

WHAT IS SOUNDMIX?

Soundmix exists in order to provide structured music and arts activity to children and young people who are newly arrived in the UK and without family support. They have often escaped extremely traumatic experiences in their country of origin. They are also extremely resilient and creative young people. We help them adjust to their new circumstances and provide some support in a fun, challenging and safe environment.

We have run music workshops with separated young people from the Refugee Council in Brixton since 2006, focusing on composition with guitars and keyboards to learn new musical skills and develop original talents, and fostering citizenship and English skills.

Aims

- To provide creative music making for separated children seeking asylum in the UK.
- To provide structured learning activity for newly arrived clients in boroughs where the local authority finds it difficult to accommodate them in mainstream education.
- To provide a forum for a variety of musical experiences from students home cultures.
- To provide a creative outlet in a safe environment, access to equipment and music training leading to the development of new musical and friendship networks.
- To teach transferable IT and English skills where appropriate.
- To provide training and experience for volunteers to allow the project to continue and expand in subsequent phases.

Outcomes:

- To develop practical music skills in clients who are often new to musical self expression.
- To have increased clients' ability and opportunity to engage with mainstream education.
- To have improved the social and psychological well being of the clients through creative music participation, in particular the effects of PTSD and depression.
- To counter the effects of loneliness and isolation through developing a new community of young musicians.
- To promote social responsibility and citizenship through learning and achievement.
- To have increased training opportunities and CPD for volunteers and new music leaders.

Other points about the teaching and learning:

We offer a supportive environment in absence of family contact. Our clients lack a familial connection most of us take for granted. On Soundmix, they are with their new friends, in a safe environment, doing something fun. We are a respite from a frightening and bewildering new life. We are a small but significant part of their new family. Many of our students have gone to form lasting friendships with others on the course, sharing accommodation and supporting each other way beyond the confines of the project - access to new networks is especially important to this client group.

Following from this, we engage them in a NOW activity. We don't plague them with questions about the past (unless they offer information). It shows them they can move forward. Music learning is an Oblique Strategy that enables young people to work through some of their issues - i.e our work is not about their status as refugees. It is about their status as (young) people.

Learning they choose to do actively, and as a respite from all the other learning they MUST do (esol, citizenship, official meetings, signing with Home Office, Housing, social care etc) - this choice is empowering.

Concrete improvement in English - many previous students now in mainstream education, some having been refused places previously. The difference is dramatic after 6 months.

Learning how to interact with other young people from around the world - many of our client group have come from tribal based communities and are not used to mixing.

We offer structured learning: this is not a drop in, it is a music class. Students learn about different musics from around the world, and how to play keyboards and guitar. Along the way, they make new friends, and learn about focusing on a collective goal, self discipline and have a growing confidence in their new abilities.

Structure of the groups:

There are 3 terms a year, each 12 weeks long, with a break for summer. We aim to follow the school timetable as far as possible.

There are two classes: the first is for beginners. They study musical principles, participate in group work, and learn one song to play together.

The beginners class lasts for 3 months after which they 'graduate' to the advanced class. In this class we encourage original compositions, singing, development of instrumental technique, as well as learning other songs from around the world.

Both groups perform once a term where appropriate in front of their peers. They qualify for a certificate of attendance and achievement after 6 months.

Some of our clients have been with us for longer. 2 or 3 have taken on informal mentoring roles to the younger clients during the class.

Organization of the project:

Soundmix workshops are run under the umbrella of the Brixton St Vincent's Community Centre and workshops are held at the Refugee Council as part of their outreach program. The young people are recruited from the Refugee Council day centre where they go regularly for help, advice, meals and English lessons. The Refugee Council supply volunteers as translators for the group.

Soundmix aims to become a registered charity in its own right by the end of 2009.

Current and previous funders:

Hilden Trust
Sir Walter St John Educational charity
Lloyds charitable foundation
Paul Hamlyn Foundation
Lambeth Endowed/Walcott Foundation
Churches Commission for Racial Justice
Smile mentoring project

