

Case studies: How have culture and creativity been supporting people in health, care and other institutions during the Covid-19 pandemic?

Project: Massage & Melodies

Organisation: Music in Hospitals & Care

Region: National (UK) – project in London

Designed for: Neonatal care

Introduction

We're a charity that improves the health and wellbeing of children and adults through the healing power of live music.

"One of the reasons it was so helpful is that when you've had a premature baby you're tied into this really medical model and you become a parent through medicine. It's not how you are meant to become a parent. Something like massage and lullabies which are typical parenting activities are able to make it a little bit more normal and a little bit nicer but also give the advice and strategies that I wanted everybody to have."

Every year, our professional musicians share live music with over 100,000 people from across the UK, who may not otherwise get to experience it. This includes those living with dementia, who have mental health problems, or who are seriously ill.

Massage & Melodies is an initiative conceived by Emily Hills Neonatal Occupational Therapist and delivered in partnership with Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust, Imperial Health Charity and Music in Hospitals & Care.

The project aims to use the positive sensory experiences of touch and music to relax both parents and baby, promoting connection, communication, sleep and digestion. This first group has been facilitated by Emily Hills OT and supported by Emma Stevens, singer songwriter and Music in Hospitals & Care musician, with Imperial Health Charity supporting safeguarding needs alongside Music in Hospitals & Care staff.

Funders

Partners

Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust & Imperial Health Charity.

Who is it for?

Babies and their families who have recently been discharged from the neonatal unit from Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust hospitals.

Are these people you have worked with before, or new participants?

Whilst it reaches families with babies in neonatal units who we would usually work with, it focuses on families who have recently been discharged and are at home which we haven't done before.

How many people took/are taking part?

Six families have taken part in the pilot course.

Where is it happening?

For how long has it been happening?

The pilot started on 21 August and finished on 11 September. We are currently planning the next course.

What were/are the main outputs?

Four Zoom sessions on Friday mornings for 45 minutes. Each week, Occupational Therapist Emily Hills led a baby massage session which was accompanied by lullabies performed by musician Emma Stevens. The different weeks focussed on different types of massage, and the families could request their favourite songs to be performed the following week.

What outcomes were/are you aiming for?

- Facilitate improved parent and child connection
- Increase parents' confidence in baby massage techniques
- Soothing and relaxing for babies and parents
- Provide opportunities for parents to interact with other families from home during the pandemic
- Health benefits for babies: sleep, digestion, communication

Have you adapted existing work to make this happen? If so, how?

Massage & Melodies is a further development of the Lullaby Hour programme which has been delivered in hospitals across the UK since 2017. These sessions take place in Neonatal and children's critical care units. The programme was developed originally at Freeman Hospital Children's Heart Unit where often children and babies were just too poorly to participate in daytime music sessions. After work with the play specialist, we decided to try out early evening bedside sessions to help children settle and Lullaby Hour was born. In addition to Massage & Melodies, since lockdown started we have also been broadcasting weekly Lullaby Hour sessions publicly on Facebook Live.

Evaluation & Feedback

We collected informal feedback during the sessions and sent out a survey, which five out of six families completed. We also conducted interviews with the delivery team for the project (Emily Hills OT and Emma Stevens – Musician).

Overall, the 5 parents 'strongly agree' with these session benefits to their babies

Q - How far do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Strongly agree Agree Neither agree or disagree Disagree Strongly disagree



The 5 parents were even more likely to 'strongly agree' with these session benefits to themselves

Q - How far do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Strongly agree Agree Neither agree or disagree Disagree Strongly disagree



92% of parent ratings on the good quality of the sessions were 'strongly agree'

Q - How far do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Strongly agree Agree Neither agree or disagree Disagree Strongly disagree

The session was of a good quality 92% 8%

From parents:

“My baby has colic but I've noticed a vast improvement since using these massage techniques”

“It was very helpful, my baby really enjoyed it and the music and massage put her to sleep”

“I feel so much more confident in massaging my baby (was scared I would hurt her before!) I also enjoyed meeting other parents as it's hard to form connections these days due to COVID.”

From Emily Hills, Neonatal Occupational Therapist:

“The really successful moments are when Emma asks parents to choose a song that means something to the family. That had such a response from the parents and it was really interesting asking them afterwards ‘why is that song so special to you?’. There was one mum who chose something from My Fair Lady. Really random! She said ‘When I was pregnant one Saturday afternoon we watched My Fair Lady and my baby went mental, really enjoying and dancing around.’ Then they played it to her in the neonatal unit and it really calmed her down and then when Emma played it [during Massage & Melodies] she was loving it. It's really nice, shows the power of music helping with attachment and atunement in a really chaotic world.”

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“One of the hospitals we work with has a large proportion of Eritrean, Somalian and Syrian families, and we didn't get any of them to attend. On the ward it is much more equitable. Maybe we could look at doing something once a week for inpatients.”

From Emma Stevens, Music in Hospitals & Care musician:

“It's a very personal space for all of those mummies and daddies and babies so I wanted to be able to offer something really personalised. They just kept coming back and eventually they came back with requests which was lovely. We had a couple of current songs I made into lullabies and a song from my fair lady... it went down really well.”

“Zoom is just another space. It's not quite the same because you're not there and you're not feeling the person's energy and musicians like to tune into that kind of thing but it's still a good thing to be able to do.”

“In the second week as I was halfway through one song and a mother started crying. I didn't notice it as much as I would have done if I had been there. Thankfully they were good tears and there was nothing to worry about but in person I would have been able to pick up on that better”

“The babies were [out of hospital and] feeling better and [parents] felt more relaxed. Because it was via Zoom they were able to have themselves muted, and they just have to have the screen up. They don’t even need to have their camera on at all and they can choose the level that they want to be involved. Most families had their cameras on the whole time.”

What is your own impression of how it has worked? What have been the challenges and successes for you?

It has been good to find a strand of work that meets the need of mothers with pre-term babies, as we are unlikely to return soon to regular delivery in neo-natal units. As detailed above the project had some benefits that came out of it being online which is a real positive.

Are you reaching more people/fewer people/different people?

Our work has been transformed by the Covid-19 pandemic, and put many barriers between us and our beneficiaries. We are certainly delivering fewer concerts and reaching fewer people. We have been able to reach those living in isolation and connect people across the UK in new ways.

What new skills have you or your colleagues had to develop to deliver this work?

This project was led by Imperial Health Charity and Emily Hills who worked to develop their working relationship and up-skilled themselves using video-conferencing software (Zoom).

What would you say has made this project possible?

Our musician’s experience working on neo-natal wards and understanding of the needs of mother & baby were crucial to the success of this project. Our partnership with Imperial Health Charity, who part funded and managed the safeguarding of the project was also key.

What would have made it easier?

Technological support for mothers and our musicians is always a challenge but this seemed to work reasonably well. There was some feedback that the community feel of these sessions that is created in real life was not the same online, and this is something we are keen to foster and improve in the next pilot.

Further information

<https://mihc.org.uk/>