

Research Briefing N°9

Music for life: promoting well-being in older people through musical activities in the community

This research explores the role of music in older people's lives and how participation in making music, particularly in community settings, can enhance their social, emotional and cognitive well-being.

Key words: music; community; well-being; psychology; ageing; quality of life



Key findings

- Measures of well-being were consistently higher among the older people (including beginners) participating in music activities compared to those (from the control group) participating in other activities.
- There are social benefits and the potential for musical development amongst beginners as well as those with prior experience in music.
- The most frequently mentioned barriers to participation in music activities were: caring for others, illness and lack of confidence.
- Facilitators of musical activities with older people have specific training needs but there are few opportunities for continuing professional development (CPD) in this area.
- There was either no change or positive change over time on the Casp-12 quality of life scales and Deci and Ryan Basic Needs Scales (NS) (validated scales to measure wellbeing and quality of life).
- There was no deterioration in wellbeing between those aged 75 and under and those aged over 75, amongst the music groups.

What we did

The UK is experiencing a new demographic: the over-65s population outnumbers those under the age of 16. This requires greater focus on the well-being of older people. Earlier studies on the role of music (predominantly singing) in older people's lives show its ability to enhance health and well-being and combat isolation, loneliness and depression.

Music for life, a partnership between the Institute of Education, University of London, the Sage Gateshead, the Guildhall School of Music and Drama Connect Project, and the Music Department of the Westminster Adult Education Service (WAES), looks at the role of a range of musical activities in the lives of older people.

The project is funded under the New Dynamics of Ageing Programme, an eight-year multidisciplinary research initiative aimed at improving the quality of life for older people in the UK. The project is a collaboration between five of the UK Research Councils: the [ESRC](#), [EPSRC](#), [BBSRC](#), [MRC](#) and [AHRC](#) and is the largest and most ambitious research programme in ageing ever seen in the UK. The initiative will inform the development of practical policy, guidance on implementation, and new approaches in scientific

Further information

Findings from this research were presented at:

- the International Society for Music Education conference in Beijing, July 2010;
- the British Psychological Society Education Section conference, Milton Keynes, November 2010;
- the Research in Music Education conference, Exeter, April 2011;
- the Leading Music Education International Conference, Canada, June 2011;
- the International Association for Gerontology and Geriatrics, Bologna, April 2011;
- the British Psychological Society Glasgow, May 2011;
- the British Society of Gerontology, Plymouth, July 2011; and
- conferences and events at the Institute of Education (October 2010, April 2011), Sage Gateshead (July 2010), and at the Southbank Centre, London (October 2010) included live and video performances of some of the musical groups participating in the project and dissemination of the research findings.

The project was featured in Hallam, S. and Creech, A. (eds.) (2010). Music education in the 21st century in the United Kingdom: Achievements, Analysis and Aspirations. London: Institute of Education

See link to [the New Dynamics of Ageing Programme](#).

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and technological design to help older people enjoy a better quality of life.

How we did it

The research was carried out between 2009 and 2011.

Research participants:

- 349 older people (29% were beginners) participating in music activities;
- 102 older people (a control group) participating in non-music activities;
- age range: 50 to 93;
- 77% of research participants identified as White British;
- 76% of research participants were female.

Methods:

- questionnaire completed before and after 9 months participation in music activities;
- questionnaire completed by control group before and after 9 months participation in music activities;
- interviews, focus groups and observations carried out with music participants and their facilitators;
- quality of life measures: CASP-12; Basic Needs Scales.