



Music and people with a learning disability

A guide for music leaders





Welcome

Music is often called the language of emotion and it has amazing power to change lives. As well as the huge enjoyment and sense of achievement gained from music-making, music opens up new ways for people to express themselves and make connections with others, allowing them to explore and show more of their full potential.

Many music leaders want to work with people with a learning disability but aren't sure how to start. Mencap and MusicLeader Yorkshire have produced this national publication to provide more information and signposting about this exciting area of work. It is available in hard format from MusicLeader (see contact details on the back) or as a free download from www.artspider.org.uk and www.MusicLeader.net/mencap

Image above:

Children making the soundtrack for a film by young people with a learning disability called Animated Hove, run by Carousel, an arts organisation in Brighton. www.carousel.org.uk

Cover shot:

Children from a special school in Yorkshire performing in a singing and signing concert. This was a partnership project between Accessible Arts & Media in York and the Yorkshire and Lincolnshire branch of Live Music Now. The project partners a singer and accompanist from Live Music Now with an apprentice workshop leader with a learning disability from Accessible Arts & Media and their mentor from Hands & Voices Choir in York.

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About learning disability

People with a learning disability are, like everyone else, unique individuals. We are all different and one of the joys of music making is the process of discovering more about each other as individuals.

Society still marginalises people with a learning disability so that they do not have the same choice and control over their own lives as others. Making music can therefore mean much more than simply playing an instrument, it's about freedom, expression, aspiration and achievement. It can be a really important aspect of someone's life.

There are 1.5 million people with a learning disability in the UK. They find it harder than others to learn, understand and communicate, although this varies widely from person to person. Many people with a learning disability do not have additional impairments, although some might (eg. visual, hearing, mobility, epilepsy, autism).

People with profound and multiple learning disabilities (PMLD) have significant physical and learning impairments, requiring high levels of support with most aspects of their lives and consequently may need additional support to access music making.

*Mencap has produced a DVD about the arts and people with profound and multiple learning disabilities called **In the moment**, encouraging more practitioners to become involved in this rewarding area of work. More details at www.artspider.org.uk*

For more information about learning disability visit www.mencap.org.uk

About Mencap

Mencap is the UK's leading, learning disability organisation. It actively campaigns on behalf of people with a learning disability and their families and carers, provides services and advice, and supports initiatives that enable people with a learning disability to achieve the things they want out of life.

Mencap has a long-standing commitment to encourage greater participation in the arts among people with a learning disability. This commitment is supported by a dedicated arts website – www.artspider.org.uk

Artspider is designed to be both a showcase for work of artists with a learning disability and to provide a searchable directory of arts provision for people with a learning disability, including up-to-date event listings and downloadable resources, for example the Mencap guide, Doing Music. This guide gives music leaders session planning ideas and suggests some simple exercises based around group improvisation. It is free to download from www.artspider.org.uk or you can order a hard copy for £5 from the Mencap arts team (their address is on the back page).

About MusicLeader

MusicLeader is a UK-wide initiative, funded by Youth Music, that aims to provide access to training and professional development for music leaders at every stage of their career, with regional branches throughout England and a wide range of support services.

MusicLeader is one of the key supporters of the Code of Practice for Music Practitioners, which is a framework through which all music practitioners can show their commitment to providing high-quality participatory musical experiences. It sets out the six key professional principles that all music practitioners should adhere to in order to deliver safe, responsible and quality work to those that hire their services. The Code is not a quality assurance but an assurance of quality – and therefore is the practitioner’s responsibility. The main six points are:

As a music practitioner I strive to:

- **be well prepared and organised**
- **be safe and responsible**
- **evaluate and reflect on my work**
- **have appropriate musical skills**
- **work well with people**
- **commit to professional development.**

The Code provides employers with the evidence that people they hire are equipped with the wider knowledge skills and commitment to deliver a professional service, to inform non-music employers what to expect from practitioners they hire and to help gain recognition that the music leading profession deserves. MusicLeader delivers training for practitioners around embedding the principles of the Code in their day to day practice. The full text of the code and details of how to sign up to it are available from www.musicleader.net/codeofpractice

Seeing the person first

The first thing you need to know is that most people with a learning disability want to be treated the same as anyone else. For many, this might simply mean having the opportunity to take part in music. For others, it's about having a chance to perform and progress in skills. Some people with a learning disability can become really accomplished musicians and some are using their artform to make a powerful statement about wanting the same chances as other people. Check out the music gallery at www.artspider.org.uk to hear the range, quality and message of music by people with a learning disability.

Sometimes you may need to know practical issues about a person's impairment if it has a major impact upon what you or the person can do, but mainly you need to spend time getting to know each individual as a whole, as you do with most people. This way you see the person first, not their impairment.

If this is a new area to you

As a music leader, your practice is more about how you communicate with people and how they can communicate with you than it is about having medical knowledge. For example, if someone is a wheelchair user, you don't necessarily need to know why, you mainly need to understand that person's access needs, so you can ensure that person is as fully involved and included as the next. The same approach applies. No-one will expect you to be an expert in learning disability. When you are working with a new group, take time to ask group members and any staff or family if there are any specific needs or issues you should know about and at least in the initial stages it may help to ensure that staff or family supporters are involved in your sessions.

Music as art or therapy?

Most people enjoy music for the fun of it, so it should generally be offered on this basis. Having an impairment does not necessarily mean you need music as a therapy.

Working with people with a learning disability is often a process of breaking down activities into easily achievable steps; giving support

to try new things, giving people the chance to be creative, maybe starting with what they find most comfortable or familiar. This could lead to enabling participants to shape and lead aspects of sessions as they become more confident.

How to reach people with a learning disability

Many children and young people with mild to moderate learning disabilities go to mainstream **schools**. Or if they have a moderate to severe learning disability they may attend special schools. Your local education service can provide more information about schools in your area.

Many young people with a learning disability find it difficult to access mainstream youth clubs, but there may be local learning disability leisure groups for young people and adults in your area, which should be listed on your local council website. The Mencap website www.mencap.org.uk lists many groups and additional information can be obtained from the Learning Disability Helpline (see back page).

Traditionally, many adults with a learning disability go to **day centres**. They aim to provide a range of leisure, learning and work opportunities including greater access to general and specialist community services, and they will also be interested in exploring the possibility of music sessions and projects either in centres or wider community settings. You should be able to find out about centres in your area from the Social Services section of your local council website. Day centres tend to work with older people with a learning disability and people with more severe or complex disabilities.

Many young adults with a learning disability either cannot or choose not to go to day centres any more. Local and a small number of national **colleges** play an important role in offering further education opportunities through specialist course provision, but provision is patchy and may be non-existent in some areas.

Local branches of learning disability organisations such as Mencap can also help you reach people. Specialist **advocacy and person-centred planning services** help people gain better access to leisure and work interests, and this may be another useful way of reaching

people. These services are often offered by local branches of voluntary organisations such as Mencap, and as they tend to be funded by Social Services, their details should also be available on your local council website.

The **Artspider website** – www.artspider.org.uk – provides information about **arts organisations** locally which work with people with a learning disability. While one organisation may concentrate on visual arts, for example, they will often be interested in bringing other artforms such as music into their work, so do not restrict yourself to looking just for specialist music organisations. There may be occasional **nightclub** events for people with a learning disability in your area, such as the Beautiful Octopus clubs in London and Leeds. Details of these clubs are available on the Artspider website – many of them offer music and dance training to people with a learning disability so they can deliver activities, be DJs and VJs or perform in some way. You may find this a good way to gain some volunteering experience.

Overcoming barriers to participation

Money

Many people with a learning disability still do not have easy personal access to money; they may also have difficulties understanding or handling money. It may be preferable to charge a service (eg. school, day centre or arts organisation) rather than an individual for what you do as they will already have any necessary financial arrangements in place. Alternatively look for external funding from Arts Council England, your local authority or charitable trusts.

Communication difficulties

Some people have no speech or language difficulties at all, some will have varying difficulties and some will have no speech or verbal language ability. As you get to know individual people in a group, you can assess the degree to which this is a barrier. It is vital to think about the ways in which you can communicate with a group and it is worth remembering that non verbal communication is largely

responsible for conveying a message effectively. Alternative forms of communication could include pictures, showing by example, and use of reference objects. Some people will have their own communication aids and support staff will be able to assist you in the use of these.

Self-perceptions

People with a learning disability can often feel they are no good at things, through lack of opportunity or experiences of success. Whatever the case, it is vital to help people build their confidence in small but significant steps; to praise every achievement and help each person realise they have great potential. Create a climate of mutual respect (and that includes support staff). But, especially if you are preparing for a performance you need to encourage people to strive for quality and you may need to be positively critical. Don't always say that everything someone does is fine, just because they are disabled. But do find a way of giving notes that motivates rather than dispirits.

Other people's perceptions

Other people can unconsciously create barriers too, such as low expectations of what a person can do, or providing information which reinforces barriers about what people can or can't do. Obviously you need to listen to any advice, but you also need to remain open-minded and make your own judgments by building in layers of challenge to the activities you do, assessing and if possible recording individual progress. You may find that it is not only the person with a learning disability who can discover new possibilities about themselves.

Dependency on others

Many people with a learning disability do not travel independently or use public transport without an escort. They may depend on their school, day centre or family members/carers to help them access any sort of activity. Schools or day centres may be reluctant to allow people to travel without a member of staff in support. Some people say they have particular difficulty doing things in the evenings because of transport issues or not having someone to go with. If your session or project happens outside of service provision, planning (and if necessary additional funding) to overcome these issues is vital. Alternatively, you may wish to explore how your sessions could operate within an established service, to avoid any issues around independence and transport.

Access to music and other social experiences

For all the reasons above, many people will have had little exposure to music other than what they see on television or what they do in school. This gives enormous scope to what you can do, but for someone with a learning disability it can be hard to choose or visualise something of which they have little experience. So people may initially be wary about doing music and they may have a narrow repertoire of what music they enjoy. A lack of experience should not be taken for a lack of interest or ability. These are issues which can be tackled sensitively in your opening sessions, probably by starting with what people like and are familiar with. You can then consider how your sessions or project link to widening people's social awareness and experience, such as going out to listen to live music or learning to enjoy new kinds of music.

Practicalities of running a project

Mencap's *Doing Music* guide covers many aspects of planning and running a project, including ideas for exercises. It is recommended that you either buy a copy or download it from www.artspider.co.uk However, here is a brief run-down to help with your project planning:

Venue requirements

Many of these considerations are common to all groups (for example accessibility, health and safety), but you may wish to think about additional factors such as acoustics (for people sensitive to harsh sound or echo) and privacy (to avoid distractions). If your group members have physical or sensory impairments, other access considerations can include hearing loops, flat access or ramps, doors being wide enough for wheelchairs, and disabled toilet facilities.

Help with transport

This is vital unless you are running your project within an established service. If you are running an activity which falls within school time or a day centre's operating hours, staff may be able to supply their own transport and escort group members. If transport cannot be supplied but people can otherwise attend, you need to agree who

will liaise with you to help people attend sessions, find out what people's transport needs are, the cost, an appropriate transport supplier, and build in the time element of co-ordinating this with your group and supplier.

Setting your aims and objectives

There is much more about project planning including aims and objectives in Mencap's *Doing Music* guide, but basically it is really useful to think about these and if possible involve group members in deciding what they want to achieve. For example, will your group make music just for itself or for performance? How would performance pressure improve or detract from the progress of your sessions? Such considerations will influence how the group develops, for example, and influence your definition of quality. Having some simple, clear objectives and the involvement of your group members will enable you to achieve good quality evaluation of your work for personal development and feeding back to the relevant organisations, families, carers and funders.

Accessible information

When you are designing publicity for your project, such as a leaflet or poster, keep words simple and to a minimum and use plenty of photographic or pictorial content to show what it is about. Appropriate service staff should be able to display information for you, discuss it with potential participants and liaise with you regarding attendees. Any printed information you use in sessions should also incorporate relevant photographs or images to make it more accessible. You should use a minimum font size of 14 point, for people with visual difficulties, and use a 'sans serif' plain font such as Arial. Do not overlay text onto images or patterned backgrounds, as it can make the words harder to read. Mencap has produced a downloadable document on this subject called *Make it clear*, available from www.mencap.org.uk

Age appropriateness

Doing music that is simple enough for all to enjoy is not the same as doing children's music with teenagers and adults. You must use music that is appropriate to the age group.

Support staff and escorts

When people have severe disabilities they may have individual support workers. This means that some people will bring their own



James sings in a band for young people with a learning disability called Zombie Crash, run by Carousel.

support staff with them to music sessions, and in the case of school children, teachers may also attend. Support workers give people practical help to do things, such as taking part in activities as well as personal care. This is useful in group situations as it ensures that one person's needs do not over-ride another's. Support workers, other staff or family members/carers can help inform you about any specific needs a person may have and suggest or assist in ways of responding to those needs. Any staff attending are there to help and you should feel able to ask them to do things (or not do things) for the people they are supporting. Remember that support workers may not be familiar with participative music and may need your sensitive guidance. You can work well with support staff if you acknowledge their professional skills and knowledge while also having some clear ideas about how you see their role in the sessions. It may be helpful to draw up guidelines on the role of support staff in a workshop situation (see Appendix 2 for an example) but in drawing up any guidelines involve the support staff if you can.

Challenging behaviour

Some people talk about the concept of challenging behaviour. This is behaviour that is dangerous or interferes with the group's ability to work together. Challenging behaviour is not restricted to people with a learning disability (examples maybe regularly turning up late, consistently playing too loud or too much, not listening, shouting or verbal or physical abuse). Most people with a learning disability do not have challenging behaviour, but it can be a feature of some conditions or it can sometimes happen because of the frustrations someone is experiencing (eg. whether or not they want to make music, whether people are communicating effectively with them). It may be appropriate on occasion to ensure that people can have supported 'time out' from your session if they need it, with the opportunity to return when they are ready. It may simply be a question of allowing people to sit out of a turn-taking exercise or musical activity but always keep the space and invitation open to them to return as and when the music draws them in and they feel safe and respected. Staff/supporters can work with you to ensure you and your participant(s) are safe, well-supported and can enjoy your sessions together.

Feedback and appraisal

Don't forget to give people lots of positive feedback throughout your sessions, and demonstrate tangible ways of recognising and recording their achievements. It is also an important part of your learning curve

to gather regular feedback and appraisal from your group. You may be able to do this just by asking group members how much they enjoyed a particular session, or use a simple sheet with a range of smiley to unhappy faces for people to tick and comment on, or invite people to put ticks, crosses, words or drawings onto post-it notes that they stick on a wall, (or even simpler, use 2 different colours of post-it note, one for 'yes I enjoyed it' and one for 'no I didn't'), inviting any staff attending your session to take part too.

Photography is a good recording mechanism (remembering the need for consent and being very mindful about how images are shared). Most digital cameras also have a video recording facility and filming what people say about their work or showing their participation can be an excellent tool, as it increases involvement and participation and people's ability to 'speak' for themselves.

Appraisal sessions are ideal opportunities for group members to share their ideas and suggestions for future sessions, and this is good practice in ensuring that you are fully inclusive in your approach. This information will also help you in feeding back to services, families and funders.

Music and recording technology as an aid

People love gadgets and generally will really enjoy the chance to record what they do. It can also be a safe way to show an audience what you do, perhaps as a build up to doing live performance. But in addition this is a really useful way to help remind people of what they have done in previous sessions. If you take photos or video, you must give each person pictured a consent form to sign, written in plain English and ideally with pictures to support the words, which asks people for their permission and explains how any images will be used, stored or shared. You will need consent from parents/carers if the person is under 18 or has been assessed as not having capacity to give consent. You may need to help people read or fill in the form.

Funding

The MusicLeader Toolkit is a useful online resource for jobs, training, support and also includes lots of advice about funding, also check out the regional pages of the site for local fundraising news. Several of the organisations listed on the back page, such as the Arts Councils and Voluntary Arts Network, provide information about and/or access to arts funding. To access the toolkit, please visit www.musicleader.net/toolkit

Training

MusicLeader offers training in all areas of working with young people and music. Information about courses is available in the Training Directory on www.musicleader.net/training

All training is available at a highly subsidised rate for MusicLeader members. Anyone wishing to advertise external training opportunities can also use the training directory, so this is a great place to start looking if you feel you have a skills gap and need some help.

MusicLeader also offers one-to-one guidance and support for music leaders at all stages of their career. More information is available at www.musicleader.net or get in touch with your regional office to talk to us further.

We can also offer bespoke training opportunities for organisations or groups – if this is of interest, please contact your regional MusicLeader office for more information.

Mencap and MusicLeader work closely together to ensure that opportunities for training in this area of work exist whenever feasible, and all information will be posted on the MusicLeader Training Directory as opportunities arise.



More music-making for Animated Hove

Wider aims and objectives

It is always worth remembering that while your specific aim is to help people learn more about creating music, what you do helps people develop in much broader ways too.

Here are a few points to bear in mind:

- When you find musical ability, do what you can to develop it and help open doors for individuals to learn more and perform in a supportive environment.
- Accept that some people will learn or develop in small, seemingly insignificant ways, but this is just as important and valuable as someone else's more obvious achievement.
- Celebrate the small steps to help participants progress. While the person may not seem to make much progress, this may be far from true. Look for subtle signs that you are doing things right. It might just be a smile, eye contact or gesture.
- Create new musical experiences including the sort of music people of that age like, for example, chances to see and hear live music as well as discover a wider repertoire of music genres.
- Keep evaluating what you do by finding out how group members feel, and keep feeding back to all stakeholders.

Remember: people are there because they want to participate and be included. They aren't just passive recipients – consider how people can develop responsibility within the group eg. leading aspects of sessions, showing how to do things, devising or contributing to exercises, helping bring out/put away instruments, deciding seating arrangements, contributing ideas.

Appendices

Appendix 1: what the law says about disability

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) makes it unlawful to treat disabled people less favourably than others. It places a responsibility on providers of services and amenities to make reasonable adjustments where possible. This includes anyone providing services to the public, whether in the private, public or voluntary sector. Reasonable adjustments can include changes in practice, policy and procedures to make it easier for disabled people to be better included, such as providing auxiliary aids and services to help overcome physical barriers. As a provider, for example, this covers any physical access issues regarding where you offer your service and how you offer it. Some obvious physical examples are doors being wide enough for wheelchair access, having alternative access to steps and stairs, such as ramps or a lift, portable induction loops for hearing aid users, disabled toilet facilities. In your own case, it may include adapting musical instruments to make them easier to hold, such as bulking out instrument handles that are small or thin, providing instruments like drums that do not require fine motor movements.

Under the Act, the duty of the provider to make reasonable adjustments is called an anticipatory duty. This means continually anticipating or thinking ahead about who may come to your session, their requirements and the adjustments you could make for them.

From a learning disability viewpoint, many of the issues aren't physical. They are subtle considerations regarding the content of what you do, how you deliver it and how people can participate. For example, do you use words that are hard to understand? What if someone cannot read music or words? How can you encourage and respond to people's feedback? These questions may help you analyse and, if necessary, adapt what you do so that you can include everyone, making your projects and sessions more accessible. The law does not expect you to incur unreasonable expense in making any adjustments, alter the core purpose of what you do, or compromise health and safety, but it does expect you to do what you can. For more about the DDA, visit www.dwp.gov.uk/employers/dda

Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks – adults with a learning disability are considered vulnerable, and as such this means that anyone who employs or contracts you is likely to need to apply for an enhanced disclosure, whether you are working with children or adults. This also applies to anyone who works with you in direct contact with people with a learning disability, whether they are paid or volunteers.

For more about CRB disclosures, visit www.crb.gov.uk

For more information about the Vetting and Barring Scheme, visit www.isa-gov.org.uk

Appendix 2: example guidelines for support staff

- Actively participate as a full member of the group. Playing music is about taking a risk and we can't expect others to do so unless we are prepared to do so ourselves (some support staff may find this too challenging. If so, is there a coffee bar where they can go but still be on hand if you need them?)
- Be patient
- Aid concentration and musical sensitivity by respecting silences and periods of reflection
- Offer support and encouragement to each other
- Be respectful of everyone's contribution at all times – before, during and after sessions
- Help people only as much as it strictly necessary
- Encourage self advocacy by supporting people to choose their own instrument and play their music in their own way
- Enjoy yourself!

Appendix 3: assessing quality

We all may have ideas about what constitutes quality in a performance and, as all art is unique, it is hard to give a clear objective judgement about whether something is good or not. But some useful indicators might be

- Is it original?
- Is it honest?
- Does it surprise, excite or move me?
- Does it have effective qualities (range, variety, depth)?
- Does it have quality of intention?

Appendix 4: some interesting statistics

- Children with a learning disability are often socially excluded and 8 out of 10 children with a learning disability are bullied. Only 1 in 12 children with a learning disability get to take part in youth clubs, compared to 1 in 5 for the rest of the population.
- Half of all families with children with a learning disability live in poverty.
- 8 out of 10 families caring for children and adults with profound and multiple learning disabilities have reached 'breaking point' because of the lack of support they get in their caring roles.
- There are 262,000 young people with a learning disability aged 13-25 years in the UK. Young people with a learning disability do not have the same opportunities to go to college, get a job or have a social life as other young people.
- Less than 1 in 5 people with a learning disability work and of those that do, most only work part time and are low paid.
- Just 1 in 3 people with a learning disability take part in some form of education or training.
- At least half of all adults with a learning disability live in the family home - many don't get the same chances as other people to gain independence, learn key skills and make choices about their own lives.

While the statistics may be depressing, working with people with a learning disability could be one of the most rewarding and exciting things you will ever do!



Creative Sound is a group of adults with moderate learning difficulties who create and perform their own music using accessible music technology (eg MIDIcreator and Soundbeam). Run by Accessible Arts & Media in York.

For more information

Mencap arts team

Burrell Road
Haywards Heath
RH16 1TW
Tel: 01444 449088
Email: artspider@mencap.org.uk
www.artspider.org.uk

MusicLeader

Youth Music
One America Street
London SE1 ONE
Tel: 020 7902 1060
Email: enquiries@musicleader.net
www.musicleader.net

Regional office addresses

MusicLeader East Midlands

Tel: 01536 401 902
Email: east-midlands@musicleader.net

MusicLeader London

Tel: 020 7729 7228
Email: london@musicleader.net

MusicLeader North East

Tel: 0191 443 4592
Email: north-east@musicleader.net

MusicLeader North West

Tel: 0161 830 3899
Email: north-west@musicleader.net

MusicLeader South West

Tel: 0117 352 5043
Email: south-west@musicleader.net

MusicLeader West Midlands

Tel: 0121 236 7978
Email: west-midlands@musicleader.net

MusicLeader Yorkshire

Tel: 01422 321 823
Email: yorkshire@musicleader.net

Mencap

Head office
123 Golden Lane
London EC1Y 0RT
Tel: 020 7454 0454
Email: information@mencap.org.uk
www.mencap.org.uk

Learning Disability Helpline

Tel: 0808 808 1111
Type talk: 18001 0808 808 1111

Youth Music

The UK's largest children's music charity
Email: info@youthmusic.org.uk
www.youthmusic.org.uk

Sound Sense

The national community music association.
Email: info@soundsense.org
www.soundsense.org.

Voluntary Arts Network

Promoting participation in the arts and crafts across the UK.
Email: info@voluntaryarts.org
www.voluntaryarts.org.

Arts Council of England

Tel: 0845 300 6200
Text phone: 020 7973 6564
Email: enquiries@artscouncil.org.uk
www.artscouncil.org.uk

Arts Council of Wales

Tel: 0845 873 4900
Email: info@artswales.org.uk
www.artswales.org.uk

Arts Council of Northern Ireland

Tel: 028 9038 5200
Email: info@artscouncil-ni.org
www.artscouncil-ni.org

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