

evaluation report

# Rock Up:

## An Evaluation of Music Leader Experiences

Ros Hawley



*"...one of those memories that  
will stay with me".*



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CREATIVE LEARNING



University of  
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**YOUTH  
MUSIC**



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## background

Funded by **Youth Music** and the **Philip Barker Centre for Creative Education**, TiPP's Rock Up project enabled a series of music residencies to be developed with young people linked to youth justice or pupil referral units across Greater Manchester over a two-year period. It allowed the organisation to build their workforce capacity and increase skills of music leaders using a practice model which brings together experienced and less experienced music leaders to work in creative teams over a series of 5-day projects. Undertaking an evaluation process which aimed to track musicians' experiences of participating in the project enabled TiPP to develop their understanding of this model more deeply over the series of residencies. Initial training sessions took place to support the music leaders at the start of the project, and teams were formed which, as a whole offered partner organisations both a broad set of musical skills and specialist experience in the settings, and allowed early career music leaders to learn from colleagues and build their experience through professional practice.

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## structure of the project

Over a two-year period seven residencies took place. The second year of the project faced challenges due to the Covid-19 Pandemic, and adaptations were made where possible for young people to access online activities. Each weeklong residency worked towards an external facing celebration on the Thursday afternoon; young people were encouraged to work towards Arts Awards during the week, and achievements celebrated within the group on the Friday.

Music making centred on developing new work with the young people through a range of creative song writing and composition activities. Activities were designed and delivered in response to the needs of the group. Young people could access guitars, keyboards, percussion, and vocal mics during sessions. Sessions enabled opportunities for young people to try new instruments, learn new skills, and, through Arts Award, share and teach their new skills to other people involved in the project.

Musicians worked in teams of four, and between them shared a range of instrumental, vocal and song writing/compositional skills, and a range of experience within youth justice settings.

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## evaluation structure

The evaluation programme consisted of an initial meeting with music leaders during project planning sessions; visits to project celebration days to observe the contexts of the project and gain verbal responses from music leaders; submission of written reflections by music leaders at the end of project weeks, and a final creative session with three identified music leaders from the organisation who represent a range of experience level and length of working relationship with TiPP.

Deliberately relaxed in its approach, the evaluation aimed to create a space where musicians could voice their thoughts and experiences when/as they felt appropriate. This report focuses on content from the written reflections of music leaders.

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## music leaders

Sixteen music leaders took part in the project. Six music leaders were new to the organisation. Two music leaders had extensive experience of working in the settings before the project began.

Music leaders were given two 'starting point' questions from which they could base their reflections after participating in each weeklong music residency. The questions were intended as a guide to be used as music leaders found useful, to prompt reflections on their learning and experience of working with the young people. Reflections were submitted anonymously to the evaluation after each weeklong residency. Key observations taken from the written data, supported by quotes from music leaders' responses, are presented in this section. An example of reflection submitted by one of the music leaders is presented as a case study to conclude this section.

It was clear from the reflections of the music leaders that there is a high level of care and commitment shown to working with the young people. For new music leaders, there is a lot to absorb both emotionally and musically during a residency. One music leader noted that they found the situations of the young people upsetting, and they worried for them. There is also a sense of 'not knowing', and in keeping an open mind as to how each weeklong

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## music leaders reflections

residency will develop. The workshop environment is complex and multi-faceted, and this results in the music team consistently learning to adapt and respond to a range of factors which the young people deal with during their participation in a music session, such as navigating behaviour dynamics within a group, individual or undisclosed anxiety regarding release dates and milestone meetings and events, fluctuating confidence levels and personal challenges with self-esteem:

“On the Thursday morning, rehearsing for the performance, one of the young people I was supporting on the keyboard part was becoming more and more disengaged, and didn’t want to play his part. After a few attempts of me trying to encourage him with little success, he told me he couldn’t concentrate because he had his pre-release meeting later that day.”

Whilst there is a shared expectation of working towards an end result, all the music leaders are aware that this is not a focus above all else, and that the individual journeys of the young people, and meeting them where their needs are, is a priority. Making a connection with individual young people can be a challenge to achieve, and takes a level of skill and experience

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## music leaders reflections

newer music leaders learn from observing their more experienced colleagues as they engage with individual young people:

“I learnt a lot from others on the project, especially about how these kinds of groups function and what kinds of action we’re able to take in response.”

“Watching fellow musicians successfully talking to different young people and inviting them into the band is always a wonderful and valuable thing to watch and learn from.”

Some music leaders saw the process of engaging individual young people as a creative challenge; in this way, developing skills of individual engagement during sessions became a complementary process alongside the development of more specifically musical skills:

“Creatively I really enjoyed my time interacting with the YP. I relished the challenge of trying to find simple ways in, for them to take part in the music – especially as guitar is difficult for beginners. I tried to focus on simple two-three notes progressions, with rest periods so fingers didn’t start to hurt/cut.”

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## music leaders reflections

"I really enjoyed watching the ebbs and flows of each young person within the group's creative process and trying to navigate this in order to keep everyone involved and engaged in the process for as long as possible."

Musical skills became prioritised in situations where music leaders needed to ensure each young person's musicianship was being developed at an appropriate level; identifying ways that individual young people could deepen their knowledge and abilities in making music also impacted positively on growing a sense of ensemble within the wider group and working towards a more nuanced musical aesthetic:

"The challenge with the more proficient musicians was to show them how dynamics in playing led to more engaging musical material, and also as a way to allow other instruments in the group a chance to be heard."

The reflection process allowed musicians to think about the musicality of the young people, note any preconceptions held within themselves regarding young people's musical preferences, and consider how the opportunities created during residencies



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## music leaders reflections

introduced young people to a broader range of musical experiences:

“The fact that the YP were engaging with traditional instruments and more traditional forms of music was inspiring to me as it showed that there is still interest amongst YP to learn and develop on these instruments in addition to beat making and using music tech to create music.”

Music leaders’ ability to cultivate their own sense of openness towards the young people and to explore roles of leadership through a range of strategies centred on musical exchange and learning, democratised the workshop environment:

“On the third day of the week, I had a lovely experience when one of the young people offered to teach me how to play the drums after hearing that I wanted to learn. He was really calm and clear and I really enjoyed learning a new instrument. It was interesting and rewarding to put myself in the position of the participants and learn an instrument from scratch during the week. I think it was also good for that particular participant to have the opportunity to teach me and feel proud of his musical achievements.”

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## challenges

Whilst it was clear from music leaders' reflections that the experiences of working with young people on the music residencies was hugely rewarding, music leaders also shared challenges they faced.

Many music leaders spoke of the noise levels within sessions, and how this impacted on abilities to concentrate, especially if working in the settings was a new experience. One music leader commented on the musical and social challenges of working within one space for entire sessions but understood that the restrictions of working in the settings presented challenges regarding space that are not simple to resolve. Clear communication and a strong team ethos underpin the success of each residency; one music leader commented that in their experience knowing there is a clear structure for sessions was important for them in being able to find their place and feel comfortable within the session.

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## challenges

Music leaders noted that staff's level of understanding of the working practices and processes of TiPP impacted on each residency, on the music leaders being able to work with the young people effectively, and on the level and quality of support the young people and music leaders received as they worked together:

"I think things might be better in future now that there's a bit more of an understanding from the PRU of how TiPP work and how the sessions tend to go, and a bit more trust."

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## case study

*"Having never taught at a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) before, I knew I was going to be in a very new environment. The conversations we had during the pre-meeting also made me aware that it would be very difficult to plan the sessions; in other words, we were going to have to improvise with whatever circumstances and pupils we were given on a particular day.*

*So instead of preparing exact "lesson plans" we instead spoke more about what types of exercises, songs, etc. we could do with the pupils. The plan was then, once we were in the room with the YP we could play it by ear and try different ideas out as we saw fit. We did know, however, that we wanted to aim to do a performance by the end of the week. We could not say for sure whether or not we would be able to achieve this but we wanted to aim for it anyway.*

*Since it was a new environment for me I of course felt a little nervous knowing I would at the very least have some moments of being out of my depth. However, the pre-meeting was very comforting because it was clear to me that I would be surrounded with a team that was very experienced with this type of teaching. Once I realised this it was a lot easier to let go of the nervousness and just become open to whatever experience I was about to have."*

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## music leader stories

To accompany this report, three selected music leaders were interviewed, and their Music Leader Stories produced for the TiPP website. Each music leader was interviewed for a maximum of twenty minutes on the telephone, and asked three questions to frame the discussion, relating to music leader journey, key learning, and impact.

The Music Leader Stories provide an insight into the musical experiences and perspectives of music leaders engaging with TiPP projects. Their stories also demonstrate how, as musicians, they have gained from working with the organisation in terms of skills development and wider employability. They provide a space to share the impact of working with TiPP and the field of social justice from social and personal perspectives.

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## creative reflection

When all the interviews had been completed, a one-and-a-half-hour session took place on Zoom enabling the three music leaders to develop a plan for creating a piece of music to accompany the evaluation. Words and phrases from music leader reflections were collated and used as a starting point for reflective discussion and developing a creative response for the evaluation. Each music leader picked out phrases they liked from the lists. We discussed their thoughts on these phrases and discussed what the quotes said about the work. The music leaders were invited to contribute their own phrases, of which one of the music leaders volunteered new phrases to add to the composition. One of the music leaders commented that she liked ' what was not there... that these words could be talking about any project or situation' and identified the commonalities of creative participatory practice as opposed to a focus on the setting of the activity.

Phrases selected by the musicians included:

- Read each other's nonverbal cues
- What it 'feels' like to be there in the moment
- Blossom in this environment
- Communication flowed easily
- Negotiate [with them] the best way forward
- Developing my skills, helping to support develop theirs
- Noise levels, personal and social interactions

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## creative reflection

New phrases included:

- Sharing
- Part of the same story
- A shared connection, important to everyone

During the session, the musicians were invited to explore what a creative response to these comments might be: a song? a soundscape? Thoughts were then worked through, with each music leader contributing ideas; these collectively became the shape of a creative response which the musicians would go away and develop. Each musician decided on roles to take within the composition, a loose structure and key were also discussed.

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## benefits of creative evaluation

The evaluation centred on supporting the journey of the music leaders during the project and examining their experiences to inform TiPP's future practice. It has provided a space for music leaders to reflect on their experiences and to include reflective processes in their practice for the organisation. More broadly it has profiled and encouraged the development of reflective practice within the organisation as it develops its music leader workforce and supported the development of reflective practice within individual music leader practice.

Importantly the outputs of the creative evaluation have enabled musicians to have a reflective but also artistic space to respond to their experiences during the project, and to develop their creative skills further within the framework of an evaluation process. This process has the potential to feed back into the organisation's creative practice and demonstrates an investment by TiPP in supporting their music team. In addition, the creative reflection element within the evaluation has enabled a more diverse evaluation framework to be put in place, where music leaders can safely explore experiences which are often significant, profound and life, or career, changing. Music leaders, after having given of their musical and emotional skills so whole heartedly during residencies, had their own personalised and protected space to explore their own creativity as a means to express in detail their



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## benefits of creative reflection

thoughts and emotional responses to working with groups of young people in complex and challenging circumstances. Using art and music outside of structured workshop leading activities enabled music leaders' responses to the project be represented in a wider range of outputs, which have the potential to increase public engagement with participatory music work in this field. This process has also enabled a deeper level of analysis by the music leaders of the impact of the work they deliver in criminal justice settings, in understanding the life experiences of the young people within the youth justice system, and of the potential for participatory music practice to impact on the confidence, self-esteem and creative and social development of young people in these contexts. Having such specific focus on the content of music leaders' written reflections has enabled key observations on the emotional and social reflections of music leaders to their work with young people within the youth justice system to be identified, collated and fed back into the organisation.

Discussions during the creative evaluation sessions specifically highlighted that music leaders see themselves as taking part in a shared experience with the young people, and that this factor was of underlying importance to them throughout the project. It highlighted that they felt the process of music making experienced during Rock Up specifically enables music leaders to feel they are

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## benefits of creative reflection

working to develop music together with the young people, as opposed to teaching or instructing them. This feeling was described as 'a shared journey' by one of the music leaders, who used this phrase to summarise the overall experience of working with the young people after viewing and discussing the collated comments from the written reflections. It then became a core theme within the music leaders' discussion as they planned the piece of music they wanted to create for the evaluation.

The evaluation has enabled TiPP to gain a deeper insight into the impact of the work on their workforce and assess the existing models of practice used by the organisation.

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## key findings

Music team structures within TiPP projects offer beneficial opportunities for music leaders to develop skills and confidence safely and securely whilst working within a potentially challenging environment; this is evident particularly for new music leaders. Learning is able to take place at every level within the project team; in future, however it might be useful to explore this aspect in more depth with the music leader teams, and particularly the more experienced music leaders, to gain more insight from them. Development of music leader resources could be a useful way to support new music leaders, who may have a less developed toolkit of activities.

The music making taking place offers space for democratic musical processes to emerge: points within sessions not only offer the young people opportunities to learn new musical skills; this also transfers to members of the music team, who may also be learning new musical skills, or working out musical ideas together with a young person.

Relationships with staff are crucial to the success of any residency. There are ongoing challenges for TiPP in being able to work effectively with YOTs and staff in general. At

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## key findings

times, the methodology of TiPP's practice is not fully understood by staff; staff responses at times are seen by music leaders to have a negative impact on the success of a project and on the young people. This is frustrating for the music leaders, and it appears important for music leaders to be able to express their feelings surrounding their experiences with this challenge, to avoid a build-up of frustration or feelings of burnout.

Reflective practice can assist the organisation with identifying areas of challenge for music leaders and support emotional resilience within a growing music leader workforce.

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the musicians

Sarah Atter

John Bligh

Neil Bruce

Riognach Connolly

Niamh Feeney

Joe Harrison-Greaves

Matt Hill

David Judge

Abi Kitching

Mercy Levett

Noa McAlister

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Tomas Pocinho

Anna Reilly

Luke Thomas

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thanks

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Philip Barker Centre for Creative Education

Youth Music

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# Want to Know More?

For more information go to [tipp.org.uk](http://tipp.org.uk) where you can read more about the work of TiPP, and read more about the Rock Up project.

You can also connect with us on Twitter @tipp\_mcr, Instagram @tipp\_mcr or Facebook , onTiPP Arts . We welcome your thoughts and insights.

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