



Case studies: How can the arts and creativity support people who are shielding or vulnerable during Covid-19?

Project: Muso Baby
Organisation: Manchester Museum
Region: North West England

Introduction

Working with music therapist Rachel Swanick, the aim of Muso Baby was to deliver a therapeutic intervention in a non-clinical setting; for mothers experiencing or at risk of anxiety or post-natal depression and their babies, who might not normally access this kind of support or visit a museum. With referral from local health visitors and other partners, families attended a series of interactive music and sensory play sessions at the museum with the aim of developing resilience and confidence to seek further support for their own wellbeing. When the museum closed due to Covid virus, the sessions moved online as Muso Baby Virtual! delivered through a closed facebook page every Tuesday morning and open to all. A live chat between 10-11am led by Rachel provides a safe forum for parents to share particular challenges they may be facing and to offer each other emotional support. This is followed by a live music session aimed at supporting participation, attachment and family wellbeing which is



'My daughter is five and adopted and she LOVES the sessions! We are working through her attachment issues. Online works because she doesn't feel self-conscious about being older than everyone else. She regresses a bit in the sessions and just enjoys being my baby. So, thank you - it is the highlight of our week.'

then posted on the page for families to access at any time. Ideas for craft activities and guided meditations are added to further support and build relationships with families.

Funders

Manchester Museum

Who is it for?

Muso Baby/ Muso Baby Virtual

Parents – particularly mothers - experiencing or at risk of anxiety or post-natal depression and their babies, who might not normally access therapeutic support or visit a museum.

What outcomes were/are you aiming for?

As Muso Baby is run by a trained music therapist, there are clear therapeutic and social outcomes for the sessions – both face to face and online. Themes such as combating stigma , isolation, improving emotional health, bond with babies, attunement resilience, change in long term behaviours and development are all part of the Muso Baby ethos.

A further aim of Muso Baby was to deliver a therapeutic intervention in a non-clinical setting for mothers experiencing or at risk of anxiety or post-natal depression and their babies, who might not normally access this kind of support or visit a museum. developing resilience and confidence to seek further support for their own wellbeing.

Where is it happening?

As the face to face sessions are now online due to Covid, we run a closed Facebook group. This has enabled us to open up the sessions to families across the U.K and globally (for example Russia and British Columbia) who have access to Facebook, as well as our core audience in Greater Manchester.

Are you working in partnership?

Muso Baby is part of a social prescribing portfolio developed by Manchester Museum and builds on a collaborative cross sector approach to delivering arts and health and early years programmes over a number of years.

In order to reach more vulnerable families, we have worked with and promoted the programme through our partnerships with health professionals and community organisations, including: local health visitors; GP surgeries; the perinatal and infant mental health visitor champions group (Greater Manchester) for whom we have hosted meetings at the museum (and have recently contributed to their online blog, Voices); maternal mental health teams across the city including hosting Maternal Mental Health Week activities led by Wythenshawe Hospital's specialist perinatal team (2019).

Other partner organisations we work with include local children's centres; Wood Street Mission (supporting local families in poverty); Home Start Manchester; City of Sanctuary (supporting refugee and asylum seeker families); local neighbourhood teams (who have promoted the programme through their Facebook pages and newsletters); The Whitworth and Manchester Art gallery.

For sessions at the museum, families were referred from health and children's centre partners and we have continued to promote the online sessions through all our partnerships to increase reach and access.

How many people took/are taking part?

The switch to online delivery has seen a shift in the nature and reach of the sessions; from providing intensive music therapy and emotional support to usually about 6 families in sessions based at the museum, to providing more generic support to a growing and wider audience of nearly 200 families (nationally and globally). At the peak of lockdown, Muso Baby videos were being viewed up to 1000 times, with each session averaging 30 live participants and a further 40 views of the recorded session per week. As lockdown has eased, each session is viewed approximately 60 times per week.

For how long has it been happening?

We began piloting the Muso baby sessions at the museum in April/May 2019 and since then the sessions have been delivered online through a closed Facebook page weekly since April. Sessions will continue through the online platform at least until September, the earliest the museum will be opening to visitors. It is likely that they will continue online beyond September and we will use them as a bridge for welcoming smaller groups of more vulnerable families into the museum in collaboration with our partners.

What were/are the main outputs?

The intention has been to deliver a weekly live chat and music session of Muso Baby Virtual through a closed Facebook page. The live music sessions are then posted as a video for

families to access at any time and craft activities and meditations are added as resources in the week to help build relationships with families.

Evaluation:

Muso Baby Virtual has engaged families locally, nationally and globally.

General feedback through the comments on the live chat sessions suggests that they have helped to support families experiencing particular challenges at this time, including: families with young children who at the same time are home schooling older siblings; families who are feeling isolated and who may not have the support of other adults in the household.

Feedback from local partners suggests that the sessions have helped to raise the profile of the museum for delivering well-being activities. We hope that this will open up more opportunities to collaborate with the health sector in the future and that the virtual sessions may translate into more actual visits to the museum when it reopens, particularly for those families who may not have visited us before.

Feedback:

One of our parents commented,

“My daughter is five and adopted and she LOVES the sessions! We are working through her attachment issues. Online works because she doesn't feel self-conscious about being older than everyone else. She regresses a bit in the sessions and just enjoys being my baby. So, thank you - it is the highlight of our week.”

What have been the challenges and successes for you?

Muso Baby is based on a key principle of music therapy: the use of music to promote positive attachment through affect attunement. Since lockdown started in the UK, the sessions are now online. This is a big shift in practice – going from working with natural parent-infant interactions on a small scale (we usually have no more than 6 families in each session) to providing more generic music and discussion, to often nearly 200 people around the globe. One of the most noticeable changes is in audience: not only are many more people engaging with Muso Baby, but even though the sessions are ‘live’, there isn’t a visual audience and not seeing the children singing and dancing along means that the music has lost its adaptability. This is difficult for the practitioner and may be unusual for the families watching. As humans, we have a need to interact with others in an interpersonal way.

During lockdown, more people are actively engaging in crafts, exercise, nature and music to feel better and give them a focus in uncertainty, but what is the link between creating something and feeling emotionally well and how do we as mental health and creative practitioners foster this? If you have a good sense of resilience, then you are able to change negative thinking in to positive action.

Not being able to offer the sessions in the museum has obviously undermined one of our original aims which was; to be able to offer the social and wellbeing benefits of being in a gallery space, as well as those associated with a sense of connection with nature – in this case, through our natural history displays. However, as we approach the ‘New Normal’, we hope we can build on our raised profile with health partners (through the online sessions) and actively

encourage greater use of our cultural spaces when they reopen to deliver more therapeutic and accessible wellbeing interventions.

Further information

Muso Baby Virtual!

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/241962876969206/>

<https://ihv.org.uk/news-and-views/voices/muso-baby-using-cultural-places-as-pioneering-spaces-to-support-parent-and-infant-relationships/>

<https://mmhellofuture.wordpress.com/2020/04/29/muso-baby-virtual/>

<https://mmhellofuture.wordpress.com/2020/05/28/muso-baby-virtual-a-therapists-perspective/>

Manchester Museum in Quarantine

Manchester Museum aims to use its collection of 4.5 million objects to inspire visitors of all ages to learn about the natural world and human cultures, past and present. As part of a capital redevelopment project **hello future** we are exploring ways of working more collaboratively to become more inclusive, imaginative and relevant to the diverse communities we serve. When the museum closed due to Covid 19 we moved activities and programmes to an online platform **MM in Quarantine**: including exhibitions; live regular broadcasts with museum curators; our parent and baby programme Muso Baby; resources for families, educators and carers.