachers. Changes to this behavioural profile may lead to individuals being withdrawn from the programme.

The respondent sample comprised 32 pupils in total (28 male and 4 female) aged between 13 and 16 years. At the time of the research, a number of the pupils involved were considered ‘at risk’ as a consequence of instances of anti-social behaviour both inside and outside of the school, previous involvement with the criminal justice system, or affiliation with gangs. Interviews lasted between 15-30 minutes and were audio recorded and transcribed in full.<sup>3</sup> Interview discussions explored pupils’ subjective experiences of the intervention and their perceptions around its personal impact. Data were analysed by way of thematic and axial coding whereby the research team adopted a cyclical process of inductive interpretation to draw out themes and meanings in response to the primary aims of the research and in line with the key themes and concepts identified from the existing literature (Charmaz, 2014). Data were analysed in four stages. First, transcripts were read in full to facilitate data saturation. Second, each transcript was individually coded and indexed whereby a capturing of the different aspects of pupil experience took place. Third, these experiences were then categorised into a number of over-arching topics relating to the specific impact of the intervention. Finally, these topics were organised into three generic themes relating to the way in which pupils perceived the benefits of their involvement in the programme. The remainder of the paper is structured around a detailed discussion of these themes, which comprise: (i) personal identity, (ii) behavioural change, and (iii) the mentoring process.

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<sup>3</sup> Prior to the onset of the study, ethical approval was gained from the University of Gloucestershire’s Research Ethics Sub-Committee (RESC). Variations on interview timings were solely due to the availability of respondents.

### **Music-making and personal identity**

As we have seen, it is not uncommon for evaluations of arts-based interventions to highlight the social, psychological and emotional benefits on offer to participants (Hirst and Robertshaw, 2003; Maruna, 2010). Similarly, qualitative findings from Burton Grange revealed that the majority of pupils experienced improvements in self-confidence as a result of taking part in the music-making sessions:

Freddie: [The intervention] made me more confident ... Like, saying something to the entire class, like Assembly or something, I'm a little more confident doing stuff like that ...

Like Freddie, many respondents noticed an increase in their confidence levels as a consequence of taking part in the programme, especially around other people. In some instances, this seemed to be linked to pupils having the opportunity to share their music-related work and to receiving positive feedback from others (e.g., compliments, applause, witnessing others enjoying their music):

Oli: I'd never really rap to, like, a group like that ... if I was just, like, walking down the street and I hadn't of [sic] come to [the sessions] and a group of kids just asked me to start rapping, I'd never do it, I'd be too nervous ... Now I didn't mind ... a few people came over [and] I just carried on ... I know that the [tutor] raps as well sometimes and like when I was rapping and showing him my beat he enjoyed it and I could see he was enjoying it so I was, like, well if one person enjoys it then maybe a few other people might enjoy it.

In line with Maruna's (2010) findings, improved confidence within delivery sessions appeared to translate into improved confidence outside of this context:

Kasey: I've realised that I'm a lot more confident than I thought I was and I've realised that I can take leadership in a big group ... Yeah, it's made me feel more confident and sometimes independent actually ... I just feel confident talking to people and adults more than I was before.

Following the findings of McQuaid and Lindsay (2005), some students articulated the value of improved confidence and interpersonal skills in terms of longer-term aspirations, linking such personal attributes to future employability prospects:

Maya: We're going into Year 10 soon, and we're gonna do work experience. Made me more confident talking to people, if you're doing, like, I dunno, working in Starbucks or something you can talk to other people ... Yeah, talking to other people and if someone was being rude to you you can like know how to sort it out and stuff ... like because we ... learnt how to be confident talking to other people... [When] we was (sic) like sitting with other people we don't know and put in groups we don't know, so that's when I started to feel more confident ... about talking about your feelings and stuff.

Further contributing to their ability to express themselves, young people reported that as a result of taking part in the intervention and writing lyrics with tutors their perceptions of rap had changed, as had their style of writing. Over the duration of the intervention, lyrics became less violent and anti-social. Tutor input was crucial in this respect. In early sessions a number of participants demonstrated a propensity to self-identify with themes of crime and violence in and through the construction of lyrics and tutors pro-actively challenged this. Of course, there are vestiges here of the work of both Baker and Homan (2007) and De Viggiani *et al.* (2013) concerning the dilution of creativity and self-expression and tensions did arise within the context of tutor-pupil dialogue around this issue. That said, the vast majority of participants appeared to view this kind of challenge in a positive way recognising how, rather than restricting their sense of expression, such practices allowed them to develop a broader overall repertoire in relation to lyric writing:

Freddie: [The sessions] made me make my raps less violent ... They [the tutors] gave me better ideas ... Usually when I think about rapping I think of like guns, getting money [sic]. Now nicer raps that are fun to listen to, like better.

Chaz: They [the tutors] changed the way like that I think about rapping, like rapping calmly without violence and stuff ... Use good language and just try to relax when you're rapping and enjoy it ... What I would've done before is ... for example, I would be rude about people, like, that have annoyed me through the day ...

In line with the work of De Viggiani (2013), it seemed that this shift in lyric writing reflected and promoted a move away from antisocial attitudes towards an altogether more positive outlook both on the world and self:

Ocha: [Tutors told me] I wasn't allowed to swear and all that ... So, then I just started writing fresh lyrics ... They taught me like the right way ... I used to talk about guns, gangs all that violence ... but they told me not to say that stuff and [at first] I was like 'Oh, why not?' But then I realised actually they're right. I shouldn't be talking about that stuff.

For some this attitudinal shift encouraged reflection on previous behaviours and the personal implications in play:

Maya: I realised that, like, school's really important when you get out and you'll regret it all being really bad and stuff... 'Cos like ... we were talking about what lyrics we were allowed to use and talking about school and stuff and how you can struggle in the future if you don't do good in school.

### **Music-making and behavioural change**

As these accounts portray, for some pupils at least, the intervention served to promote improvements in overall behaviour. Indeed, several young people reported that as a result of taking part they felt calmer and/or experienced feelings of anger less often:

Gus: Well like before ... I used to have like anger problems. I still have anger problems obviously, but, like, it's kind of calmed me down in lessons and that ...

Yusef: I'm not as angry and I calm down more easily ... I'm more used to a calm environment so I'm not like getting really stressed out of lessons or ... in school or out and about.

As has been noted in previous research, it appeared that general decreases in feelings of anger were associated with music being utilised as an alternative means of expressing frustration (Bilby, Caulfield & Ridley 2013; Daykin *et al* 2011; Moller 2011; De Viggiani *et al* 2010; 2013). Reductions in feelings of anger and the calming effect of being involved in the project appeared to result in improved attitudes and behaviour beyond delivery sessions. This was reflected in more positive attitudes towards teachers and learning:

Chaz: Well before the ... sessions I used to get quite rude to teachers. I used to shout in lessons if a teacher accused me of something I didn't do. But now I have less detentions ... [Now] I don't really get that angry, but I don't know if it's got to do only with the ... sessions but ... since the [intervention] sessions, I just got better behaved ...

More specifically, a number of pupils reported being better able to manage conflict with teachers via an improved ability to communicate, think through consequences and moderate responses. Thus, suggesting that for some the intervention had had a positive impact on impulsive behaviour:

Yusef: I think more about what I do ... If I get into an argument I don't always start it 'cos I ... think about what's gonna happen and the consequences ... [for example] I was talking to a teacher, having an argument but I didn't start shouting because I thought about what the consequences would be.

Kasey: Before ... I would've reacted in a different way that would've got me into trouble. I've kind of learnt how to ... make it so you don't get into trouble and so that teachers or members of staff understand how you're feeling and what situation you're in ... Let's say a teacher thought that I did something that I didn't do. Before I would've ... started arguing back and like ... shouting and everything. But now I've learnt ... how to, like, accept the fact

that they think it was me. I know that it's not me but I can just speak to them later instead of speaking to them in front of all my friends and ... them thinking that I'm trying to like show them up.

Some students attributed their improved classroom behaviours (and relationships with teachers) to the communication skills that they gained through interacting with project tutors. Mason and Ocha had both experienced something of a turn-around in this respect:

Mason: The tutors, they're like kind and they listen to me and that's what makes me want to listen to them as well. They don't just want to stick you in detention. Like, they would listen to you, let you, like, say what you have to say and that's what helps a lot because other teachers they wouldn't like listen to you, they won't speak to you, they'll just put you on 'concern' [behavioural alert] without allowing you to justify yourself ... I used to like get into big arguments with the teachers and I used to, like, not really threaten but ... I used to swear at them, say 'Shut up' to them, walk out of lessons. I used to, like, just get into trouble for fun basically. But now I don't do that anymore ... I've learnt. I now know it's not a good thing to do and, like, if I have a problem I resolve it after not at the same time because the teacher has like 28 or 29 other students they have to look after not just one and after the lesson I can speak to them.

Ocha: In classes the way I speak to teachers ... I'd just give them attitude for no reason ... They [the tutors] started talking to me calmly ... 'cos the way I used to talk to teachers with attitude, they gave it back to me, like, they just gave me attitude all the time man. That's why ... I've like proper learnt how to talk calm better.

It seemed that the modelling of positive interactions with tutors generalised to pupil interactions with teachers. This enabled pupils to improve their behavioural profiles and allowed them to inhabit a more valued role in school (Smith, 2009):

Sam: I don't get that many 'concerns' anymore and, yeah, I don't get excluded nowadays. Like, before [the intervention] I used to get excluded ... like, internally, every week and now I don't. I barely get exclusions ... I think it's just made me calmer ... I think 'cos the ... staff [tutors] ... don't shout it's made me calmer ... now I don't make teachers shout, I don't intimidate teachers and they don't, like, have to shout at me ... I just get down to my work.

In addition to modelling positive relationships, the intervention appeared to allow the development of a more positive approach to schooling by providing a space for students to relax and forget about the wider pressures of academic life, all of which had a positive impact on their mood:

Scott: It gave us a break from learning ... 'Cos when you're in school you have too much to think about ... but if you come here [to the project sessions], then it gets your mind off learning and ... you can do something else for a change, not just keep on having to do learning and keep on thinking about ... what about if I don't pass my GCSE's an' all that

In the same way, Nabil highlighted how music sessions provided a source of escapism, which allowed him to regulate himself in order to return to classes with a more positive outlook.

Nabil: In school ... it was a bit boring so ... I got in a bit of trouble sometimes 'cos I wasn't feeling part of the lesson. But in [the project] ... because it's at the start of the day, I feel good for the rest of the day ... because it's fun ... and, yeah, I don't have to be in lessons. I get two hours off and ... it makes me feel like I've had a break and then I can just go to lessons happy. Like, usually I'm really tired and have to do another two hours of lessons, but now I can have a break and just relax and do music ... I'm kind of doing better at school now. Before I wasn't doing that good but now I'm like, I think it will like inspire me to do good, yeah.



Other pupils talked of the way that the intervention provided them with an external incentive to behave well in school throughout the week given that if they failed to do so they may not be permitted to access further delivery sessions:

Oli: I've been a bit more behaved in lessons. Like on Fridays I try to be as good as I can so that I'm gonna enjoy [the sessions] and then the rest of the day's gonna be good and ... [I] try not to get in trouble 'cos like it might effect it ... If I'm better behaved then I can do more things and I won't be getting in trouble that much and then I can come to [the project] and everything.

Improved behaviour as a result of external motivation to maintain a place on the programme seemed to translate into positive feedback from teachers:

Cameron: I don't argue with teachers as much anymore ... and I get like more praise ... because I behave well in lessons ... because, like, if I didn't behave well then I would've been kicked out of [the project] so I just got used to behaving properly.

### **Music-making and mentoring**

A number of pupils at Burton Grange spoke positively about the way in which tutors treated and worked with them in a mentoring role. In particular, pupils seemed to value: (i) tutors' style of communication (often described as 'polite', 'calm', 'friendly'), i.e., when an issue arose students liked the fact that tutors discussed things with them rather than administering judgment and/or punishment; (ii) the one-to-one help/attention they received from tutors; and (iii) the way that tutors listened to them presenting as someone they could confide in. In discussing these issues, pupils frequently compared their relationships with tutors to those with teachers:

Kasey: The fact that they were interacting with me and everyone and ... if you do something wrong they [tutors] won't shout at you, they'll try and help you out to improve. Like say ... I was writing lyrics and there was something that didn't quite go together but Greg [Tutor] didn't go 'Oh, no, no, stop, that doesn't go together'. He said 'Or maybe you can try this and see which

one you like better and then choose the one that you like better.’ And I found Greg did that a lot with me and my group and I found that that helps.

Oli: They all seemed nice ... they just weren’t really bossy and, like, they weren’t like teachers or anything ... Like when they tell you to do something they’re not like ‘Do it now’, they’re like ‘Please can you do this’; ‘Please would you mind if you just do this a little bit’. I just liked them because they’re nice people ... Normally, when teachers tell me to do stuff I don’t. I don’t really, like, follow instructions straight away. I’m a bit defiant. But when the tutors tell me to do something - and because they say it nice and they say it respectfully - I’m just, like, alright and I’ll do it straight away.

In particular, pupils valued the fact that tutors listened to and showed an interest in them. This appeared to allow pupils to feel valued (Smith, 2009) and respected in an environment where much of their previous interaction had been dominated by conflict:

Oli: I liked the fact that they listened ... instead of waiting for their turn to speak ... Like teachers they never listen to what you have to say, they’re just waiting for their turn to speak again, so you ask them a question they answer it, they’re not really listening to your question. ... But with them [tutors] they actually think about it ... like, they listen and then if they wanna speak after they’ll speak ... and I don’t really think that they’re thinking what to say ... just afterwards they say it. But teachers, they know what they’re gonna say when you start asking the question.

The mentoring role of tutors also appeared to provide students with the opportunity to reflect upon their feelings and express their emotions, as has been identified within other mentoring programmes (Deanne et al., 2011; Lonie, 2011):

Natasha: They were like ‘Are you alright?’ and all this ... Teachers normally never ask that, they just get on with their lesson ... [It helped] ‘cos you can get all your feelings out ... They’re just there to talk to you not like other teachers who are just like too busy to talk to anyone.

Furthermore, the capacity of tutors to offer one-to-one support enabled pupils to complete tasks more readily, thus facilitating a sense of achievement, promoting self-esteem and creating a sense of positive reinforcement from an adult which some may not have been familiar with (Woodward et al., 2008):

Mason: Like he’s [Jez, Tutor] really nice and he helps a lot ... ‘Cos one time I was by myself, I was just trying to do something, a lyric and he came and he’s like ‘Oh, do you need any help?’ and I was like ‘Yeah, I need help’. And he helped me with the whole thing, when he could’ve gone to another student he just stood there and helped and we finished it ...

Tutors’ distinct attributes in terms of their backgrounds, age and positioning allowed them to adopt a more ‘relaxed’ classroom approach and also facilitated the establishment of supportive working relationships with students which were experienced as different and supportive:

Ria: They’re just like really supportive people ... they’re funny as well ... People that are doing lyrics, they don’t laugh at their lyrics ... they’re just not judgemental about people’s lyrics and they’ll help you ... They’re not like proper adult-ish, y’know what I mean, like all formal and everything ... because the adults in this school they’re all serious and they won’t like have jokes ... But, like, the [tutors] ... they are mature but they also have a laugh and they’re just not so serious all the time.

Indeed, teachers and classroom support staff also recognised the way in which pupils quickly established working relationships with tutors. Significant in this respect was the way in which tutors conducted themselves and sought to establish meaningful relationships with pupils, as outlined by one female teacher:

Charlotte: Well it is a different approach and it's like, y' know, you've got adult men who, y'know, if you look at them, they're big, you think 'Oh God they're quite frightening', but actually no, they're warm, they're gentle, they're there to listen to you and to teach you new skills ... I just thought they're very respectable, very nice, pleasant, easy going, approachable people and especially with the children ... and they interact really well professionally and y'know, that's the bit, once you've developed the relationship you've, you've got the child on your side haven't you? And they're able to do that straight away and that's good.

The unique mentoring relationship facilitated by tutors was thought by Charlotte (and others) to offer something which pupils sought to engage with and could gain a sense of belonging from (see also Deanne et al., 2011; Lonie, 2011):

Question: How do you think they [tutors] gain that respect from the children?

Charlotte: Well, I think it's their own insights and their own life experience and I think if you've got a good sense of yourself you kind of omit that don't you? And it's their own life experience and personality and they obviously know how to engage with the children, and connect! Connecting with young children is so important, 'cos they could've been a group of people that our kids wouldn't [connect with] 'I'm not going with them' so there must be something about them as a group that the children wanna be a part of.

Collectively, what such sentiments indicate are the kinds of benefits on offer when interventions operate within the context of a wider structures of welfare provision and support and which are delivered with the intentional aim of gaining the trust of the young people involved. It seems that such a format can enable pupils to engage and actualise behavioural change, and develop alternative positive patterns of interacting with others.

## **Conclusions**

Building upon the findings of previous research into the benefits of arts-based interventions, the respondent narratives presented in this paper have highlighted the

potential for music-making to be utilised as a means of engaging marginalised youth in educational settings. In turn, pupils bear testament to the value of mentoring as a useful backdrop against which trusting relationships may be established with those who typically reject conventional authority structures.

Over and above engagement, these personalised accounts serve to demonstrate how taking part in music-based interventions within such settings may confer psychological, behavioural, and social benefits. These intermediate outcomes which have been linked to desistance from delinquency can positively impact the individual lives of participants and their wider environment (Bilby et al., 2013). Pupils described these benefits in terms of increased confidence, improved attitudes towards schooling and their futures, improved behaviours linked to feelings of calm, and better communication skills. Furthermore participants reported feeling less angry either as a result of the music sessions providing them with a physical space to relax or an alternative means to express their emotions. Young people also reported decreases in externalizing behaviours, with some linking this to the psychological benefits outlined and others linking it directly to motivation to maintain their place on the intervention. Others described how improved social skills, especially communication, helped them to better manage themselves in conflict situations – particularly with teachers. Overall these benefits seemed to enable pupils to try to do things differently, offering opportunities for them to gain positive reinforcement both from teachers and tutors and thus helping to create a more positive cycle of interaction, communication and conduct.

Pupil narratives are also encouraging in relation to the potential of such interventions to produce psycho-social benefits, however it is not clear if these positive experiences translate into concrete, long term outcomes, i.e., a reduction in behavioural sanctions post-intervention. Furthermore, although tutors appeared integral to the positive experiences of pupils, further research is needed to fully explore the extent to which mentoring might add value over and above stand-alone music interventions. Nevertheless, at a practical level, the combination of mentoring and music-making offered a unique way to engage this ‘hard to reach’ group. Importantly this process of engagement in and of itself provided pupils with the opportunity to feel valued, thus increasing their likelihood of accessing appropriate support in the future.

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