

Sistema Scotland

Big Noise Raploch- the first year

In a nutshell:

Following a programme of pre-launch activity when we worked across the community and through the schools to gain the confidence of the local community, work began in Raploch Community Campus in Summer 2008 with the first Big Noise Summer School which took place during the school holidays. We worked with 65 children who had just completed Primary 1, 2 and 3 five days each week over the summer break.

From August 2008 and the beginning of the school year, we worked with over 200 children each week including all who attended the Raploch Nursery, Castleview School and all Primary 1 children in curriculum time. In addition we ran the After-School Club three days each term-time week for children in Primary 2, 3 and 4.

During the school holidays we arranged 'Take a Musician Home for Tea' living room concerts to 40 homes, took children and parents to concerts, ran family workshops and had guest teachers visit us.

Summer School 2009 included 80 children who had completed Primary 1, 2, 3 and 4.

What went well?

- Design and implementation of introducing **the programme** to the community of Raploch. The pre-launch / launch ensured a wide ranging curiosity and interest in the Big Noise coming to Raploch. We are pleased with the programme design and delivery and are delighted with the progression of the children in both musical and social skills.
- The recruitment and initiation of **the team**: finding six musicians, introducing them to a communal working practice, training including a visit to Venezuela and delivery of the programme. We have recently recruited our Big Noise Manager and a 7th musician. We have a good ongoing training and support programme for the musicians.
- The continuing interest and **commitment of children and families**. We have a core group of children who are very committed. We then have some who come and go. We work hard to encourage and support those

who need it most, and emphasize that children are always welcome and can return to the programme at any time. We are particularly proud of the work with do to engage with those children and families who are **hard to reach**, including our liaison with Stirling Social Services officers to ensure that the most vulnerable children are involved, and to build relationships and trust with the families. In May 2009 we began to be represented on Stirling Council's **Staged Intervention meetings** with the schools. We view this as a big achievement, and recognition of the importance of our work with and knowledge of the children.

- Establishing Big Noise at the **heart of the community**. The office is prominently located opposite the Community Campus and accessible to all. The community opened its homes to the musicians for the initiative **Take a Musician Home for Tea** and tremendous pride in the achievements of the children has been palpable. The ongoing interest for **excursions**, children's concerts etc. Attendance has remained high and this programme of activity maintains momentum and encourages the wider involvement of the community. Due to popular demand we have launched an **adult orchestra** for the parents who meet once a week.
- Our partnership with **BBC Scotland** has developed well. A programme charting the first year in Raploch will be screened by BBC Scotland (probably in October 2009). The BBC SSO has committed to a set number of performances in Raploch, for the children to attend BBC SSO rehearsals/performances and 10 of the BBS SSO musicians have started a "buddy programme" with members of the Big Noise orchestra
- Our partnership with **FESNOJIV** (the Venezuelan body which pioneered 'El Sistema') has continued to develop. Their support continues to be invaluable and we hope to host Venezuelan teachers in Raploch in year 2.
- We have introduced a **volunteering policy**, and have designed a training and support programme for the volunteers. The Summer school 2009 was supported by 3 volunteers including a local parent and a volunteer from America, and this worked extremely well. The inclusion of volunteers will support the organisation infrastructure long-term, and will also assist in the engagement and development of local parents and others who want to support and be involved with the orchestra.
- The **energy, enthusiasm and potential of the children**: they are amazing, and the staff love working with them!

Development of the children

Nursery – The musicians and nursery staff are delighted with the progress, in music terms, and also expression and confidence. The Big Noise work was highlighted positively in a recent HMI inspection of the nursery. The inspectors noted that the skills and experiences learned in the Big Noise sessions were being transferred to the children's other play.

P1 – The headteachers and classroom teachers have commented that the sessions have built confidence, encouraged responsibility and improved listening skills, cooperation and the ability to take turns. The children make good contributions to team activities and show their enjoyment of performing. Also noted improvements were the development of fine motor skills and the teachers praised the support given to children with additional support needs.

Castleview – The head teacher described herself as speechless with admiration for the work of the musicians. We have been introducing the Figurenotes notation system for children with additional needs, and we have one child who has started to learn piano, is starting double bass and we hope long term to involve him in the after-school orchestra. Our partnership with Drake Music Scotland has enabled two of our musicians to be trained in using soundbeams and Figurenotes and our collaboration will continue.

After-School Club – The most notable change in the programme has been in the behaviour of the children with dramatic improvements being sustained from November 2008 onwards. The children have also progressed well musically. Orchestral skills are very good, good social awareness of being part of a group and performing as part of a group. Children have demonstrated a good group pulse, and almost every child can pitch-match when singing. General musicianship skills are developing extremely well and the ability to read music is also progressing. Attendance is good and the introduction of one to one or paired lessons once a week is working well.

What have we learned?

- Working with the children requires an incredibly high amount of energy from the team. Although anticipated, the realities of creating an orchestra for everyone are incredibly challenging. Based on this we have learned the following:

We need a higher child /adult ratio than originally projected before we started. In particular we require additional support for the

musicians especially as we are open to all children including those with more challenging emotional and behavioral problems, learning difficulties, and some very practical additional support needs (support for toileting etc). We now have in place support for learning assistants.

We have appointed a manager for the musicians (this role was absorbed into the Director's post for the first year).

Our ability to cope with very challenging behaviours within the group context was initially stretched. In order to ensure that all children's needs are better met, we have designed an individualised plan for 5 children, and are working towards integrating them into the full group over time.

The original after-school programme schedule was too long, it has been altered to include time-tabled individual/paired time for the children with the musicians.

Summer school days in 2009 were extended and lasted from 9.30am to 2pm Monday to Thursday to include breakfast and lunch for the children. On a Friday we delivered supervised practice sessions, and trialed sending instruments home over the weekends. The musicians' time was scheduled to ensure they had short breaks throughout the day. We have also reviewed the holiday entitlement for staff, have increased this slightly and scheduled two programme close-down periods (one week at the end of Summer, and Christmas).

- That where possible, positive male role models in the programme are very important. (Changes in the team mean that we now have three male members of staff in Raploch)
- The head teachers have asked us to review the high level of time commitment required by Big Noise in curriculum time for the Primary 1 children. With Stirling Education links officers we are exploring ways of achieving our objectives while accommodating these concerns as we shape our Primary 1 delivery for Year 2.
- The P1 teachers noted that the boys seemed less engaged and enthusiastic than the girls. We shall explore this observation further and ask: are the teachers assessing boys correctly, do the boys express their engagement in a different way, or are the sessions not meeting the needs of the boys as well as the girls, and have to be designed differently?

- That the Raploch community has many problems, but also many positive elements which have helped to make this programme work here. There is a close-knit community enabling easy spread of information, allowing for neighbours to take responsibility for children on excursions. We have developed respect from the parents which is invaluable.

The New School Year:

- As we embark on the new 2009-10 school year, we have been delighted that 75% of the eligible children who have just started Primary 2 chose to attend the first After-School Club. This exceeds our expectations and is testimony to how well Big Noise has integrated into the community.
- The after-school programme for 2009-10 will include the development of chamber groups and a choir which will also offer the opportunity for older children up to P7 to be involved for the first time. As one of our newly recruited musicians has a strong interest in improvisation, a chamber improv group will also be launched.
- We are also focusing the next year on developing more ways for parents and community members to be involved in the programme.

Sharing the story of Sistema Scotland

In April 2009 the Simon Bolivar Youth Orchestra undertook a residency at the South Bank Centre which included performances and sessions discussing “El Sistema” and the transformative effects of this inspirational programme. Sistema Scotland Chairman Richard Holloway and Director Nicola Killean were invited to participate in these events. Throughout the year, Sistema Scotland has played host to a variety of visitors interested in the development of our work. In Autumn 2009 BBC Scotland will screen a one hour documentary covering the first year of Big Noise Raploch.

Fundraising:

A list of those who have supported the programme to date is included in The Big Picture Book. Since the print deadline, The Robertson Trust has also committed its support. We would like here to emphasise our gratitude for each and every commitment made to help Sistema Scotland continue its work.

At time of writing, £1.8 million has been raised towards the costs of the first five years in Raploch. Another £1.3 million is sought.