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Sistema Scotland is registered as a Scottish Charity No: SC039119
In 2008 we established our first Big Noise programme in Raploch, Stirling. Further Big Noise centres opened in Glasgow’s Govanhill (2013) and Aberdeen’s Torry (2015). We plan gradually to roll the programme out to more communities in the years ahead. Big Noise focuses on the existing assets and the potential of young people. It counters persistent social problems in the targeted communities by drawing a line under the past and nurturing a new generation of children who grow up in an environment saturated with intensive and immersive music making. We work with children from birth through to adulthood. While our most obvious triumphs are musical our purpose is to use that music making to equip children with confidence, resilience, ambition, and a multitude of transferable skills to support them across all areas of their lives. The ultimate goal is to boost educational performance, health and wellbeing so that children grow to achieve their full potential, contributing to positive communities with fewer costly problems.

“Established approaches are not meeting some of the challenges in our society. It is essential we learn from innovative programmes like Big Noise.”

Angiolina Foster CBE, Chief Executive of Healthcare Improvement Scotland
A team led by the Glasgow Centre for Population Health (GCPH) has been working to track the impacts of Big Noise in Raploch and Govanhill now and for decades ahead – evaluating what part this musical childhood plays in forming the adult lives of its participants. Researchers will seek not only to detect changes but also explain them.

First findings were published in 2015 and already reveal that Big Noise is achieving its goals. The researchers found convincing evidence of positive change to children’s lives and concluded the programme represents a good investment for society.

An economic assessment of Big Noise Govanhill, carried out by Glasgow Caledonian University as part of the GCPH study predicted the orchestra would be cost-neutral by the sixth year - producing benefits of higher value than costs of delivery.

The GCPH team identified seven core qualities of the programme and stated: “The depth and strength of Sistema Scotland’s impacts are likely to lie in the fact that all seven of the themes are present in one organisation.”
• Inclusivity and accessibility
Big Noise is open to every child in the community. There is no audition process or fee. Sistema Scotland actively promotes Big Noise take up with children, young people and families with lower levels of engagement and complex needs. The programme can be tailored to individual needs and aspirations in order to overcome barriers to engagement.

• Intensity and immersion
Big Noise begins teaching children at preschool age and continues to school leaving age. After-school programmes run up to four sessions per week, during term time and most school holidays. This immersion in Big Noise gives children access to an intensive music education and the sustained development of a range of life skills.

• Collective learning and teaching
The orchestral model – Big Noise tuition takes place primarily in groups, so that children learn both the basics of music and instrument skills as part of an ensemble or whole orchestra, from the beginning of their musical careers. This is understood to provide context for and meaning to their learning, as well as providing an environment in which they can develop a wide range of social and life skills.

• Reputa}
The GCPH has employed a range of research approaches to develop an understanding of Big Noise and to assess the impacts and outcomes of the programme on participants, families and the wider community. In this section we have organised this evidence into a series of ‘logic models’ which each represent distinct Big Noise outcome pathways. The logic models are presented in the full report available on the GCPH website. What follows here is a short summary of each logic model outlining key elements of the impact pathway.

Not all pathways will be experienced by all Big Noise participants and the scale and types of impact will depend on an individual’s own experiences and needs. Consistent and long-term engagement with the programme is likely to encourage better outcomes for an individual. Sistema Scotland’s focus on areas with concentrations of deprivation enables the programme’s impacts to be achieved where need is high. All things being equal, if the impacts of Big Noise are large enough to compensate for other drivers of inequality, then there may be a reduction in social and health inequalities faced by the children, young people and their communities in the long term. The seven impact pathways for participants are summarised below:

“Sistema Scotland’s Big Noise programme has the potential to significantly enhance participants’ lives, prospects, health and wellbeing through a variety of identified pathways in the long-term.”

Professor Carol Tannahill, Director of the Glasgow Centre for Population Health
Boosting engagement with learning and education
This pathway is concerned with the crossover benefits of Big Noise participation on wider education and learning. There are established links between participation in musical learning and enhanced wider academic achievement. Strong evaluation evidence indicates that children who participate in the Big Noise orchestra demonstrate improved language and other skills, as well as higher levels of confidence and pride. School attendance rates for Big Noise participants in both Raploch and Govanhill are higher than for those who do not engage with the programme within the target population. It is theorised that improved levels of attendance and academic performance, aspiration and post-school destinations for Big Noise participants, may lead to improved employability and employment outcomes in the long term.

Developing and building life skills
This pathway outlines the life skills that children and young people are supported to develop through engagement with Big Noise. Many of these skills stem from the programme outputs: namely the experiential and ensemble learning that children and young people engage in and the exposure to challenges and reward that learning an instrument and taking part in performances provide. In the short term this develops participants’ creativity, adaptability, problem-solving and decision-making skills, team working, collaboration and co-operation skills and their self-discipline and control. It is anticipated that over the long term, employability and employment outcomes (and others) may be enhanced.

Securing emotional wellbeing
The impact of Big Noise on participants’ emotional wellbeing was regularly cited as a key benefit of the programme. In the short term, these impacts stem from the happiness and enjoyment that playing and being exposed to music, in a safe, positive environment offers. Over the medium term, playing their instrument may also develop into an emotional outlet for participants. In addition, the Big Noise environment offers a sense of security and belonging, which it is anticipated will support the development of mutual support networks and resilience among participants over the medium term.

Building social skills and networks
Participation in Big Noise offers children and young people substantial and sustained opportunities to build on and develop the social skills they learn at home and at school. It also offers unique opportunities for children and families to mix socially with others from within and outwith their communities. This increased social interaction and social mixing may potentially lead to increased cultural tolerance and understanding as well as a broadening of friendship and peer groups among Big Noise participants in the long term.

Respite and protection
This outcomes pathway maps out the role of Big Noise in two key areas: (a) protection of children and young people from stress in their home environment and (b) the diversion of young people from activities, such as alcohol and drug use and antisocial behaviour; both areas having the potential to damage the health and wellbeing of participants. The intensive and immersive aspects of the Big Noise orchestra, and in particular the relationships that participants are able to build with Big Noise musicians, as well as the programme’s free and inclusive quality, are the foundation of this pathway.

Developing as a musician
This pathway maps out the impacts associated with the development of participants’ musical knowledge, skills and abilities. The high quality and intensive nature of provision in place at Big Noise, and the broad range of group and individual learning formats are central to this pathway. In the long term, the development of musical skills has the potential to increase cultural participation, to broaden friendship and peer groups, to improve outcomes from education and learning and to enhance employability and employment outcomes.

Encouraging healthy behaviours
This evaluation found some areas in which participation in Big Noise orchestral programmes has the potential to encourage healthy behaviours – for example in relation to diet and exercise – and mitigate against the uptake of damaging behaviours.

Each of these seven theorised pathways has the potential to impact positively on the long-term health and wellbeing of participants. This can be through protection from factors that are damaging to health, through building resilience and developing positive peer groups, through improving educational and employment outcomes and the acquisition of a range of life skills and increased opportunities.

For more information visit www.gcph.co.uk
Familiar songs, games and rituals encourage children to listen and copy sounds, the building blocks for early language development. Movement games enhance physical development and co-ordination, through swaying, bouncing, walking and clapping. Listening activities build concentration and memory. Baby Noise participants develop early social skills such as choosing, taking turns and playing together. For the parent or carer this is a chance for increased bonding and golden time with their child. Social time with other parents is also very valuable.

The pre-orchestra programme begins with BABY NOISE – a play-oriented weekly session for babies and toddlers accompanied by a parent or carer.
nursery

RHYTHMS

During this phase, children are introduced to pitch, rhythm and pulse through a nurturing series of play-based songs and activities.

Through planned listening activities children are exposed to a wide variety of musical genres and are encouraged to respond to music kinesthetically and emotionally. Children are also introduced to simple percussion instruments during this phase and through these activities they develop coordination, gross and fine motor skills as well as simple ensemble disciplines of playing (and stopping) together. The emphasis is always on the ensemble, so the children learn to cooperate and support each other.
In Primary 2 children choose which stringed instrument they would like to play and then make their own replica to form a paper orchestra. The children form a bond with their instrument as well as learning its different parts, and how to hold and bow it properly, so they have a head start by the time they are handed the real thing. That exciting day usually comes around Easter for Primary 2s.

The pre-orchestra programme continues through Primary 1 and 2, delivered by Big Noise staff during the school day as part of the curriculum.

“While Big Noise can appear to the casual observer to be like many other arts or music programmes, we encountered a number of factors which, when taken together, potentially make it unique – including its ambition, longevity, intensity and inclusivity.”

Professor Carol Tannahill, Director of the Glasgow Centre for Population Health
They can now attend our after-school orchestra sessions and holiday clubs which run throughout the year. Depending on age and location this can mean up to four afternoons a week after school and four half days a week during holiday periods. We only close for a couple of weeks at the end of summer and over the Christmas and New Year period. All Big Noise tuition is delivered by specialist professional musicians and educators who are backed up by a brilliant group of volunteers, including parents, community-members, retired professionals and students.

Children become full members of Big Noise at the end of their Primary 2 year.
A FULL symphony ORCHESTRA

Intensity and Immersion:
Once in the after-school programme, a typical Big Noise child can be involved in the programme for up to 11 hours a week, 45 weeks each year. That means almost 500 hours of intervention and support a year.
On arrival in a community we aim to first form a string orchestra, with children learning violin, viola, cello and double bass. When we feel this strong core is established we add woodwind, brass and percussion to make a full symphony orchestra.

The programme runs deep in the life of the community, is longterm and intensive. Pathways are offered from birth through to adulthood with the time involved gradually increasing as children grow. Children’s horizons are widened through Big Noise. We run a variety of residential trips – from a few miles down the road to the other side of the world. In 2014 we took young people from Raploch on a life-changing ten-day visit to Venezuela where they rehearsed and played alongside local children in an El Sistema Nucleo.
The children are usually working towards their next public performance, whether it’s a community show for their families or a high profile event such as the London 2012 Festival for the Olympic Games or 2014 Commonwealth Games opening ceremony. Public recognition and affirmation of hard work is a powerful thing. The feeling that you are representing your community, your town or your country boosts pride and self-esteem.

“I’ve certainly seen concerts down here, where all the communities are mixing together. The Arab community, the Eastern Europe community, the Asian community, the indigenous white community, they’re all mixing together. The attendance at the concerts is phenomenal. They’re packed, absolutely packed… I think it’s a great unifier.”

Primary school teacher, Govanhill
INCLUSION

Big Noise works with others to create a nurturing team around the child.

Staff work in partnership with schools, social workers, health visitors and community workers. The holistic approach extends to consider all angles of nurture. The programme provides healthy food, transport when required, and Big Noise uniforms when required for performing in concerts. We work to remove all barriers to participation - both psychological and physical.

Raploch is home to Castleview School, a school for children with additional, and in some cases complex needs. The programme uses innovative and hi-tech methods to work with these children. Figurenotes, a music system using colours, makes it easier to read and compose music. Computers linked to electronic beams and pressure pads allow children with mobility issues to play.

“(Child’s Name) can be hard to manage when he’s in my class. But the difference when a Big Noise musician came in! Because it was something he could do, you could just see in his eyes. ...Being taught on the violin, he was just so proud of what he could do. That’s a child that stands out in my head for the impact there can be, on a child who’s very hard to reach, in many ways.”

Primary school teacher, Govanhill

Big Noise pursues excellence and is for every child regardless of ability.

The programme operates a non-exclusion policy and never turns children away. Everyone has a contribution to make. We work with many children and young people from stable and happy families and we also actively seek to engage with the most vulnerable and challenging individuals. The programme successfully involves large numbers of such children. Those that are not involved at any given time are actively pursued. The organisation recruits staff committed to that task, then trains them in the necessary specialist skills and supports them in coping with the issues they may encounter.

Castleview School - This child is playing an electronic instrument via the red pad.
As the children become adolescents they take a lead in shaping their centre, and develop enhanced skills to prepare them for the world of further and higher education and employment.

Raploch is the first centre where young people in Big Noise have reached this stage. The Youth Board is developing leadership and consultation skills. The young people represent the voices of the wider Big Noise community, and are beginning to contribute to the governance of the programme. Many have become Ambassadors for the work of Big Noise, representing the orchestra at public events and conferences. Assistant Teacher roles are in development, exploring how young people use both their musical, leadership and developing teaching skills to pass on their knowledge to the next generation in the programme. Work Experience programmes are also being developed with placements in a variety of organisations across Scotland. Volunteering opportunities and qualifications are also being explored, to support young people who would like to give back to their Big Noise community.
During school holidays the children can book visits we call “Take a Musician Home for Tea.”

In these musical house parties the children and teachers perform, often not just to the family but all the neighbours too.

“I have never seen a piece of work come into an area, target so many people and have such an impact in such a short period of time.”

NHS Manager, Glasgow

ADULT ORCHESTRAS

Some of our centres have sessions for adults.

Lessons are open to anyone from the community and have been popular with parents and grandparents of children who are already part of the programme. These sessions don’t have the intensity of what we deliver with children and young people however play an important part in the Big Noise community. They help us strengthen our relationships with families, and give participants an idea of just how much the children are achieving.
A LEADING ROLE IN A GLOBAL MOVEMENT

Our work is inspired by a remarkable Venezuelan called José Antonio Abreu who began running music lessons for a handful of children in the 1970s.

His organisation became known as “El Sistema” and today involves several hundred thousand children in centres across the South American country. The movement’s most famous son Gustavo Dudamel is our patron. Scotland is not alone in being inspired by the Venezuelan example. Orchestras are springing up all over the world. Sistema Scotland has been delighted to play a leading role enabling this social action phenomenon. We have hosted two international conferences to share expertise, and we have mentored emerging organisations in Sweden, South Korea and New Zealand. We have also given advice more informally and hosted visits by organisations from every continent except Antarctica.

MUSICAL FRIENDS

The children of Big Noise are building relationships with musicians of the very highest calibre. The Big Noise teachers are all excellent players, many performing with the best orchestras in the country.

We have partnerships with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra and the Royal Scottish National Orchestra. One of Scotland’s most famous classical musicians, Nicola Benedetti is the children’s official “Musical Big Sister”. We are proud of our continuing links with Venezuela. We have an ongoing relationship with the Libertadores String Quartet whose members have visited Scotland to play for and work with the children.
Within a short time of Big Noise setting up, new babies never know anything other than a community filled with music.
Sistema Scotland
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