

MUSICAL FUTURES

*Music with Looked After
Children and Young People
in Hounslow and
Wandsworth*



Introduction

In May 2013, with funding from Youth Music, Creative Futures launched 'Musical Futures', a music programme for Looked After Children and Young People (LAC) in the London boroughs of Hounslow and Wandsworth, building on existing partnerships with both boroughs.

'Musical Futures' consisted of a series of intensive 'modules' delivered largely in school holidays with different age-groups of LAC in each borough, each of which concluded either with an informal performance to family and friends, or a recording. From January 2014 we delivered more regular after-school sessions in Hounslow in the form of a band, which met weekly during term-time for just over a year, leading up to an intensive weekend in a recording studio and an album launch event in late March 2015.

In all, 10 modules were delivered consisting of 240 musician-sessions over the course of the two-year period. 14 different musicians, plus a director, dancer, drama tutor, and film-maker were engaged. 8 performances were given, two of which were public events, and 5 CDs and one DVD were produced.

61 LAC took part in the project aged 7 to 18 years, 14 in Wandsworth and 47 in Hounslow. Some engaged for one module only, but many took part in multiple modules, and a core of a dozen or so engaged regularly for the year of the band element. Most participants were in the 9-15 age-range.

The project cost in excess of £60,000, of which around 80% was provided by Youth Music, with other funds being raised from the Mercers' Charitable Foundation, Hounslow Youth Grants and contributions from both local authorities.

Why Looked After Children?

LAC are statistically among the most vulnerable in society:

- 10 times more likely to be excluded from school
- 12 times more likely to leave with no qualifications
 - 4 times more likely to be unemployed
 - 50 times more likely to end up in prison
- and far more likely to suffer mental health problems than those not in care.

Their lives are often chaotic, and they have little control over decisions that are made about their future. There is strong evidence to support the notion that music in particular, and creativity in general, can bring a range of positive benefits to young people who are facing multiple challenges.

Setting the Scene

There is little provision of out-of-school music programmes for LAC in Hounslow or Wandsworth. Music Services in both localities provide excellent opportunities for students with a level of instrumental proficiency (as well as school-based tuition), and our programmes fill a gap by providing project-based provision for non-music specialists from the Looked After cohort. Our partnerships with both Music Services have flourished and we are developing a number of new initiatives with them and other partners to offer further music opportunities for LAC in the area.

"We haven't got on-going relationships with any other organisations in the way we do with Creative Futures, especially for such a long time. Quality of the facilitators: all brilliant. We've had lots and [they are] all really good: talented musically and brilliant with the kids; interested in finding out about issues and ways to work with them makes it quite unique. You put on these amazing projects.... it is so beneficial for the kids." – Participation Officer, Hounslow



Project Objectives

Through 'Musical Futures' we set out to deliver a series of music projects which would have a real impact on the lives of some of the most vulnerable young people in London, and build in them a sense of aspiration, achievement, and belonging. We wanted to challenge those involved, as well as nurture and support them, and to do all this in an absolutely safe, secure, welcoming, inclusive and friendly environment. Above all we wanted those involved to have fun, make friends, and be creative.

We aimed to achieve a balance of musical, social, and organisational outcomes:

- To improve the quality of music delivery for children and young people
- To embed learning and effective practice in host and partner organisations and share practice beyond the project
- To develop the creative, expressive and musical ability of children and young people
- To improve children and young people's self-efficacy (self-esteem, skills, engagement and confidence) and resilience in challenging circumstances
- To encourage participation from children who have not previously engaged in extra-curricula activities; and to foster in all participants a heightened sense of responsibility and team work through shared experiences and through working towards shared, musical, goals

Project delivery

Through the project we offered a wide range of music-making opportunities, led by inspiring and highly experienced musicians.

We planned and devised a series of projects, based on the feedback we'd had from LAC who had been involved in our previous work in both Hounslow and Wandsworth and in consultation with staff in both places. Mostly the projects were intensive, over a few days each, in the holidays. Six months into the project we changed this plan and opted instead for a more sustained approach which we expected would more effectively meet our original objectives.

Activities mostly focussed on creating new music, and included:

- Writing lyrics
- Composing songs
- Arranging songs
- Singing and vocal skills development
- Playing instruments (eg in the band)
- Creating a film with soundtrack
- Combining music and dance
- Music technology

20 new pieces were created and recorded, including the album 'The Brave & the Strong' created by the band in Hounslow which was recorded over an intensive weekend at The Freak Machine studios, and launched in March 2015 at a performance event at the Lampton Conference Centre.

"Zoe and Gen are really good musicians. Sometimes it can be hard to learn new things....but at the end we all end up having a really big song and it's amazing how you start from not knowing and then it grows to be such a great piece of music" – participants, Hounslow

Key Findings

The project has enhanced the happiness of these young people. In response to the statement “Playing my musical instrument makes me feel happy”, at the start of the project 80% of respondents scored negatively with a 1 or 2; and at the end of the project 75% scored very positively with 5.

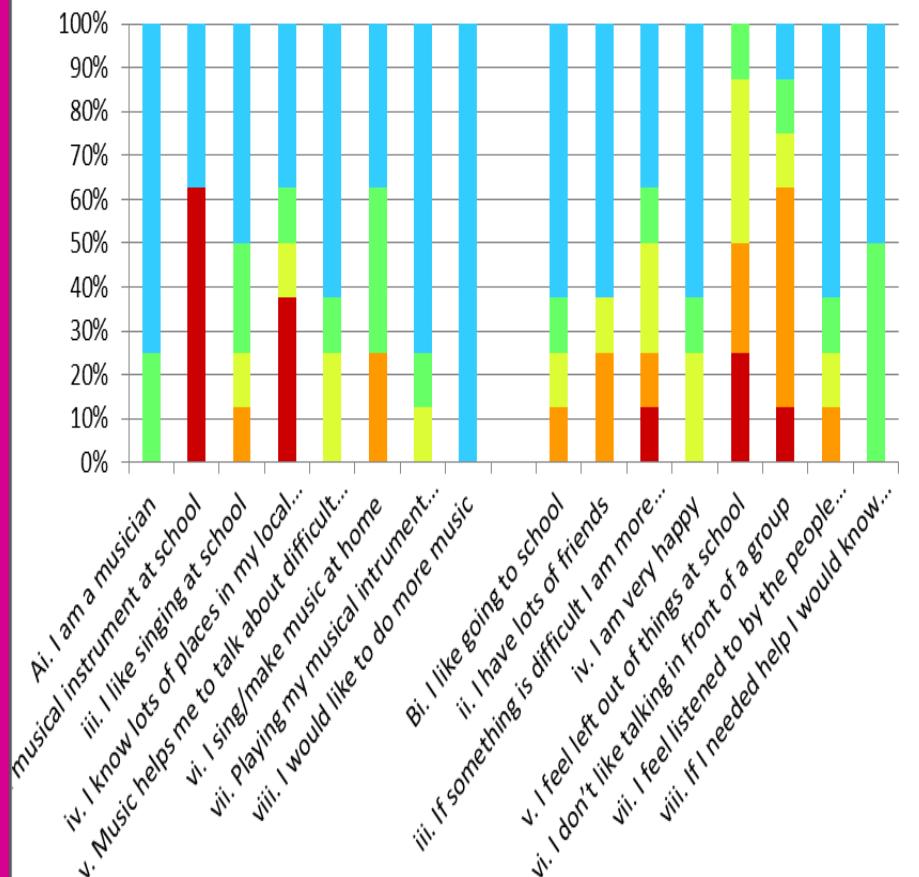
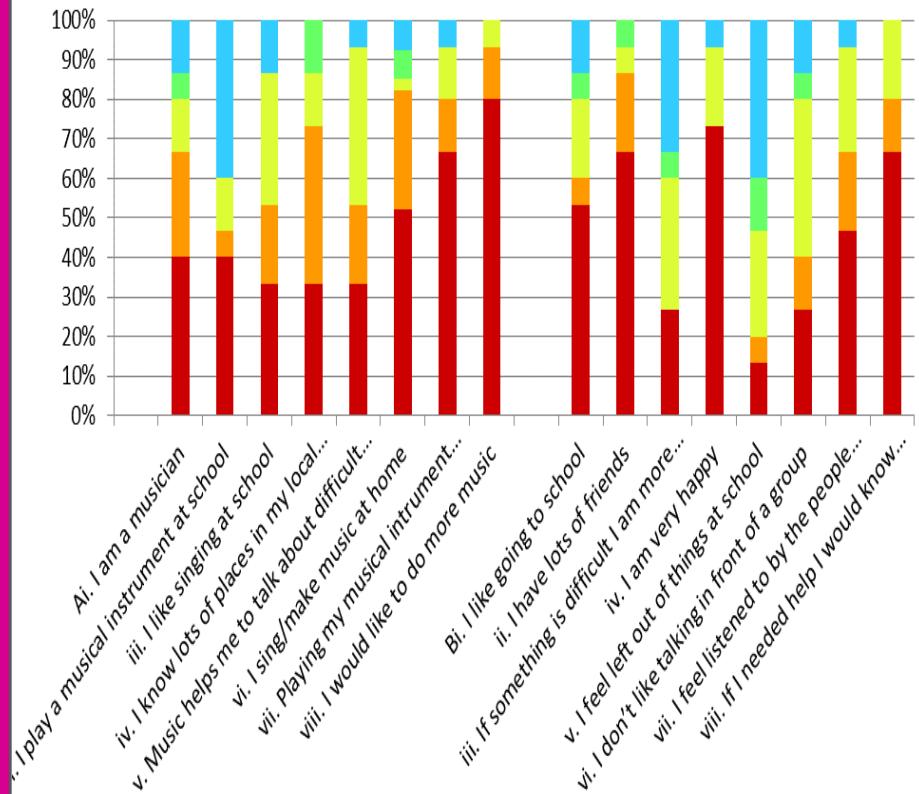
The project has helped these LAC to express their feelings to others. In response to the statement “Music helps me to talk about difficult things”, at the start of the project 53% responded negatively with 1 or 2 and only 7% positively; and at the end of the project 75% responded positively with 4 or 5.

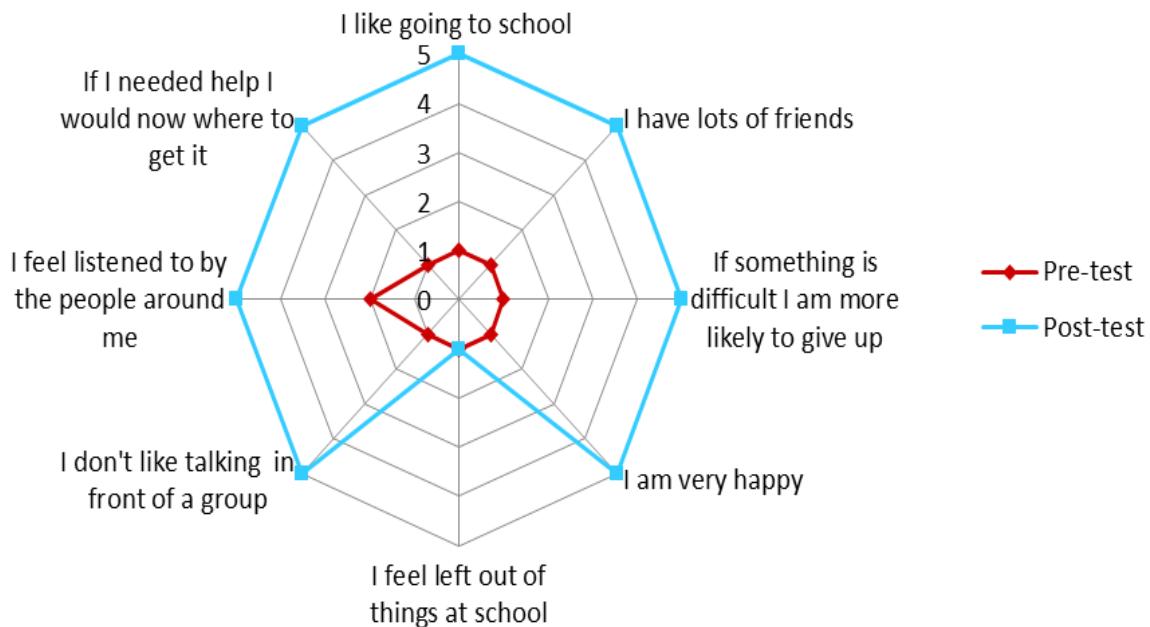
The project has positively impacted on participants’ engagement in school. In response to the statement “I like going to school”, at the start of the project 60% responded negatively with 1 or 2, and at the end of the project 75% responded positively with either 4 or 5.

Music builds positive relationships, respect and empathy. In response to the statement “I feel listened to by the people around me”, at the start of the project 67% responded negatively with 1 or 2, and at the end of the project 75% responded positively with 4 or 5.

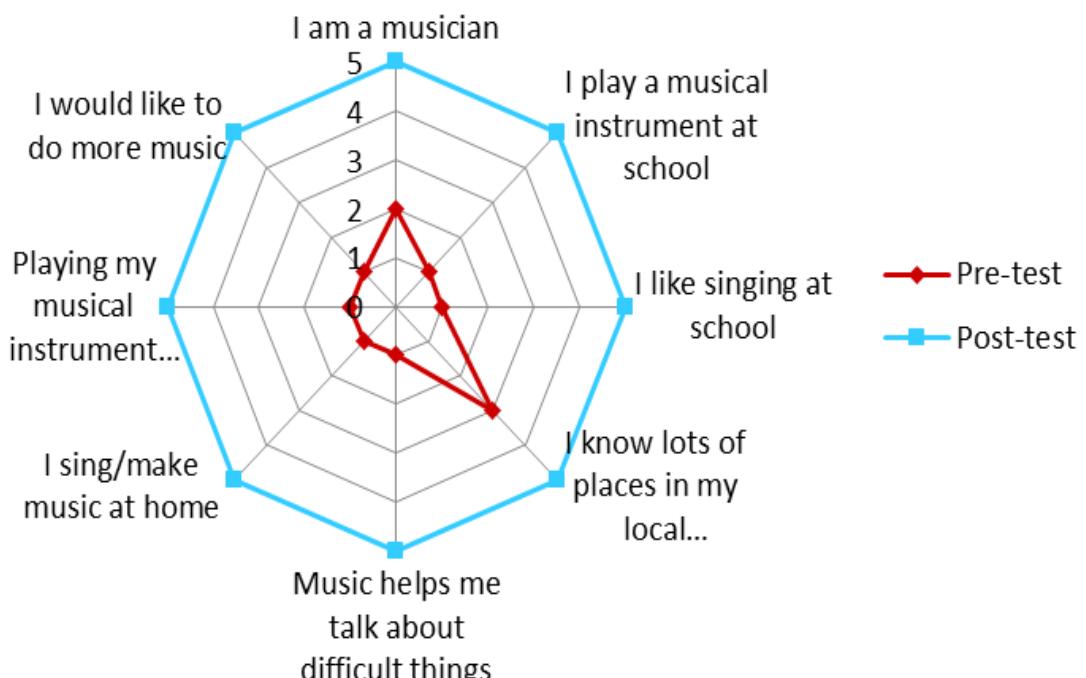
Participants in the project want to do more music. In response to the statement “I would like to do more music” at the start of the project 80% responded very negatively with 1; and at the end of the project 100% responded very positively with 5.

The transformation of red to blue across these graphs clearly demonstrates the self-reported progression of participants in both musical and other-than-musical terms, and strongly supports the feedback gathered through session observations and interviews.





"AM enjoyed the group very much and it has given him even more of a passion for music. AM learned to drum at home in Algeria and this has been something that has been very meaningful to him to be able to try in the UK. He has grown in confidence and has participated in other activities because of his joining the music group. He has been asking for a drum to continue on with playing since the group ended." – Carer



Changing perceptions of music

The professionals we worked quickly with noticed positive impacts on the young people:

"I expected that our young people would come and be engaged and have a good time, definitely. I think I have been surprised by the fact that actually we've seen young people develop very, very quickly and we've seen some of our young ladies go from shy, retiring, not speaking out to "oh yeah, I'll sing that bit" and that's transferring into other areas of the work I do as well and seeing those young people flourish so that's been really positive. I don't think I was expecting that quite so soon.... If anyone was in the same position as me I'd say to get stuck in and if you've only got 2 kids, run with it and start to pull in other young people, because it's such a valuable experience." –

Participation Officer

Feedback on the progress of a specific young person (YP):

"YP becoming much more confident to try... and to speak up in situations like Children in Care Council and [leading] training [of] elected members

We asked participants to respond to the statement, 'Music helps me to talk about difficult things'. At the start of the project 93% participants responded either average or negatively. At the end of the project all participants responded either average or positively, with 63% giving it the most positive rating. (See question A/v in Tables 1 and 2 set below.)

Creative and musical skills

‘Musical Futures’ focussed on developing creativity and self-expression through music of all styles, instrumental playing and singing - although there was no instrumental tuition apart from that which was possible within 90-minute group sessions. The focus was on creative expression, composing, lyric-writing, arranging, ensemble playing, and preparing for a recording or performance. In these areas participants developed new skills and reported positive progression:

“We got to experience every single thing: writing songs, making music, composing in them, using the computer and making loops.. It feels really good.” – Participant

“I used to write journals and I used to try to write songs but I stopped because...I lost the spirit. Before I used to just write a sentence but now I know I can take a topic, make a mindmap, you write synonyms, rhyming words....I used to just write a paragraph, now I know how to write a verse, chorus, build-up....” – Participant



Positive progression in instrumental playing was also reported, and many participants are very keen to further develop these skills in future:

"I've learnt the bass – I know a bit about it and if you give it to me I can play something. I've realised a lot about different instruments. I've never touched an instrument before this." – Participant

"I would love to do more music. I'd love to keep playing bass guitar, that's something that I'm always gonna stick to because that was the best experience" – Participant

"I've never played bass guitar before. When I first played it I found it difficult but thanks to Tlnashe [workshop leader] I've been able to do easy hand movements and find a way to make it easier. Same for piano as well." – Participant

Working together and taking responsibility

Our team noticed that participants in the longer-term module (the band) became more punctual and reliable as the project progressed, and especially as the recording sessions and final showcase performance loomed. Here are some observations from the Participation Officer:

“Majority of young people turning up on time when we had asked them to”
“S commented that she wished M would not be late to sessions and miss out”
“M and S travel from Harrow to attend sessions (over an hour of travelling)”.
“L supporting N to be able to play and be part of the group”
“YP returns to the group when supported rather than becoming a permanent distraction.”

There was a growing sense of responsibility to others in the group, trust, and friendship:

“I remember when I used to be so stressed because I was getting bullied at school and when I came here everyone was happy it made me happy.” – Participant

“The first day when I came here I knew I was going to stay for a long time. I was trying really hard to come on time because I wanted to. This was really important to me. This was a place where I felt happy and I was around different people and I was more confident, more open.” – Participant

For many of those involved in Hounslow, this was their first interaction with an activity organised by the Participation Service, and almost of all those have taken up further activities and opportunities.

Self-esteem

We have strong evidence of the positive impact of this project on participants' self-confidence, and examples of transformational outcomes. Quotes from interviews with our participants enforce this:

"I think it's one of the best things I've achieved in my life actually.. Creative Futures is what got me into actually wanting to do music and I found out how much I really love music and how I can pick up things really easily so I shouldn't really waste that ability, so that's why I'm going on to do music in college and I was able to tell the people there what I'd done and stuff. The best thing is I got straight onto a level 3 course so I don't have to do level 2 because I passed my audition. I played 5 different instruments in my audition. I want to be a music therapist." – Participant

"My mum was really surprised, she was like "you sing?". She never thought I would go on a stage, she never thought I would do something like that, she never knew I could do the bass. She was really impressed and surprised. She knows how secretive I am and how quiet and shy I am usually, and then when she saw that I'm playing.... in front of even 3 people she would have been shocked. It was kind of a good thing for me, I liked how she was shocked and surprised and it kind of made her proud, she was really happy about it. She said 'I'm really proud of you that you're doing something and trying to find yourself'. I think teenage is the age when you need to find who you really are, and that really helped me with music that now I know what I'm gonna do next in my life and what I like." – Participant

"I've achieved something really big. I've learned how to step up for myself, I've learned how to talk around people. Now in class when they ask me a question I can speak up, I've learnt a lot from here. I think I've achieved more than anything. This would be the first thing I've achieved for myself. Music's something personal which I feel I've achieved which is really new." – Participant

"N was very newly into care at the start of the project. As the project has proceeded N has become more and more confident and at ease within the sessions. When she started she was very quiet and shy, now she bounds into the room and is very communicative!" – Practitioner

Confidence

Developing the ability to stand in front of others and perform is a good marker of confidence and resilience, and this project offered many opportunities to develop these skills. Every module concluded with a performance, some small and informal to an invited audience of carers and friends. In Wandsworth, two of the 3 modules concluded with a performance at the annual Awards Ceremony for Looked After Young People held at Wandsworth Town Hall. For the Band in Hounslow performances were given at Orleans House in Twickenham (summer 2014) and at the Hounslow Civic Centre (March 2015) at which 'The Brave & the Strong' album was launched.

“*Orleans House was my first performance. That was scary, I get stage fright I just can't go in front of people... the good thing was that Jane and Tinashe [music leaders], they said “it's gonna be ok, breathe, stay with us, we'll be looking at you, if you feel you've done a wrong chord just forget it, keep going, it's not a big deal. And everyone else, 'L', 'J' they were all really supportive and the good thing is that we were all in it together which made it more easy for us to accomplish. In the end it was the best experience, even if I did [make] any mistakes I don't regret them. I was more excited at the launch concert. It was weird I had a lot of confidence even though this time there were more people and there was a stage and everything was really professional. I think nervousness is always going to be there but I was more excited and I was really happy.”* – Participant in Band

“*I was really really nervous but then I got into it, I was like, I've practised this, I need to show it off. It was nerve-wracking. I was less nervous at the launch. But it was so formal! And in front of so many people! I was like, it's gonna be the last time, just enjoy it. I got loads of motivation before we started from the musicians. I was so happy.”* – Participant in Band

Impact

This has been a transformative project, both for many of the young people who have participated, and for Creative Futures. The evaluation we have gathered paints a picture of change and impact, supported by testimony from those involved, many of whom have identified in themselves very positive change: more confidence, more engagement in school, clearer pathways for the future in terms of further education and even career paths. It has been a privilege for us to work with the talented musicians who have led this project, and to see at first hand the journey the young people have been on and their remarkable achievements.

Organisationaly, the project has further promoted Creative Futures as a leading music provider in the LAC sector, one example of which was the invitation to present at the London Councils annual Care Services conference in 2014. We have reinforced our partnerships with Hounslow and Wandsworth, and will be working on new contracts and partnerships with both boroughs.

Legacy

In both boroughs we have plans in place to extend and develop our music and creative provision work with LAC. This will involve partnerships with the Music Services and local authorities.

In Wandsworth the Virtual School (our prime contact there) was impressed by the ability of our artists to engage with often disaffected young people, and are keen to develop targeted programmes for small groups of young people who are struggling in some way. We will be working with them to devise this new phase, and will involve the Music Service where appropriate.

In Hounslow the Participation Team continues to be a key partner, and has identified a gap in provision for Care Leavers (aged 17-21) and those preparing to leave care (from the age of 15). We have devised a combined-arts programme to pilot ways of meeting this group's specific needs, and are now fundraising for this programme. In addition we have built a partnership with the Virtual College and the Music Service, and will be offering a range of further music opportunities to LAC in Hounslow through this model, partly funded by the Virtual College. The Music Service will be providing 'scholarships' for Key Stage 2/3 pupils to learn instruments, and Creative Futures will continue to offer out-of-school arts programmes with the aim of building resilience and educational engagement. Pupils from our projects will be sign-posted to the instrumental tuition opportunities the Music Service offers within their schools, and visa-versa.

We plan to extend the reach of our work with LAC to other boroughs, and to further develop the inspiring and skilled creative workforce we have engaged for this programme. Most importantly, we aim to deliver more outcomes for young people in challenging circumstances like this:



"I think it's one of the best things I've achieved in my life... Creative Futures is what got me into actually wanting to do music and I found out how much I really love music ..., so that's why I'm going on to do music in college. I played 5 different instruments in my audition. I want to be a music therapist." – Participant

"You [the LAC] are absolutely amazing. This has been a fantastic evening. What talent you have. It's absolutely brilliant to see something translate from paper to the fantastic achievement you've had this evening..." – Jacqui McShannon, Assistant Director, Children's Services, LB Hounslow, at the final performance of the project in March 2015.

Thank you to Youth Music, the Mercers' Charitable Foundation, Hounslow Youth Grants and both local authorities for giving us the opportunity to deliver this programme which has had such positive impacts, and from which we have learned so much and been so inspired.

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National Foundation for
Youth Music