



Tàlaidhean Ùra

The Fèis Rois Lullaby Project

Final Evaluation Report February 2023

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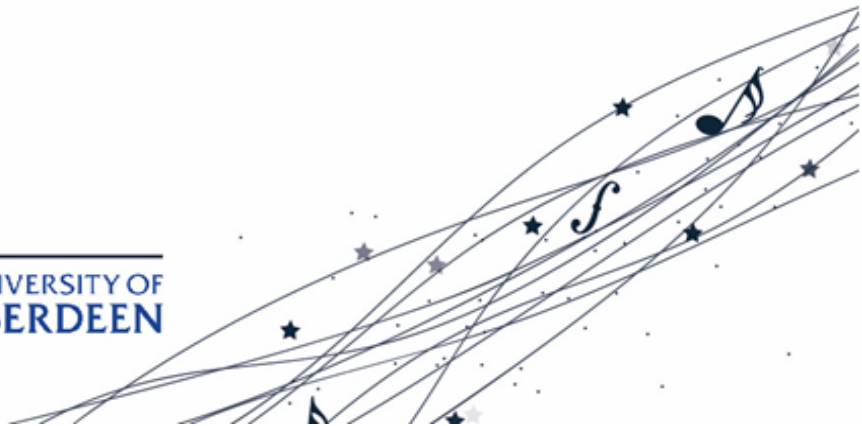
Acknowledgements

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Introduction

About Fèis Rois

Fèis Rois is a Scottish charity, based in Dingwall, which enables people of all ages to access, participate in and enjoy the traditional arts and Gaelic language through a diverse programme of activities.

Fèis Rois is widely recognised as a national leader in the arts, particularly in music education. The organisation aims to give young people and lifelong learners the opportunity to experience and engage with traditional music and Gaelic culture in a way that supports them in developing their social skills and inspires them to reach their full potential.

The Lullaby Project

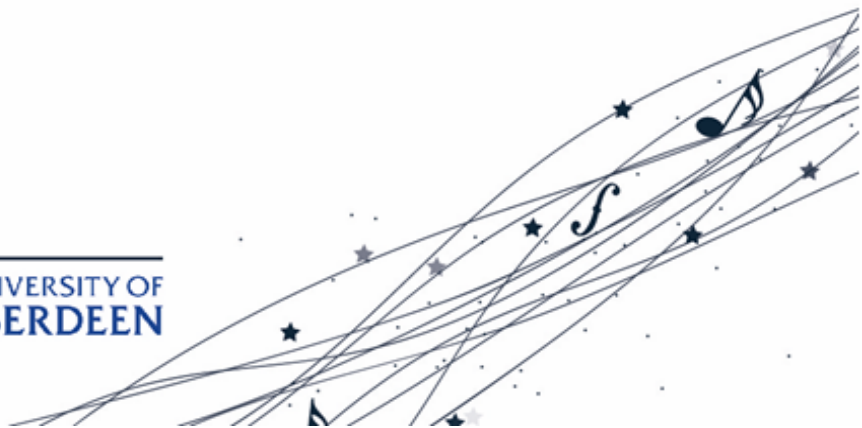
The Lullaby Project was developed by Carnegie Hall's Weill Music Institute and delivered across various settings in New York City, including homeless shelters and prisons. It has since been delivered across the US and in the UK, with evaluations showing groups have a positive impact on mother's wellbeing and connectedness. Fèis Rois were delighted to deliver Lullaby Project groups across the Highlands, incorporating aspects of Gaelic traditional music.

Tàlaidhean Ùra: The Fèis Rois Lullaby Project was delivered as a twelve-week group for mothers of infants under the age of 3. Sessions took place weekly and lasted for 2 hours. The project was delivered to three cohorts of mothers and babies across different areas of the Highlands: Alness, Tain and Inverness. Each group was delivered by three professional musicians, involving a total of six musicians across the project. Mothers were supported to develop their confidence and skills in singing, music making and song-writing through practical activities which they could then do at home with their infant. All mothers were supported to write a personal lullaby for their infant, with the opportunity to work with the musicians to record their lullabies at the end of the 10 weeks.

Mothers also had opportunities to socialise with each other over coffee and cake during the session break. During the session, babies were looked after in a creche, so mothers were able to work on their lullabies, participate in craft activities, and enjoy a cup of tea and chat in peace!

Background Research

The therapeutic benefits of music are well documented, with participation in musical activities associated with improvements in wellbeing, reductions in symptoms of anxiety and depression, and increases in relational closeness (see Wang and Aguis, 2018, for review). There are specific benefits of music for mothers and babies, and community music interventions for postpartum mothers have been shown to increase self-esteem, improve maternal mental health (Fancourt and Perkins, 2018) and reduce social isolation (Savage et al., 2020).



Between 10 and 20% of mothers suffer from perinatal mental health issues during pregnancy or the first year postpartum, with an annual societal cost of over 8 billion pounds (Bauer et al., 2014). A review by Gavin et al. (2015) estimates that only 40% of women with postnatal depression are clinically diagnosed, with just 10% receiving adequate treatment.

Mother-baby singing has multiple benefits for both mother and baby. Research by Fancourt and Perkins (2017) found that mothers between 4 and 40-weeks post-partum who sang to their baby daily reported higher levels of wellbeing and self-esteem, fewer symptoms of postnatal depression and a better self-reported bond with their infant than those who sang less frequently. Similarly, in a within-subjects study where mothers received both a session of group mother-infant singing, and a comparison session involving mother-infant play, the singing session demonstrated significant improvements in affect and perceived closeness between mother and baby compared to the mother-play condition (Fancourt and Perkins, 2018a). The impacts of mother-baby singing may be especially beneficial for mothers with poor mental health. In a study by Fancourt and Perkins (2018b) mothers with symptoms of postnatal depression were randomly assigned to either a 10-week community singing intervention, a 10-week creative play intervention, or a control comparison. Mothers participating in the singing intervention with higher levels of postnatal depression showed a significantly faster reduction in symptoms compared to the other two conditions.

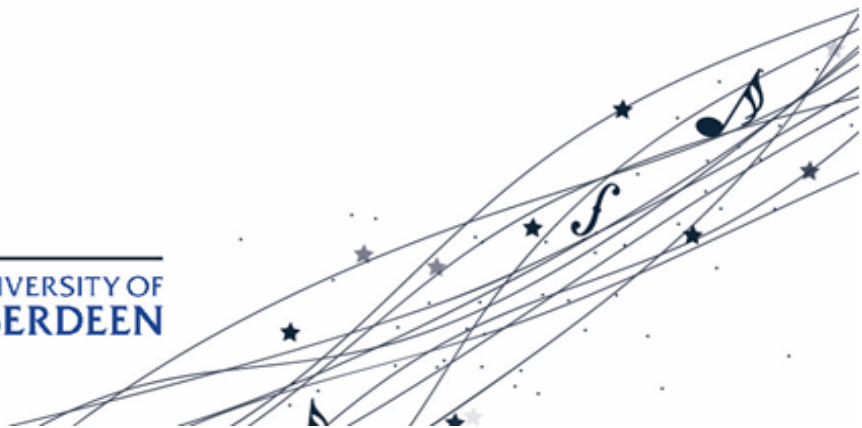
Previous evaluations of the Lullaby Project in the USA have demonstrated positive impacts with vulnerable parents, including greater wellbeing and improved connectedness (Wolf, 2017). Similarly, a recent evaluation of Lullaby Project delivery in the UK found that parents reported a more positive emotional state, improved connectedness, increased proactivity and greater reflection on their lives and their relationship with their infant after participating in groups (Asensco, 2017). While the principles of the project remain the same, both the aforementioned versions of the Lullaby Project have been delivered on an individual basis, with parents working one-to-one with musicians. The Fèis Rois Lullaby Project was delivered in a group setting, over a longer period of time, and therefore it is anticipated that there will be additional benefits to mothers through enhancing their social support networks. This may be particularly important for mothers living in remote and rural areas of the Highlands, where levels of social isolation are high.

Theory of Change

The Theory of Change for the Lullaby Project, developed with The Behavioural Insights Team is shown in Figure 1, overleaf.

The project aimed to achieve the following outcomes:

1. Improvements in maternal mental wellbeing
2. An increase in social connectedness/reduction in social isolation
3. An increase in confidence with music making and singing
4. An increase in the frequency of singing to baby



Feis Rois

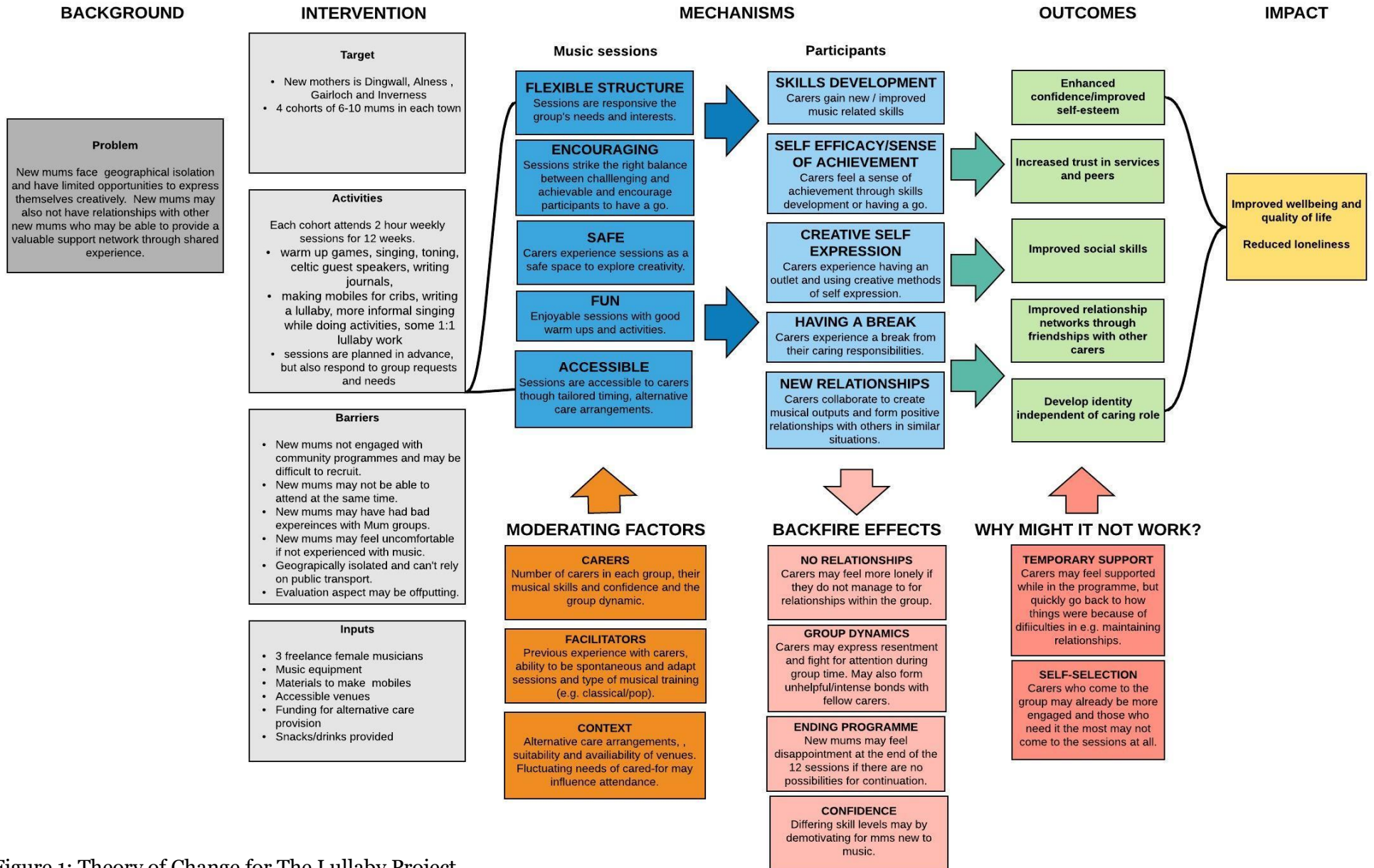


Figure 1: Theory of Change for The Lullaby Project

Method

Evaluation Design

This was a within-group pre/post study, with outcome measures collected at baseline (Week 1) and post-intervention (collected at the end of the final group session in Week 12). Interviews were also conducted with musicians and a sample of mothers following their final intervention session.

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the University of Aberdeen School of Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition Ethics Review Board (Application No. 1842).

Participants in the Project

10 mothers signed up to participate in the project across the three locations: 6 in Inverness, 2 in Alness and 2 in Tain. One mother in the Inverness group dropped out of the project due to personal circumstances, leaving 9 mothers who completed the project.

The 9 mothers who remained in the project were aged between 31 and 41. 7 women were first-time mothers, 1 mother had another child children and 1 mother had another 4 children. Babies were all aged under 10 months, with the exception of 1 infant who was 2 years old.

Sample

All mothers participating in The Lullaby Project intervention were given the opportunity to take part in the evaluation. Participants were free to withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice to their continuation in the group.

Four out of the 9 mothers completed both pre and post evaluation questionnaires. Interviews were also conducted with 7 out of the 9 mothers and with 2 of the musicians who delivered Lullaby Project groups.

Measures

This evaluation collected baseline and post-intervention data using the following three measures:

- **The Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale** (WEMWBS; Tennant et al., 2007) is a validated measure to assess mental wellbeing. It consists of 14 items relating to positive psychological functioning, including optimism, positive affect, agency and clarity of thought. Higher WEMWBS scores are indicative of better wellbeing, with research indicating a mean score of 51 for the UK population (Tennant et al., 2007).
- **The UCLA Loneliness Scale** (Russell, 1996) is a 20-item questionnaire which assesses participants' perceptions of closeness within their social network. Lower scores on the UCLA Loneliness Scale relate to reduced loneliness and greater social connection with others.

- **Items assessing Musical Confidence.** Mothers were given 3 questions which asked them to rate their confidence in their musical abilities, their confidence singing to their baby and how often they sang to their baby.

Semi-structured individual interviews were also conducted with a sample of mothers (n=7) and group facilitators (n=2) to explore their experiences of the Lullaby Project groups.

We also plan to measure changes in mother's relationship with their infant using the Child and Adult Relationship Observation (CARO; Thompson et al., 2019), which provides a measure of the quality of the parent-child relationship. We have collected pre/post video observations from 6 mother-infant dyads, although these have not been analysed yet.

Data Analysis

Due to the small sample size, there is not sufficient power to detect statistically significant differences between pre and post measures. A narrative summary of the findings is presented below. Key themes from interview data are also summarised.

Findings from Pre/Post Measures

Limitations of pre/post score changes:

The final sample of mothers includes 4 completed pre/post datasets. It is therefore not possible to draw conclusions about the impact of the group on outcomes for mothers, based on this small sample size. While pre/post score changes are presented, the main focus of the evaluation is a qualitative exploration of mothers' experiences of the Lullaby Project groups. Future research should use a larger sample of participants and consider use of control comparison in order to be able to make valid causal attributions about the impact of the group.

Outcome 1: Improvements in Maternal Mental Wellbeing

- Maternal wellbeing, measured using the WEMWBS, **increased for 75% of mothers** (3 out of 4).
- The **average WEMWBS score increased by 7%**, from 50.75 to 54.5.
- At the start of the project, 50% of mothers (2 out of 4) had a mental wellbeing score above the UK average. At the end of the project, **100% of mothers (4 out of 4) had a mental wellbeing score above the UK average.**

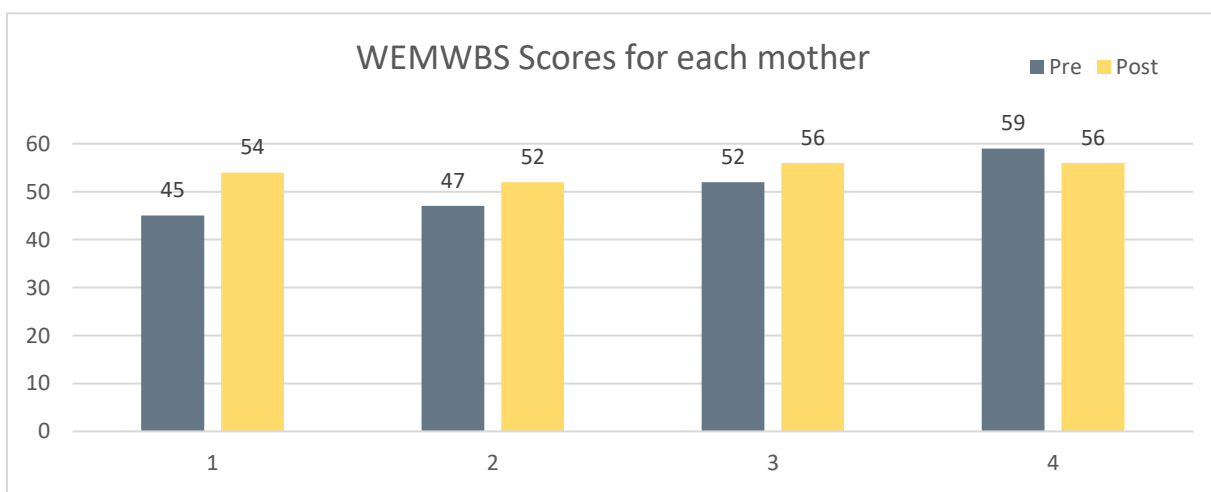


Figure 2: Pre and post WEMWBS scores for each mother

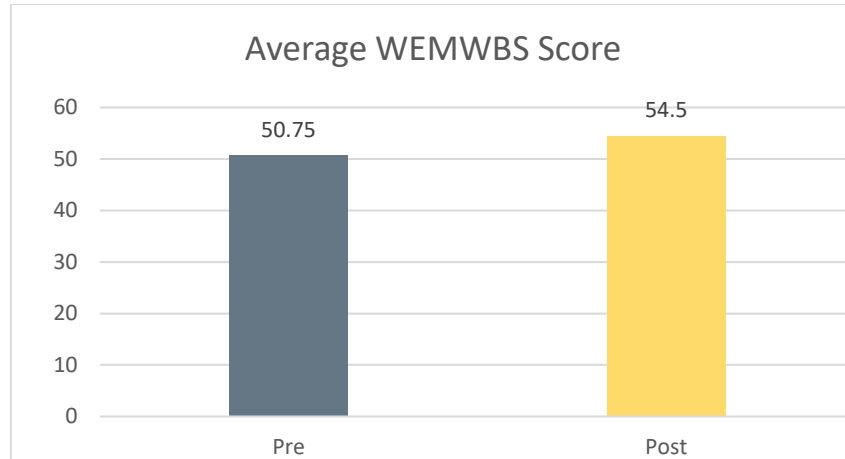


Figure 3: Average pre and post WEMWBS

Outcome 2: An increase in social connectedness

- Social isolation, measured using the UCLA Loneliness Scale, **decreased for 75% of mothers** (3 out of 4), demonstrating increased social connection.
- The **average score decreased by 4%**, from 34.5 to 33.

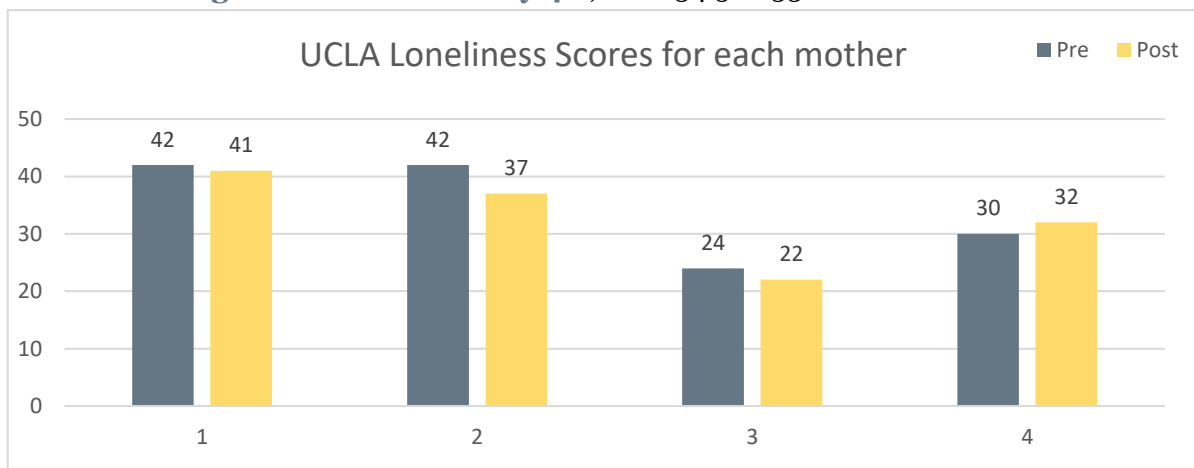


Figure 4: Pre and post measures UCLA Loneliness scores for each mother

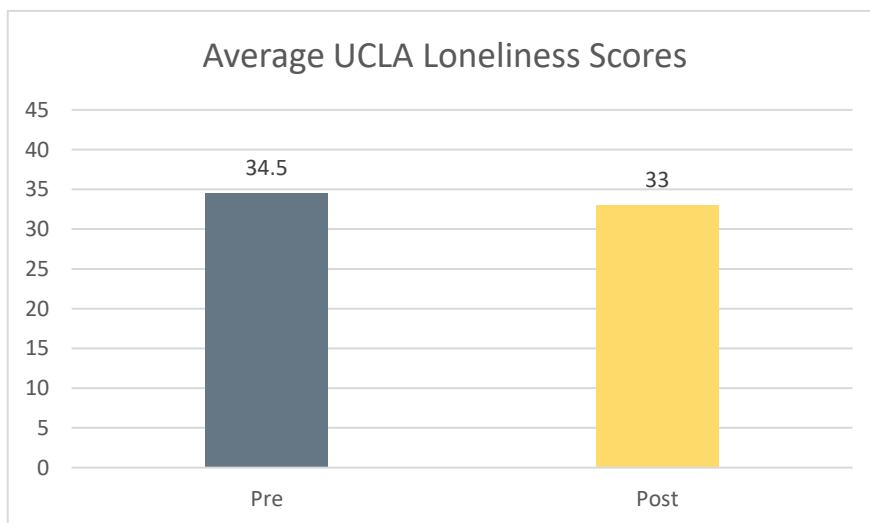


Figure 5: Average pre and post UCLA Loneliness scores

Outcome 3: An increase in musical confidence

- Only 25% of mothers (1 out of 4) reported an increase in confidence in their musical abilities after participating in the project. However, the three mothers who did not show an improvement all rated their confidence levels high at the start of the project. All three played a musical instrument, and one out of the three was a professional musician. The mother who did show an improvement in musical confidence did not play a musical instrument. Average musical confidence increased from 7 to 7.25 out of 10.
- **75% of mothers** (3 out of 4) reported that they **felt more confident using music and singing to their baby** after participating in the project (Figure 6 below). Average musical confidence increased from 7.25 to 8.5 out of 10.

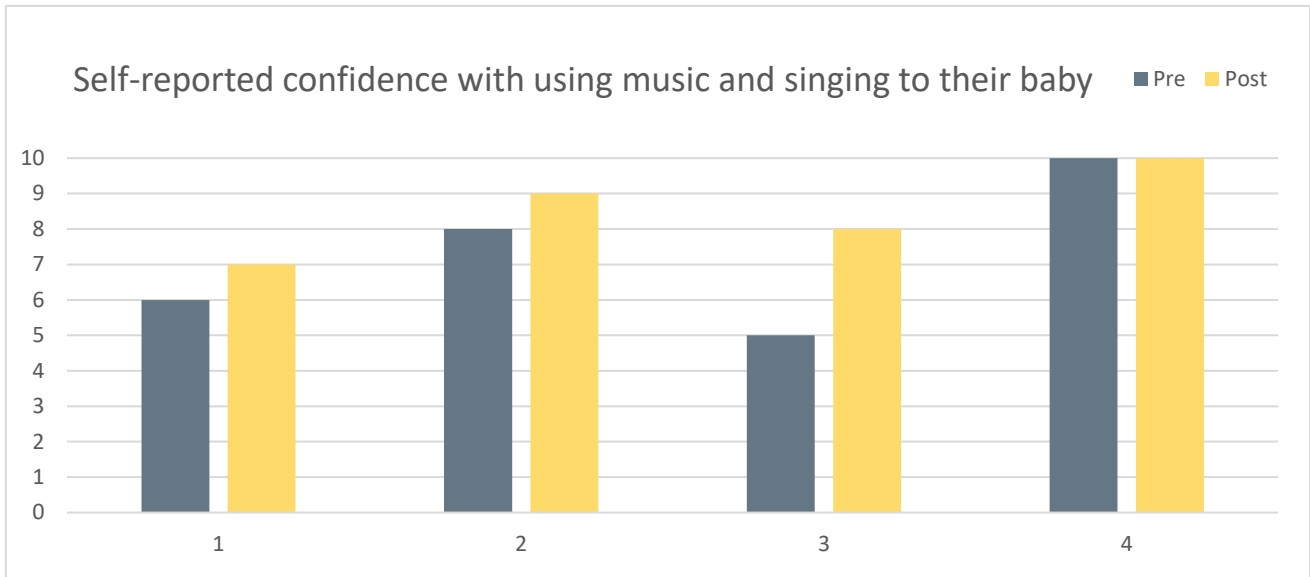


Figure 6: Confidence using music and singing to baby for each mother

Outcome 4: An increase in the frequency of maternal-infant singing

- All mothers reported singing to their baby daily at the start of the project (the highest frequency), so this did not increase over the course of the project. However, when asked about the perceived impacts of the project, **100% of mothers** (5 out of 5) reported that they were now **singing and using music more often with their baby**.

Participants' experiences of The Lullaby Project:

- Participants were asked to identify how they had benefitted from participating in the Lullaby Project (Figure 7). All mothers identified at least two benefits, with a range of between 2 and 4 benefits identified. The most common benefit was **feeling more confident using music and singing to their baby**, with all mothers selecting this as a perceived impact (Figure 7). It is worth noting that several participants noted on their questionnaire that for some areas (e.g. feeling more positive about motherhood and having

a positive relationship with their baby) they were already doing well, so no improvements could be made.

- Participants also reported that they were **likely to participate in music making activities in the future**. When asked to rate the likelihood of future participation on a scale of 0 (Not at all) to 10 (Very likely), scores ranged from 7 to 10, with an **average of 8.75**.

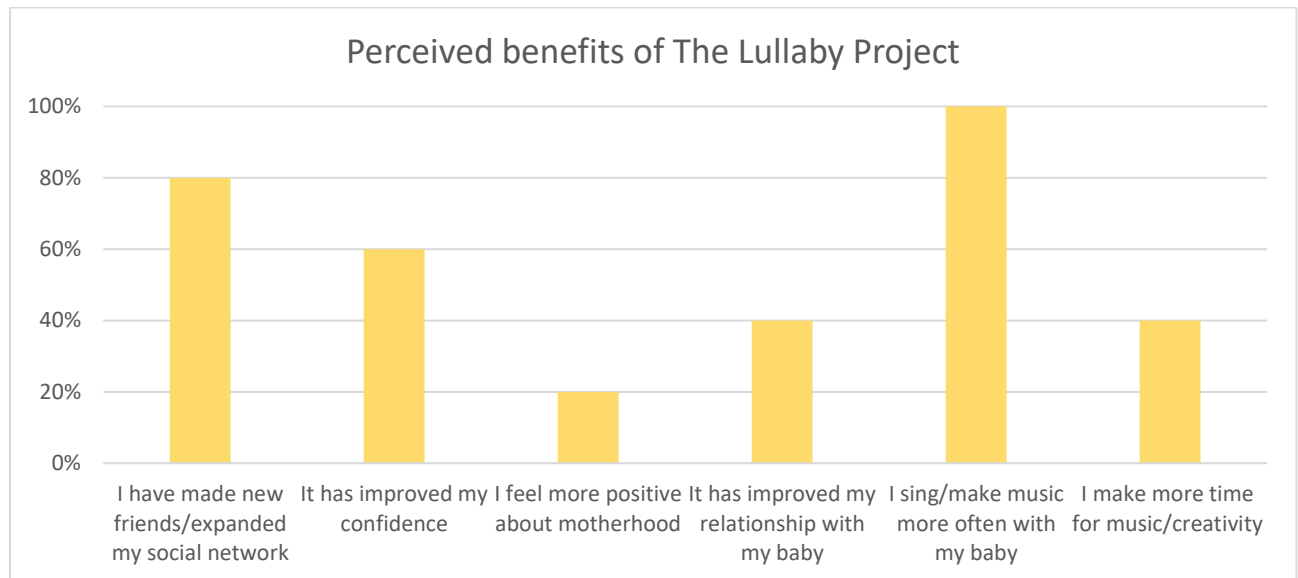


Figure 7: Perceptions of benefits of The Lullaby Project

Qualitative feedback about benefits of the project from the questionnaires included:

I feel a real sense of accomplishment having written my first 'song' - something I never thought I'd be able to do because I didn't know how. I have another one partially written already!

I enjoyed being creative with other adults and forming closer bond with adults I already knew (not new friends but now closer friends!)

It has allowed me to be creative which I never have been before

It was a fantastic project and was brilliant for my wee girl to play with other children and for me to get a change to create some music and write a song.

Benefits identified during interviews

Three key benefits were identified by mums through the interviews. These were:

- Forming new friendships or strengthening existing ones
- Developing their confidence from acquiring new skills
- Having some time and headspace for themselves

Forming new friendships or strengthening existing ones: Mothers felt they benefitted from being able to form new connections with other mothers and strengthen existing friendships. This was predominantly for mothers in the Inverness group, as this was a larger group:

It was nice to meet other people. I'm hoping that we'll stay in touch. (Inverness mum 5)

Some mums described feeling isolated when they had children, and the benefits of forming lasting relationships with other mothers who they could meet up with during the week:

I have a few close friends but nobody with children. So I think definitely when she was younger, I felt a bit isolated. I hadn't really met new friends with babies. It's just nice to have people that you could meet up with to help break your week up a bit and have more chats. (Inverness mum 3)

The nature of the project helped engender close relationships, and mums enjoyed being able to share the experience of writing the lullaby. Having the babies in the creche also meant that it was easier for mums to have conversations with each other:

I think it helps when you're able to bond with people over doing something together. The project has been really special and it kind of makes it easier to get closer to people more quickly. When you've got a baby like you have such limited time... Talking about the lyrics together and sharing those more personal things in everyday chitchat kind of thing (helped bond). (Inverness mum 3)

Developing their confidence from acquiring new skills: Mums enjoyed learning a new skill, and some mums in particular discussed the challenges of being on maternity leave and not having opportunities to use their brain or be creative:

It was really nice to learn a new skill. In ordinary life, I would never write a song. And I would never sing really. So it was lovely to try something new. (Alness mum 1)

Their confidence in using music and singing with their baby increased, and they felt more confident in writing songs or lullabies for their baby in the future:

I've definitely benefited. I suppose in confidence in songwriting. I can develop that skill and carry that forward. That isn't gonna go away, that's with me now forever... I sing to her a lot and maybe I'll develop that into like a full lullaby. Now I feel like I have the confidence to do that. It's not this scary mystical process. It's totally achievable. (Inverness mum 2)

Alongside increasing their confidence with music, some mums also reported feeling generally more confident after participating in the project:

It's probably made me maybe a bit more confident in speaking out. If I can perform a lullaby in front of a few people, then it's giving me a bit more confidence. So yeah, I would say I have benefitted from it. (Inverness mum 4)

Having some time and headspace for themselves: Mums benefitted from having a break while their babies were looked after in the creche:

I think there's always a benefit to having a little bit of away time. Having the creche there was great. That's a huge benefit to just have a little bit of time away and a bit of a break. (Inverness mum 2)

The Lullaby Project felt different to other groups offered in the community as it was more focused on mums and their needs, rather than just being baby:

Sometimes it's [groups] for the baby, sometimes it's for the mum. This was a lot more mum focused, and it was good to get that. (Inverness mum 1)

The group allowed mums to have some time and headspace for themselves, which they wouldn't otherwise have had within their week. This gave them opportunities to be creative and feel a sense of achievement. They also enjoyed being able to produce something special that their child could keep forever:

I think I've also benefited in terms of allowing that creative side of your brain to have a bit of space. (Inverness mum 3)

It made me feel really happy after. You feel good for taking your baby but this class was sort of different. It felt like you've done a really nice thing for the day, like you'd actually achieve something as well and something that you would never have done before. (Alness mum 1)

I've definitely benefited, maybe not socially so much because I'm unlikely to see those mums again. For me, it was the music. And the making something for my child. It was just a new experience and the overall enjoyment of doing something different. It was really wholesome. (Tain mum 1)

Positive Feedback about the Lullaby Project

I think this was definitely my favourite thing that I've been to and I definitely would recommend it.

I loved everything. I loved going to the classes and I loved the encouragement that you got from the group.

I've really enjoyed the project. It's been something I've looked forward to every week. It's just been brilliant. I really miss it.

I really enjoyed going every week. I think everyone should do it. I just felt really lucky that we stumbled across it. I think it's great - great for little people and great for big people.

Discussion and Conclusions

No valid conclusions can be drawn about the impact that The Lullaby Project groups on the four pre/post evaluation outcomes: maternal mental wellbeing, social connectedness, musical confidence, and frequency of singing/music making with baby. This is due to the small sample size which was insufficiently powered to run statistical tests. A larger sample of participants and using a control comparison would enable valid causal attributions about the impact of the group.

It is worth noting that the project was offered universally, and the sample of mothers who participated in the project were all coping relatively well with motherhood. All mothers reported fairly positive wellbeing, social connectedness and musical confidence at the start of the project. There is therefore a ceiling effect within this sample, where initial scores were high and therefore improvements in scores were minimal. This was particularly the case with musical confidence (as one participant was a professional musician) and mothers' relationships with their baby. If the group was offered to a more targeted sample, for example, mothers with mental health difficulties or those with limited musical experience, the scope for improvement would be significantly greater.

Qualitative feedback from interviews shows mothers both forming or strengthening friendships with others, developing their confidence from learning a new skill and having time and headspace for themselves.

In conclusion, while qualitative findings clearly demonstrate that the Lullaby Project had a positive impact on both mothers and musicians, no conclusions can be drawn about the impact of the group on the quantitative outcomes assessed in this evaluation: maternal mental wellbeing, social connectedness, musical confidence, and frequency of singing/music making with baby. Future research should include a larger sample of participants and consider use of control comparison in order to be able to make valid causal attributions about the impact of the group.

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