

NCH Music in Mind Youth Programme Report

Prepared by Aisling Kennedy, Corporate Development Executive, NCH

NCH Music in Mind Youth Programme Report

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Executive Summary:

The National Concert Hall's (NCH) Music in Mind Youth Programme addresses the concerning mental health issues that have been highlighted in a post-Covid world, particularly amongst those living in marginalised communities. By sharing the proven positive benefits associated with musical engagement with young people experiencing mental health issues, this programme provided them with a creative communal outlet.

The programme aims to improve the quality of life for people living with mental health difficulties, enhance mental wellbeing through group music playing, and provide social activity and new ways of strengthening resilience. It has been demonstrated to lead to positive outcomes in the following areas: positive feelings; expectation and hope; self-belief; abilities and skills; social support and networking; structure and organisation.

With funding from the Creative Youth Nurture Fund through Creative Ireland, the programme ran from Autumn 2023 – Summer 2025 in 6 counties and engaged with 259 young people aged 12-24 in 10 community youth and outreach centres across Ireland.

From the outset, strong participation and engagement from the participants was encouraged and facilitated. The programme was informed and delivered based on feedback and observations made by the participants.

The first workshop in the series consisted of a co-planning and development session where the young people had the opportunity to input into the design of the coming workshop series. For example, this included the type of music that they wished to

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work on during the series, whether they wanted to work towards specific goals or maintain a more process-driven approach, what milestones (if any) they wanted to build into the project, and what sort of final performance or event (if any) they aimed to work towards.

Based on the feedback and data collated through a specific evaluation process, key successes and recommendations have been gathered to ensure the programme can continue to develop and continue its momentum.

Key elements to a successful programme identified:

- The creation of a **safe space** is essential – It was noted that a few students initially struggled with low self-confidence, which at times hindered their willingness to fully participate, especially in group singing or solo activities. Creating a safe space where they feel comfortable to try something new is imperative.
- **Professionally trained facilitators** who are trained to cater to the specific needs of the group and can actively engage the young people with the programme.
- **Variety** of music for inclusivity.
- **Consistent Structure.** The creation of routine in the young people's week created a positive anticipation for the programme. Many students cited the weekly sessions as a highlight of their week.
- **Positive and welcoming atmosphere** is needed to foster enjoyment, excitement and engagement among the young people.
- **Building relationships based on trust** is essential.

The NCH Music in Mind Youth Programme engaged vulnerable young people, many of whom come from marginalised backgrounds who might not be able to access the necessary supports within their community, or nationally. Young people from such communities are at a higher risk of mental health difficulties, and experience higher levels of mental ill-health. This important programme had a positively transformative impact on those who participated in it, leading to personal growth, increased mood, enhanced collaborative skills, increase in self-confidence, and an overall improvement in their quality of life. Parents also remarked on the noticeable positive changes they saw in their children and their belief in the programme.

We are looking forward to building on the learnings from this iteration of the programme, extending our reach, so that even more can experience the many benefits of music on mental health and wellbeing.

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Introduction:

The NCH Music in Mind Youth Programme focuses on young people with mental health difficulties, or at increased risk of mental health difficulties. Building on and strengthening our existing network of partner organisations, this innovative and impactful programme was implemented throughout a range of child and youth populations throughout Ireland, each of which are at increased risk of mental health difficulties.

The NCH Music in Mind Youth Programme consists of a series of participative music workshops in percussion or singing. Each workshop series is of 8 weeks' duration and takes place twice per year in each centre. Each 8-week programme brought percussion or singing workshops to the service users of the community groups detailed below and aimed to improve the quality of life for people living with mental health difficulties, enhance mental wellbeing through group music playing, and provide social activity and new ways of self-expression.

The NCH Music in Mind Youth Programme has successfully been demonstrated to lead to positive outcomes in the following areas: positive feelings; expectation and hope; self-belief; abilities and skills; social support and networking; structure and organisation.

This iteration of the NCH Music in Mind Youth Programme, built on the learnings since its initial launch in 2015 of working within mental health, refugee and homeless sectors, and was provided mindful of the specific needs of each priority group. To support this the NCH met and worked in close collaboration with the partners across a range of sectors. Each partner already had an acute knowledge and expertise in supporting their specific target population. This collaborative process facilitated a vast range of populations to enjoy and benefit from the programme in a way that integrated their unique cultures and needs from the outset. In advance of the commencement of the programme, as with all Music in Mind programmes, the NCH met with each group co-ordinator with a view to ensuring that there was a clear understanding of the programme and that the needs of the specific youth group were integrated into the programme design.

As a core element of the first workshop, participants were also supported and facilitated in the creation of a comfort agreement. This helped to provide a sense of safety, empowerment and rapport while also ensuring that the participants voices and concerns were heard, addressed and built into the programme.

As a prerequisite for their engagement with the programme, all NCH facilitators had extensive experience working with community and marginalised groups and had completed mental health and trauma informed practice workshops addressing potential areas of challenge that may have emerged.

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Each programme is reflexive to the needs, culture and interests of the specific group. The participant needs of each group informed the content, pace and outcomes. Participants were encouraged to engage and participate at their own pace, understanding that participation can have many forms of expression. The programme facilitators tailored their approach to the cultural and individual needs of each group, and a regular check-in system ensured that any emerging concerns were flagged quickly and confidentially.

Impact of this programme was monitored by an evaluation process. The evaluation process was divided into 3 distinct sections across a set timeline:

1. Pre-Programme which assessed how participants were doing prior to commencement;
2. Weekly evaluations which showed their experience of the workshop and highlight any issues that might need attention between sessions;
3. Post-Programme in which feedback was obtained from all stakeholders following completion of the programme.

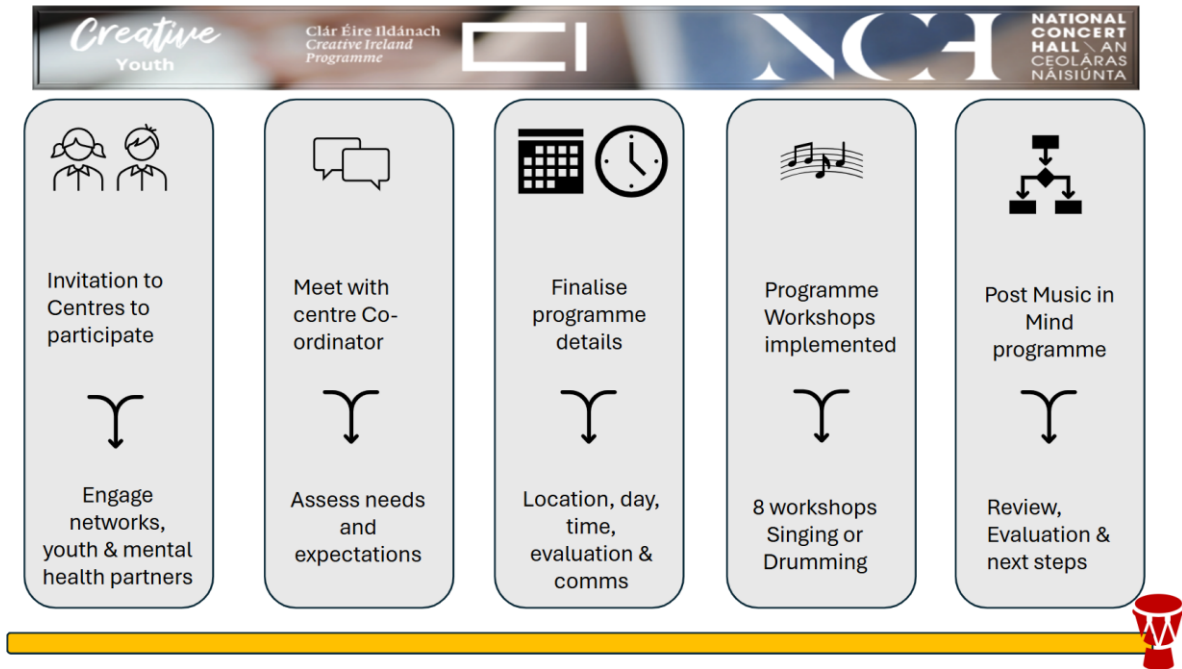
The feedback captured real-time responses and helped to monitor the progress of the Music in Mind Youth Programme, while also assessing its impact on the participants wellbeing.

In addition, participants completed a questionnaire detailing their satisfaction or otherwise with various aspects of the programme. The use of Plickers, an online technological tool that allows centre coordinators to survey their group without the need for participants to have individual devices, was a huge success as an evaluation tool. The anonymous aspect allowed for the young people to express themselves honestly, without fear of judgement. It also served to alert support staff or the facilitator of any emerging issues for any individual participant.

This report is reflective of the data obtained from the evaluations received from each participating centre and includes both qualitative and quantitative evidence of the efficacy of the programme.

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Outline of team and key participants; including the number of Creative Practitioners/Artists that received funding through this agreement;

The NCH Music in Mind Youth Programme is a collaborative initiative, between the NCH, mental health professionals, music facilitators, local coordinators and youth groups.



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The following youth groups participated in the programme over the period September 2023 – June 2025:

1. Carline Learning Centre, Peter McVerry Trust, Lucan, Co. Dublin
2. Finglas Youth Resource Centre, Finglas North, Dublin 11
3. Bonnybrook Youth Group, Darndale, Dublin 17
4. East Wicklow Youth Centre 'The Vault', Arklow, Co. Wicklow
5. Letterkenny Centre for Education (Youthreach centre) (NYCI), Co. Donegal
6. Oberstown Children Detention Campus, Lusk, Co. Dublin
7. No 4 Youth Service, Co. Galway
8. Mosney Village, Co. Meath
9. Child & Adolescence Mental Health Services Castlereagh, Co. Roscommon
10. PMVT Learning Centre, R804, Usher's Quay, Dublin 8



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NCH Music in Mind Youth Programme 2023-2025

Centre	No. of programmes	Total number of workshops	Participants per programme	Total number of engagements
Carline Learning Centre, Peter McVerry Trust	3	24	12	36
Finglas Youth Resource Centre	1	8	15	15
Bonnybrook Youth Group	4	32	15	60
East Wicklow Youth Service 'The Vault'	2	16	10	20
Letterkenny Centre for Education (Youthreach centre) (NYCI)	3	24	15	45
No 4 Youth Service Galway	1	8	15	15
Oberstown Children Detention Campus	10	80	2	20
Mosney Village	2	16	12	24

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Child & Adolescence Mental Health Services Castlerea, Roscommon	1	8	12	12
PMVT Learning Centre - CMS	1	8	12	12
Total	28	224	120	259

Programme	Centre	Programme
Autumn 23	Carline Learning Centre	Percussion
Spring 24	Mosney	Percussion
Spring 24	Finglas Youth Resource Centre	Percussion
Spring 24	Youthreach Letterkenny	Singing
Spring 24	Galway No 4	Percussion
Spring 24	Bonnybrook	Percussion
Spring 24	The Vault, East Wicklow Youth Service	Percussion
Spring 24	Carline Learning Centre	Percussion
Summer 24	Mosney	Singing
Summer 24	Bonnybrook	Percussion
Summer 24	Oberstown Group 1	Percussion
Summer 24	Oberstown Group 2	Percussion
Autumn 24	Carline Learning Centre	Percussion
Autumn 24	Bonnybrook	Percussion
Autumn 24	Youthreach Letterkenny	Singing
Autumn 24	Oberstown Group 1	Percussion
Autumn 24	Oberstown Group 2	Percussion
Extra 4 weeks	Oberstown Group 1	Percussion
Extra 4 weeks	Oberstown Group 2	Percussion
Spring 25	Bonnybrook	Percussion
Extra 2 weeks	Bonnybrook	Percussion
Spring 25	The Vault, East Wicklow Youth Service	Percussion
Spring 25	PMVT Learning Centre CMS	Percussion

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Spring 25	Oberstown Group 1	Percussion
Spring 25	Oberstown Group 2	Percussion
Spring 25	Youthreach Letterkenny	Singing

Summer 25	CAMHS Castlerea	Percussion
Summer 25	Oberstown Group 1	Percussion
Summer 25	Oberstown Group 2	Percussion

Outputs and outcomes:

Successes achieved:

The NCH Music in Mind Youth Programme was a positively transformative experience for the young people who participated in it. Local coordinators, facilitators and parents remarked on the improvement in the young people's collaborative skills, the growth in their self-confidence and abilities, and the overall improvement in their quality of life. Young people spoke about feeling energised, the new friends and connections they had made, and the confidence they now had to try new activities like community-based singing and public speaking.

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Positive Outcomes:

- **Improved Mood and Emotional Regulation:** Many students showed visible improvements in mood and engagement following each session, with music serving as a therapeutic outlet.
- **Increased Confidence:** Several participants grew more confident in performing, speaking, and collaborating with peers over the eight weeks. This was due to the kind and consistent persuasion from facilitators.
- **Social Connection:** The group format fostered a sense of belonging and peer support, contributing positively to participants' social development and interpersonal skills.
- **Enhanced Focus and Patience:** Learning musical instruments promoted focus, discipline, and perseverance, which are transferable skills to other areas of learning.

“It’s the one thing I really look forward to every week.”

“I didn’t think I’d be any good at music, but now I can play a few chords on the ukulele.”

“It helps me relax. I feel better after it.”

“Our facilitator makes it really fun and easy to learn.”

“I wish it could go on longer.”

The following feedback reflects the incredible impact the programme had on young people’s mental health and personal growth:

Adolescence Mental Health Services Castlerea, Roscommon:

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“Access to a safe space where they can socialise and communicate with peers saw new friendships established through participation in the group. Participating in the group boosted the confidence of the young people attending and it allowed young people an opportunity to learn a new skill. One young person was able to see the progress they had made from the start of the program to the end, commenting “I’m getting better” on their feedback form. Through music and rhyme positive mental health was fostered”.

“It was fun, and I learned new things”.

“I’m getting better”.

“Today’s session was good. I liked when I played my guitar, and we played the drums to remember the rhymes to do again to remember them”

Oberstown Children Detention Campus:

Due to the nature of Oberstown Children Detention Campus, the NCH Music in Mind Youth programme was altered to suitably fit the setting. Due to the strict security policy of the centre only 2 young people were permitted to participate in a workshop session, instead of a group of 15-20. For the 8-week duration of one programme, two workshop sessions were facilitated, and a total of 80 workshops took place over the 2-year period. The local coordinators were involved at every point, and this further highlighted that the commitment of coordinator is vital to the success of the programme. This centre serves as an example of how the NCH Music in Mind Youth Programme can be adapted to reflect the specific needs of any one group and the positive impact it can have in a very unique setting.

“There are many ways for young people’s voices to be heard in Oberstown and we continue to identify how to overcome barriers to young people’s accessibility to music programmes that they would not usually be available to young people that are from marginalised backgrounds.

Oberstown is committed to continually developing participation methods that are rights-based, with a view to ensuring that all young people have the opportunity to express their individuality through music and to have those views taken seriously and acted upon.

The NCH Music in Mind Youth Programme has emerged as a powerful platform for creative music arts and education. Its versatility and accessibility make it an ideal tool for creating inclusive and engaging learning experiences particularly for young people in Oberstown.

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The Music in Mind team were great at integrating creative content in collaboration with the young people and collaborative experiences through engagement, which is central to effective education, especially for young people in Oberstown who may feel disconnected for traditional classroom settings.

Overall, the project really worked well and gave the young people an experience they would not usually experience and peaked a new interest for them."



Bonnybrook Youth Group:

The NCH Music in Mind Youth Programme achieved particular success with the Bonnybrook Youth Group. The programme ran 4 times over the 2-year period, with a total of 32 workshops. In April 2025, the group of young people, their local coordinators, and the facilitator who has worked with them for 2 years came to the National Concert Hall for a Music in Mind Sharing Day. The excitement and nervous energy was infectious as they experienced a Gamelan workshop, followed by Samba drumming and topped off with a performance of their own compositions in front of a small crowd in the historic Kevin Barry Room. All parents said their child felt **“excited and proud”** to share their pieces at the National Concert Hall.

Key to the success of the programme:

- Strong local coordination and commitment.
- Clear alignment with programme goals.
- Youth voice central to implementation.
- High group cohesion and peer support.
- Safe, inclusive environment.
- Positive feedback from participants and parents.
- Ongoing collaboration with NCH.

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Since finishing the programme, Bonnybrook have continued to carry the positive momentum forward. They have held a fundraising event to raise funds to continue the programme and started a mentorship programme to offer guidance and support to other young people in the youth centre.

Key ingredients to a successful programme:

- The creation of a **safe space** is essential – It was noted that a few students initially struggled with low self-confidence, which at times hindered their willingness to fully participate, especially in group singing or solo activities. Creating a safe space where they feel comfortable to try something new is imperative.
- **Professionally trained facilitators** who are trained to cater to the specific needs of the group and can actively engage the young people with the programme
- **Variety** of music for inclusivity.
- **Consistent Structure.** The creation of routine in the young people's week created a positive anticipation for the programme. Many students cited the weekly sessions as a highlight of their week.
- **Positive and welcoming atmosphere** is needed to foster enjoyment, excitement and engagement among the young people.
- **Building relationships based on trust** is essential.

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Challenges:

In advance of the implementation of the NCH Music in Mind Youth Programme, a significant amount of time was spent contacting, meeting with, engaging in online information meetings and collaborating with individual groups and national networks by the NCH and the mental health professionals. In addition to the youth groups who took part in the programme (as outlined above), the following organisations were also invited to engage and participate:

- National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) (Network)
- YMCA
- BeLong to (LGBTQIA+)
- ISPCC

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- IPAS
- Barnardo's
- Belvedere Youth Service
- Dublin City Council and
- Dublin City Council Culture Company
- NOSP's (National Office for Suicide Prevention) network of funded services
- HSE aftercare services
- YAP (Youth Advocate Programme)
- Crosscare
- Focus Ireland
- National Traveller Women's Forum
- Faroige
- Lucena Clinics
- HSE CAMHS services
- HSE addiction services
- City of Dublin ETB's, regional youth reach,
- TUSLA
- The Irish Kidney Association

Many of the groups experienced multiple challenges, these challenges varied from cohort to cohort. For some the challenge related to the constant turnover of young people within the group. For others a bigger group seemed to pose greater challenges for the local coordinator. Maintaining consistent commitment of the coordinator/ staff, was also a challenge. With regards to the young people engaged in homeless services, the level of dysregulation and chaos within their lives, their additional needs, sensitivities (e.g. auditory), levels of trust ETC. posed challenges.

For some groups the interest seemed to be more in providing activities to keep the young people busy. For some groups it was clear that they did not have enough resources to provide for local coordination, child protection aspects, follow up and engagement with the NCH. Going forward it would be important to verify that there is capacity and commitment locally to provide for the complexities of the programme within a particular group of young people. Alternatively having funding in place to support the coordination role might be something what considering.

As outlined in the SLA, the NCH stated it would engage with the following cohorts:

1. Children and young people living with a diagnosis of End Stage Kidney Disease (ESKD).
2. Refugees and asylum-seekers; i.e. living in IPAS locations

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3. LGBTQIA+ community
4. Traveller community
5. Young people within, or transitioning from, the care system.

Throughout the engagement process it became evident that each of the above youth group had specific needs, which would require the programme be definitively tailored to them if they were to successfully participate in it. For individual reasons distinct to each group, the NCH was unsuccessful in implementing the Music in Mind Youth Programme within these youth groups.

The Irish Kidney Association (IKA):

Over six months of focused work went into working to make it possible for the programme to be provided to young people affected by end stage kidney disease. This included the development of an Expression of Interest (EOI) which was disseminated widely throughout the Irish Kidney Associations network of regional branches, its network of partners and associated hospitals and allied services. In addition to seeking the young people's level of interest in the programme, the EOI captured details such as the specific locations, availability, travel requirements, needs and potential challenges that might need to be addressed to realise the programmes implementation.

While the outcomes from the EOI clearly indicated that there was interest in the programme, it also highlighted a number of significant challenges that would need to be addressed in order to make the programme a viable option i.e. the geographical spread of the young people was significant, the young people had treatment needs (e.g. dialysis) that impacted on their ability to be able to engage on specific days. Despite integrating flexible and creative approaches towards implementation of the programme, unfortunately it was not possible to make it viable. Should the opportunity arise again into the future and there was a greater lead in time there would be potential to implement the programme if the group size was smaller.

LGBTQIA+ community:

To engage members of the LGBTQIA+ community meetings were held online with groups such as BeLong to. In the case of these groups while there was clear interest and enthusiasm from these organisations, there was also a reticence among the young people to participate due to fears regarding their privacy etc.

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Traveller community:

Engagement with members of the Travelling community came in many forms both through the established NCH networks and local contacts, including the Chaplin. While there was enthusiasm and there is potential going forward, substantial early preparatory work would be required to cultivate relationships, build trust, grow a sense of partnership, and to assess the needs of the young people.

Refugees and asylum seekers:

With regards to refugees and asylum seekers, the challenge was implementing the programme in a sustainable way as the precarious nature of their circumstances results in constant change, moving, uncertainty, etc. To successfully run the programme in centres working with this community, it is recommended that the programme run for a shorter period of 4 weeks, multiple times per year as this may be more beneficial and inclusive for the needs of this community.



A summary of the Project evaluation

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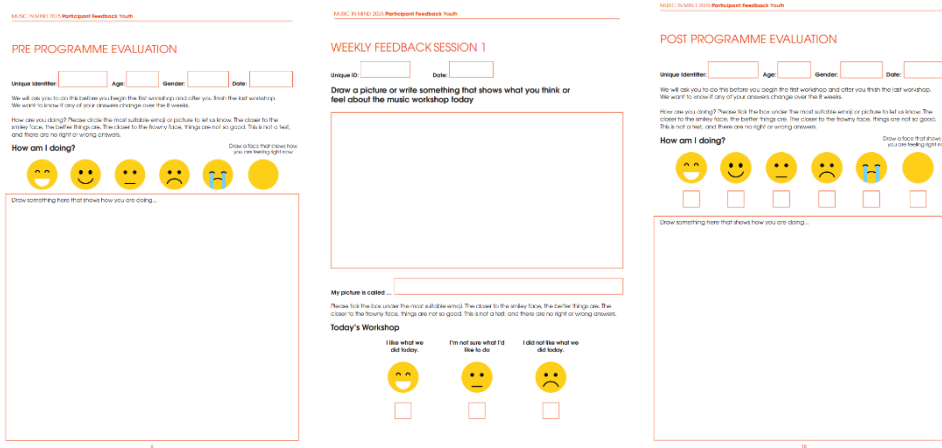
The voice of the young person is at the heart of the NCH Music in Mind Youth Programme. Understanding how they are feeling and allowing for those feelings to be expressed throughout the programme is of the utmost importance. The NCH Music in Mind Youth Programme employed an evaluation system built around the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS). This scale was developed “to enable the measuring of mental wellbeing in the general population and the evaluation of projects, programmes and policies which aim to improve mental wellbeing.” The scale has been widely used nationally and internationally for monitoring and evaluating projects and programmes and investigating the determinants of mental wellbeing.

The WEMWBS is a “before and after” scale that measures improvements or otherwise in people’s wellbeing over a specific period (in this case the duration of the 8-week series).

Impact of this programme was monitored by an evaluation process. The evaluation process was divided into 3 distinct sections across a set timeline:

4. Pre-Programme which assessed how participants were doing prior to commencement;
5. Weekly evaluations which showed their experience of the workshop and highlighted any issues that might need attention between sessions;
6. Post-Programme in which feedback was obtained from all stakeholders following completion of the programme.

Evaluation forms:



The feedback captured real-time responses and helped to monitor the progress of the Music in Mind Youth Programme, while also assessing its impact on the

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participants wellbeing. It provided the opportunity for the participants voices to remain central to the programme.

In addition, participants completed a questionnaire detailing their satisfaction or otherwise with various aspects of the programme. The use of Plickers, an online technological tool that allows centre coordinators to survey their group without the need for participants to have individual devices, was a huge success as an evaluation tool. The anonymous aspect to it allowed for the young people to express themselves honestly, without fear of judgement. It also served to alert support staff or the facilitator of any emerging issues for any individual participant. Plickers was used as an evaluation tool in Bonnybrook Youth Group only.

The local coordinators completed end of programme evaluation forms which provided invaluable feedback and recommendations for future iterations of the programme.

The facilitators completed weekly reflective journals which included open prompts to allow for open, honest answers. These journals also served as a means of assessing how the programme was going and what changes could be made to it on a weekly basis.

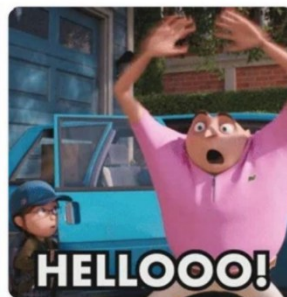
Put up your card to let us know you are here today



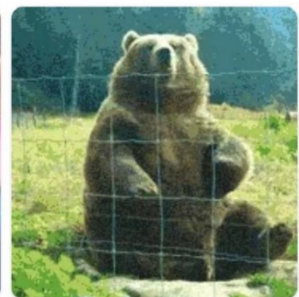
A



B



C







D

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Tell us how you feel about participating in today's workshop

 <p>I'm Excited</p> <p>A</p>	 <p>I'm not bothered</p> <p>B</p>	 <p>I don't want to be here</p> <p>C</p>	 <p>I'm tired</p> <p>D</p>
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Did you learn much about yourself during the programme?

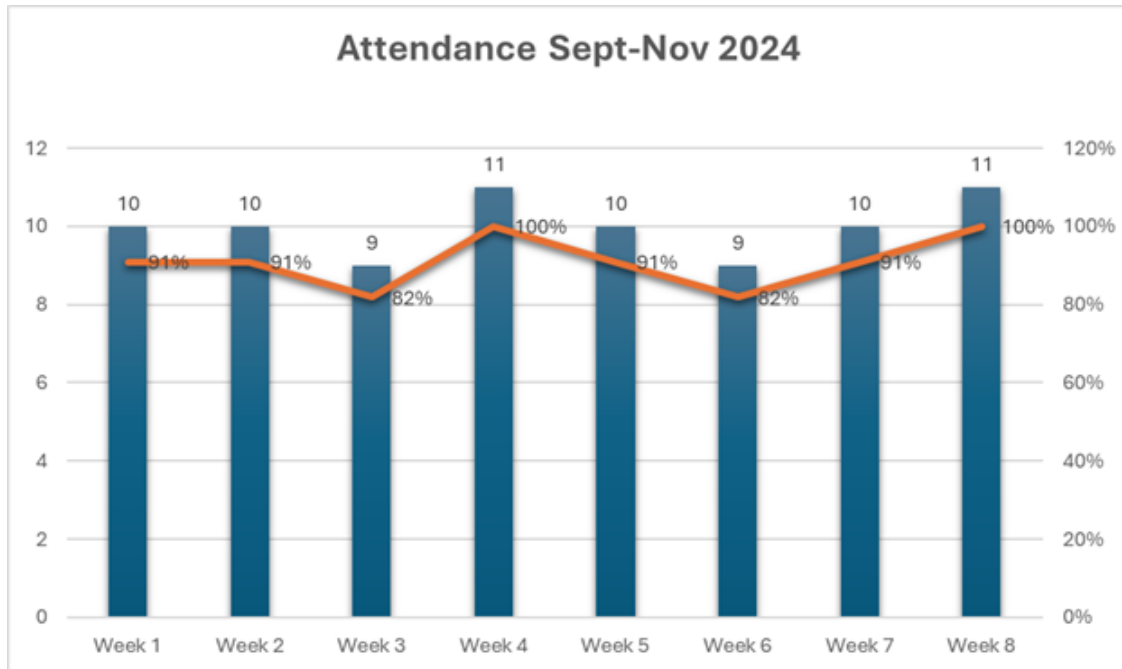
- A** I learned nothing
- B** I learned a little
- C** I learned a lot

**Plickers outcomes:
September 2024-December 2024**

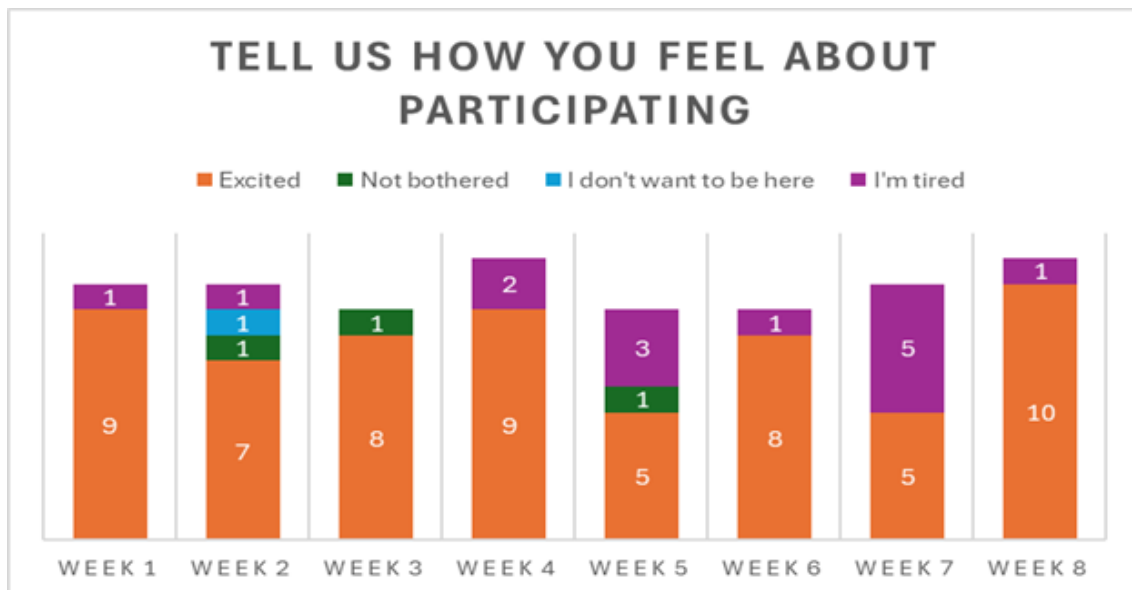
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Number of participants: 11

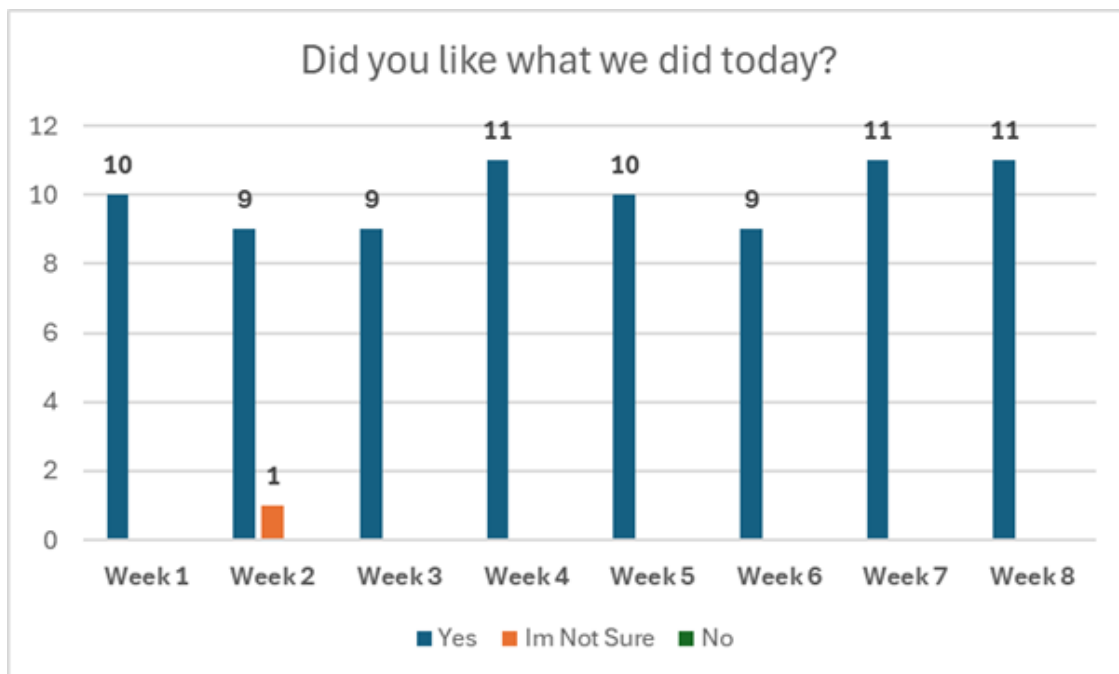
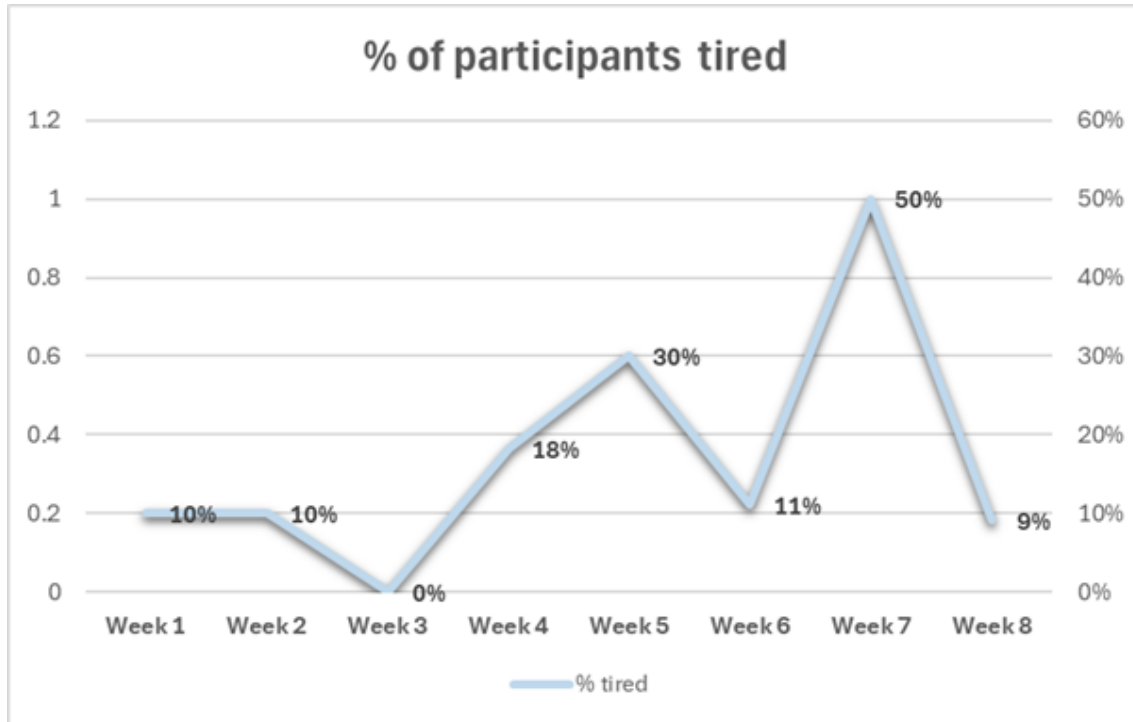


There is a significant high rate of consistency of attendance throughout the full programme of Music in Mind (82-100%).



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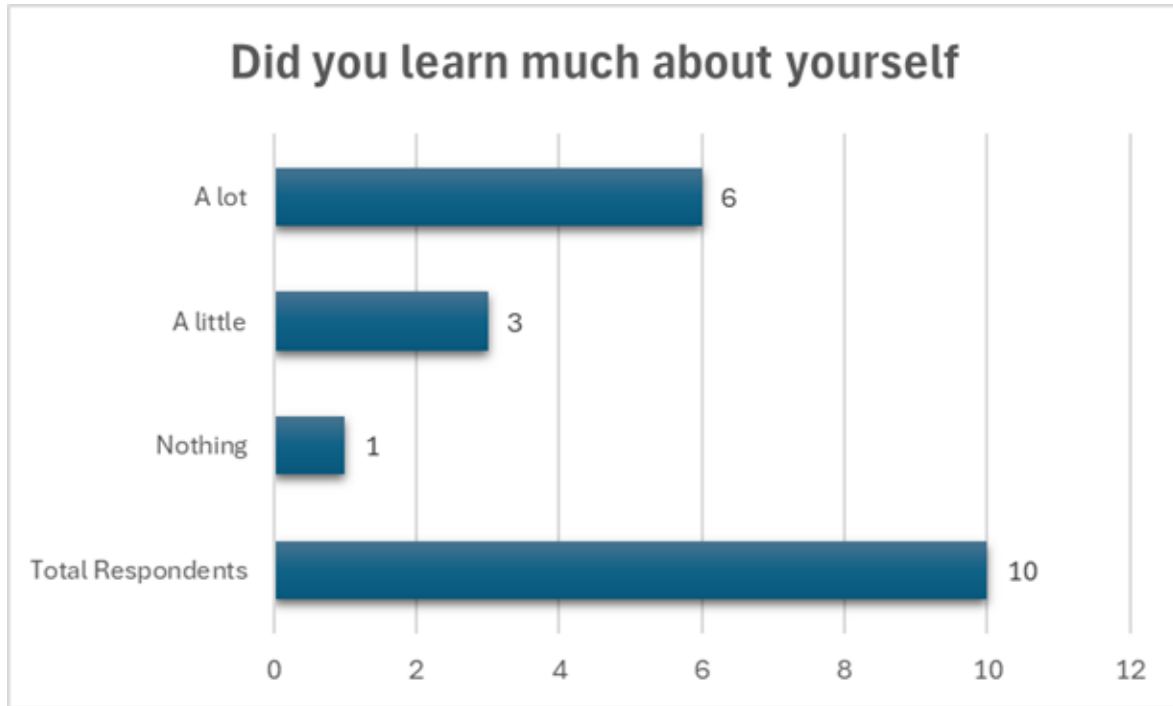
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At the end of the 8 weeks participants were asked if they had learned much about themselves over the course of the programme. The following outlines the responses.

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Do you think others might enjoy Music in Mind? 100% said 'Yes'

Would you be interested in doing the programme again: 100% said 'Yes'

The East Wicklow Youth Service 'The Vault' participants with their certificates of participation



Any relevant findings

Key Considerations and Recommendations for Future Programme Enhancement

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1. Ensure tailored, trauma-informed, and culturally sensitive delivery

The diverse and often vulnerable nature of the young people engaged in the programme necessitates a delivery model that is flexible, trauma-informed, recovery-oriented, and culturally attuned.

Recommendations:

There is no one-size-fits-all approach. Programmes must be delivered at the group's pace, avoid undue pressure or exposure, and reflect the unique needs of each group.

2. Allocate adequate preparation time for networking and planning

The initial timeline for the current programme was short, compromising trust-building and effective engagement with vulnerable populations.

Recommendations:

- Include a dedicated **preparatory phase** in the planning and budgeting process.
- Ensure sufficient time is allocated at the outset to build relationships and networks with partners and services.
- Enhance current **promotional materials** to include additional media i.e. videos (e.g., videos promoting the programme and demonstrating the use of Plickers etc.)
- Allow time for services to **advertise and recruit without urgency**.
- Use this phase to **gather feedback and adapt** the programme to meet emerging needs.

3. Further enhance young people's voices in programme design

To ensure relevance and engagement, young people must continue to be involved from the outset, and ways should be explored for this to be further developed.

Recommendations:

- Take further steps in the recommended preparatory phase to integrate young people's voices in the **design, planning, and implementation** of each programme to the greatest extent possible, while considering the realities of the programme structure.
- Consider further opportunities for expanding **ongoing feedback**.

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- Ensure facilitators continue to be prepared to be responsive to youth input and choices.

4. Provide flexible programme duration options

Some young people struggle to commit to programmes, particularly when above 4 weeks.

Recommendations:

- Offer choice: both **4-week and 8-week programme options**.
- Explore opportunities to accommodate services with **high turnover rates** (e.g., refugee or homeless services).

5. Allow for smaller group sizes based on need

Standard group sizes aren't always suitable, especially in high-need environments.

Recommendations:

- Provide flexibility in group sizes, especially for those with complex needs (e.g., residential centres, young people with medical conditions).
- Recognise that **smaller groups can enhance engagement, safety, and inclusion**.
- Plan and budget for a **limited number of small-group cohorts**.

6. Strengthen communication and shared understanding

Clear, consistent communication of programme values and requirements is essential.

Recommendations:

- Reinforce key values (e.g., trauma-informed, recovery-focused) during **initial and ongoing coordinator meetings**.
- Strengthen and consider additional **structured feedback mechanisms** to highlight and address emerging challenges at the earliest opportunity.
- Ensure clear communication of the coordinator role, child protection responsibilities, and evaluation expectations.

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7. Deepen stakeholder engagement and understanding

Misunderstanding of programme purpose can hinder effective engagement in line with the programme aims.

Recommendations:

- Continue to emphasise that the programme is **not a drop-in or recreational activity**, but a **participative, structured intervention** aimed at:
 - Supporting positive mental health and enhanced quality of life outcomes
 - Building self-esteem and self-efficacy
 - Enhancing sustained engagement

8. Introduce optional taster sessions

Some young people are hesitant to commit without understanding what the programme entails.

Recommendations:

- Offer **introductory taster sessions** before full commitment is required (case by case basis).
- Use the session to:
 - Build rapport
 - Explore musical preferences
 - Identify any immediate barriers
- Acknowledge that some groups may not continue after the taster; plan accordingly.

9. Standardise the use of pickers for evaluation

Pickers proved engaging, fun and respectful of confidentiality.

Recommendations:

- Adopt and build on the use of **Pickers as the standard evaluation tool**.
- Allocate budget for **licensing** and **training**.
- Create a **video resource** to demonstrate its use.
- **Integrate Pickers training** into coordinator preparation.

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10. Expand facilitator support and training

Facilitators working with vulnerable youth need ongoing support and development.

Recommendations:

- Schedule **regular facilitator check-ins** and peer learning forums.
- Provide as a core element of the programme access to **one-to-one support** if challenges arise.
- Expand training to include:
 - Cultural awareness
 - Neurodiversity
 - Working with hard-to-reach youth
- Reinforce the importance and requirement for development of **Comfort Agreements** as dynamic tools that evolve with the group.

11. Enhance pre-evaluation tools

Understanding participants' musical preferences can improve engagement.

Recommendation:

- Add a **music preference question** to the pre-evaluation form, possibly using a drop-down list.

12. Address local resource gaps

Inconsistent staffing and facilities can limit programme safety, effectiveness and implementation.

Recommendations:

- Allocate **designated funding for local coordinators**.
- Ensure each centre commits to consistent **child protection** and **participant support**.

13. Ensure suitable programme locations

Inadequate or unsuitable spaces negatively impact participation.

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Recommendation:

- Create a **small fund** to support groups to **rent appropriate venues** if necessary.

Insights from Implementation

How Relationships Were Cultivated

Relationship-building was tailored to each group:

- **Irish Kidney Association:** 6 months of engagement, expression of interest circulated nationally. Despite challenges, groundwork laid for future success.
- **LGBTQIA+ groups:** Initial interest strong; concerns about privacy suggest smaller groups might improve participation.
- **Travelling Community:** Requires long-term relationship-building and trust. A taster session could help establish rapport.
- **Refugee Youth:** Frequent move on and relocation disrupted continuity. Shorter, programmes (i.e. 4-week programme) may improve accessibility.

Groups Facing Most Challenges

- **Homeless youth and refugees:** High instability, sensory sensitivities, inconsistent participation.
- **Centres with limited staff:** Struggled to meet safeguarding and coordination needs.
- Some groups were more interested/focused on diversionary activities rather than an evaluated programme.

Recommendation:

Continue to assess each group's **readiness and capacity** prior to programme commencement. Where possible, **offer funding or additional support** to ensure proper implementation.

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Conclusion:

The NCH's Music in Mind Youth Programme focused on young people with mental health difficulties, or at increased risk of mental health difficulties. Building on and strengthening our existing network of partner organisations, this innovative and impactful programme was implemented throughout a range of child and youth populations throughout Ireland, each of which are at increased risk of mental health difficulties. The programme took place from Autumn 2023 – Summer 2025 in 10 youth and outreach centres, across 6 counties and engaged 259 young people aged 12-24.

The voice of the young person is at the heart of the NCH Music in Mind Youth Programme. Understanding how they are feeling and allowing for those feelings to be expressed throughout the programme is of the utmost importance. The NCH Music in Mind Youth Programme employed an evaluation system built around the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS). The WEMWBS is a "before and after" scale that measures improvements or otherwise in people's wellbeing over a specific period (in this case the duration of the 8-week series).

Impact of this programme was monitored by an evaluation process. The evaluation process was divided into 3 distinct sections across a set timeline:

1. Pre-Programme which assessed how participants were doing prior to commencement;
2. Weekly evaluations which showed their experience of the workshop and highlighted any issues that might need attention between sessions;
3. Post-Programme in which feedback was obtained from all stakeholders following completion of the programme.

This report is reflective of the data obtained from the evaluations and includes both qualitative and quantitative evidence of the efficacy of the programme.

The data identified the key ingredients to make this programme a success going forward.

Key ingredients for a successful programme:

- The creation of a **safe space** is essential – It was noted that a few students initially struggled with low self-confidence, which at times hindered their willingness to fully participate, especially in group singing or solo activities. Creating a safe space where they feel comfortable to try something new is imperative.

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- **Professionally trained facilitators** who are trained to cater to the specific needs of the group and can actively engage the young people with the programme
- **Variety** of music for inclusivity.
- **Consistent Structure.** The creation of routine in the young people's week created a positive anticipation for the programme. Many students cited the weekly sessions as a highlight of their week.
- **Positive and welcoming atmosphere** is needed to foster enjoyment, excitement and engagement among the young people.
- **Building relationships based on trust** is essential.

Key recommendations:

- Ensure tailored, trauma-informed, and culturally sensitive delivery
- Allocate adequate preparation time for networking and planning
- Further enhance young people's voices in programme design
- Provide flexible programme duration options
- Strengthen communication and shared understanding
- Deepen stakeholder engagement and understanding
- Introduce optional taster sessions
- Standardise the use of pickers for evaluation
- Expand facilitator support and training
- Enhance pre-evaluation tools
- Address local resource gaps
- Ensure suitable programme locations

A sincere thank you to Creative Ireland for their support and belief in this transformative programme and its impact on the young people of Ireland. We believe this programme has had transformative impact on those who have engaged with us. We are looking forward to the next iteration of the programme, building on the learnings and key recommendations gained, and bringing the magic of music to more young people throughout Ireland.

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Participant Feedback form:

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NÁISIÚNTA

MUSIC IN MIND 2025

Participant Feedback
Youth

Unique Identifier:

Clár Éire Ildánach
Creative Ireland
Programme

nch.ie NCH Registered Charity Number: 20011987

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Plickers Pilot Questions:

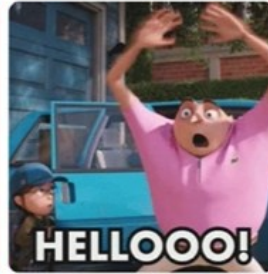
Put up your card to let us know you are here today



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Facilitator Reflective Journal:

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Music in Mind Facilitator Reflective Journal Spring 2025

The purpose of this journal is to allow you to record your thoughts, observations and feelings on each music session with your Music in Mind workshop participants. This can be recorded as rough notes, key words – whatever suits you best. Try to complete the reflection as soon as you can. It should take no more than five minutes. We have left the statements very open so you can respond in any way that you want. There are no right or wrong responses.

We will use your notes to reflect on how the programme is going, and they may form part of presentations, articles, or online media that we create on the Music in Mind programme. We will never attribute comments to a particular facilitator.

If issues arise during the workshops that cannot be addressed on a local level, please let us know by contacting Lucie at education@nchi.ie or 01 417 0054.

1. Facilitator Name
2. Centre Name
3. Session Number
4. What worked well in today's session...
5. What didn't work so well in today's session...
6. I noticed...
7. Next time I would...
8. In one word describe your experience of the session today

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Coordinator end of programme evaluation form:

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MUSIC IN MIND 2024 **Participant Feedback**

Coordinator Evaluation Form

Name: **Centre:**

Date:

Music in Mind is a participative music programme which was developed to provide people with mental health difficulties the opportunity to play music in an enjoyable and participative way. We would appreciate your honest feedback on the programme; such feedback is critical to the future development of the *Music in Mind* project.

Answers will be compiled as group feedback except where we take an individual quote. In such cases all quotes will be anonymised and nobody will be named in any report of findings. **Many thanks for your cooperation.**

1. What worked well in *Music in Mind*, in your opinion?

.....

2. What did not work so well in *Music in Mind*, in your opinion?

.....

3. Did *Music in Mind* achieve the following objectives, in your opinion?

1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree

- | | | |
|------|--|-----------|
| I. | Improve the quality of life of participants through active engagement with music | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| II. | Enhance mental wellbeing through group music playing/singing | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| III. | Provide social activity and new ways of self expression | 1 2 3 4 5 |

4. In your opinion, how did participants experience *Music in Mind*:

- | | | |
|------|--|-----------|
| I. | Participants found <i>Music in Mind</i> enjoyable | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| II. | Participants found the programme of benefit creatively | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| III. | Participants found the programme of benefit to them socially | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| IV. | Participants found the programme of benefit to their mental health and wellbeing | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| V. | The programme facilitated participant networking | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| VI. | I would recommend the programme to others | 1 2 3 4 5 |

We welcome any further comment or suggestions in relation to the participants' experience that might demonstrate the impact of the programme eg: increased engagement with the service, improved confidence etc:

.....

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Evaluation outcomes Spring/Summer 2024:

**Music in Mind Evaluation outcomes
 Youth Nurture Fund Spring/Summer 2024**

The following is an overview of the Centres engaged in Youth Music in Mind in Spring/summer 2024 and the evaluations received:

Programme	Centre	Evaluation Packs Received	Singing / Drumming
Spring 24	Mosney	11	Drumming
Summer 24	Mosney	13	Singing
Spring 24	Finglas Youth Resource Centre	10	Drumming
Spring 24	Youthreach Letterkenny	16	Singing
Spring 24	Galway No 4 (<i>Adult Pack</i>)	14	Drumming
Spring 24	Bonnybrook	12	Drumming
Summer 24	Bonnybrook (<i>Pilot -pickers</i>)*	---	Drumming
Spring 2024	Carline (no evaluation packs completed)	0	D
Total		76 (62 Youth+14 Adult packs)	

*Outcomes captured separately within pickers

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