



Rhythm for the Brain

Evaluation Report

April 2022





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Introduction

Overview

Rhythm for the Brain was delivered by *Beat It Percussion CIC* in 2021/2022 and was funded by Birmingham City Council through its Neighbourhood Network Scheme Innovation Fund. The fund supports projects that support their vision as summarised below:

Birmingham citizens lead healthy, happy, independent lives within their own homes and communities.

The workshops included multi-sensory, hands-on music making activities designed to promote well-being for people with mild to moderate dementia and other ageing-related support needs living in the community with family carers. The concept grew directly from gathering feedback from visiting family members during a project based in residential care homes, which led Beat It Percussion's lead facilitator, Lynn Kay to understand the issues of isolation and frustration faced by both carers and the person living with dementia. The workshops were targeted at carers and individuals with mental health conditions such as dementia and offered opportunities for independent engagement with music making activities.

Sessions took place in accessible community venues where individuals living with dementia and other ageing-related support needs and their carers attended for 1.5 hours on a weekly basis for one or more courses of 6 sessions.

Desired outcomes of the project were as follows:

- Increased social participation is created through clients participating in up to 48 sessions over a 12-month period.
- Healthier lifestyles are promoted through cognitive stimulation, physical engagement, and social stimulation/interaction.
- Carers feel more supported because the intervention provides an opportunity for peer support and inclusion in community activities.
- Access to a relevant and diverse community offer is provided through fostering a culture which focuses on and supports the strengths, assets and positive outcomes for citizens.

Earthen Lamp was appointed as external evaluator for the project and the findings from the evaluation activities have been compiled in this report.

Main sessions

In total 53 sessions were delivered as part of the Innovation Fund by Beat It Percussion in 2021 and 2022. Although only 48 sessions were initially commissioned, this target was exceeded due to an underspend in the room hire budget. The sessions were delivered as follows:

- Total sessions delivered in 2021: 32
- Total sessions delivered in 2022: 21

The sessions were delivered across Birmingham with groups and community centres and the table below describes the distribution of these sessions.

Area	Venue	No of sessions	Dates delivered
Yardley	Iridium Centre, Richmond Clinic, Stechford	6	Sep 7 th , Sep 14 th , Sep 21 st , Sep 28 th , Oct 5 th , Oct 12 th
Hall Green	Saheli Calthorpe Hub, Balsall Heath	11	Sep 7 th , Sep 14 th , Sep 21 st , Sep 28 th , Oct 5 th , Oct 12 th , Nov 2 nd , Nov 9 th , Nov 16 th , Nov 23 rd , Nov 30 th
Hall Green	Anand House, Sparkbrook	3	Nov 2 nd , Nov 9 th , Nov 16 th
Perry Barr	Sampson Close, Handsworth	2	Nov 10 th , Nov 17 th
Northfield	Longbridge Retirement Village, Longbridge	6	Sep 16 th , Sep 23 rd , Sep 30 th
Northfield	Chatham Court, Northfield	6	Oct 1 st , Oct 8 th , Oct 15 th , Oct 22 nd , Nov 5 th , Nov 12 th
Northfield	Trusted Local Care, Northfield	3	Nov 19 th , Mar 7 th , Mar 14 th
Northfield	Northfield Baptist Church/Ash Grove	6	Jan 10, Jan 24, Jan 31, Feb 7, Feb 14, Feb 21
Northfield	Northfield Dementia Café	3	Jan 25, Feb 22, Mar 22
	Extra one-off/taster sessions	7	Jan 24, Jan 28, Feb 7, Feb 22, Mar 10, Mar 22, Mar 25

Taster sessions

The second year of this project (Jan 2021 – Mar 2022 to include extension time) saw the delivery of 18 taster sessions. This is more than the original target as the project used some underspend from room hire to enable Beat It to do more of them. Taster sessions are a particularly important aspect of the work as this is where the team meet new groups and partner organisations, and from this meeting Beat It can work towards new projects and fresh funding opportunities. Funders require evidence of need and taster sessions are an effective way to help provide this.

The taster sessions were delivered across a number of NNS regions and online and had 157 participants:

- Selly Oak 2
- Sutton Coldfield 1
- Edgbaston 2
- Yardley 6
- Hall Green 3
- Perry Barr 1
- Online taster sessions 3

Some of the taster sessions led to successful applications to local NNS's: Yardley, Sutton, and Perry Barr. Other NNS's and private customers also connected through this route.



Methodology

Participation in the sessions delivered was monitored through sign in sheets for each workshop, maintained by the workshop leader. In addition, various other mechanisms were employed to gather evaluative data about how the sessions were received by participants, their impact on participants and how far they met the objectives. The methods of data collection for evaluation of the project were as follows:

- Reflection form filled in by workshop leader after each session to document the activities and learning
- Quotes gathered from participants of the sessions and from venue support staff
- Observational and participatory research carried out by the external evaluation team at four sessions (two at the start of the programme and two at the end), including the final celebratory session
- Regular conversations between the project manager, the workshop leader and the external evaluation team on the impact of the programme on participants and the delivery organisation

All quantitative and qualitative information gathered through the sessions have been independently analysed by *Earthen Lamp* and compiled in this report.

Evaluative findings

Observational analysis of the sessions

Over the course of three months, three observations were carried out of workshops delivered to different groups. The first one was at Iridium Richmond Primary Care Centre in Stechford. This session which took place in September 2021 and had two attendees. Both participants had been referred to the sessions with the aim of improving participants physical and/or mental health. They had been to Rhythm for the Brain sessions before, one attended multiple sessions online during the pandemic, and the other had been to an in-person session the week before.

The second workshop was also in September 2021 and was held at the Calthorpe Hub in Balsall Heath. This was attended by seven participants, four of whom came from the Saheli women's group (who use the centre regularly) and three people who worked at the centre. Among the participants there was a mix of people who had attended before and who were new to the workshops.

The third workshop was in March 2022 in Longbridge Village (a retirement community with a room available for social events, providing support for some of the residents with more complex needs). There were five participants, three residents and two carers. Another resident came into the room and was invited to take part but seemed content to watch the workshop from the back and stayed for the entire session. This was the last of a series of sessions held at Longbridge Village and the staff noted that other residents and carers had attended the week before and were keen to come back. This highlighted an issue with finding a time that worked for a large group when the potential participants have care appointments booked or have caring responsibilities.

While each of the workshops was designed for the needs of diverse groups, they all had similar structures. Each began with a warm-up (which was tailored to the mobility and abilities of the group) and the participants were told the benefits of the exercises to their physical or mental health and how they could be utilised in their everyday life. This was followed by an exercise where the whole group called out each person's name in between a simple rhythm either clapped or beaten on small hand-drums. Drumming names was a straightforward way of introducing the group to one another and creating a communal feel and welcoming

atmosphere. This was followed each time by a series of drumming exercises such as call and response or drumming ‘conversations’ between people in the group, or a group repetition of a rhythm. The range of exercises and several types of drums (for example larger free-standing drums for people with reduced mobility) meant that everyone could take part. All three workshops then ended with a relaxation element. In the first two this focused on breathing techniques that could be used outside of the workshop. In the third session the participants took turns in using the relaxation instruments which allowed engagement between staff and residents and sparked conversations about memories.

Engagement between all participants was a key element of all the sessions and this occurred in different ways, depending on the group and the needs of the participants. The first session (where the two participants came as a result of referrals) was all about engaging on an emotional level, with a reflection on first-hand experiences or trauma. One of the participants commented that the session gave them the “energy to reinforce your desire to get out of a rut.” In contrast, the second and third sessions had more of a focus on allowing people who knew each other or were part of the same group, to have fun together. These sessions also taught people new skills and encouraged them to think about how these activities were beneficial to physical and mental wellbeing. The different responses to Rhythm for the Brain workshops demonstrate the versatility of these types of workshops and how the sessions can be adapted to fit with the needs of the participants.

The structure of the workshop and the variety of exercises and instruments allowed everyone to participate on a level that was comfortable to them. The atmosphere created by the facilitator was welcoming and was commented on as being a safe-space or feeling like they were “in safe hands.” The facilitator was careful to ensure that participants knew that it was okay to make mistakes and explained exactly what was going to happen so that participants felt comfortable at each stage of the workshop. It was also important that all people in the sessions (staff, residents, facilitators) were invited to participate. This meant that it was a communal process which allowed for bonding over the shared experience, even in groups where people didn’t know each other very well. In the Balsall Heath workshop, one person commented “we’re all in it together.” In Longbridge at the end of the session everyone spoke about what they had got out of the workshop, which meant it wasn’t just about carers supporting residents, it was an active experience for everyone.

Observing the workshops, you could see some of the participants going on what one described as ‘a journey,’ becoming more engaged and comfortable as the session went on. It was clear that there was a high level of participation, with almost everyone taking part in all activities. Enjoyment and engagement were indicated throughout with smiling, laughing, eye-contact between participants and drumming rhythms which people used as applause to respond to one another. In Stetchford someone described the workshop as “a moment I can embrace.” When asked about the emotional benefits, one of the Balsall Heath participants said that the workshop “lifts you up.” People at all three workshops were keen to return to future sessions. At the Stetchford session one participant commented, “I’m addicted now.” In Longbridge Village, staff and residents had a conversation at the end about trying to facilitate future sessions because the sessions had been fun but also provided something different to the other activities which were on offer there.

Celebration event observation analysis

The final Celebration Event was held at Saheli Community Open Day on 17th March 2022 at Calthorpe Wellbeing Hub

The evaluators attended a drumming workshop at 12pm-12.30pm after which people had a celebration buffet lunch outside and then came back for a sound bath at 1pm. This was part of a social fun day and so there were lots of Saheli staff and volunteers present. 79 people attended the event. It was a sunny day so there were other activities (such as tennis) outside, and refreshments were available.



Drumming session

There were 17 participants (1 male, the rest female) in the drumming session. People who joined late were given chairs and welcomed to the circle until there were no drums left. There were a mix of ages and ethnicities and most of the people had been to previous sessions.

It started with a warm-up, then some drumming exercise. Because it was a short session Lynn then moved on to the call and response drumming. She started with some rhythms but then everyone had a chance to lead, Lynn knew most of the people by name and went round the circle one at a time. Because it was a short session/ a large group there were lots of exercises about getting the group drumming together in a fun and sociable way. Perhaps because there were so many people drumming at the same time, there were looks of concentration on people's faces but there were still lots of smiles and eye contact around the circle. At the end people were asking Lynn questions and looking at the different instruments.

Sound bath

There were 21 participants (and more wanted to join but were told it was full and they should join the next session). Lynn talked everyone through how the session would work before leading a guided meditation and sound bath which lasted for around 20 minutes. Participants seemed relaxed and quiet; most had their eyes closed throughout.

Because it was part of a social day in a small community centre there were some noises from outside/ in the kitchen where people were clearing up, and from the photographer who was documenting the session, but this did not seem to disturb most of the participants.

Before the sound bath one of the women asked us if I was helping with the evaluation. She told us that she loves the drumming workshops and that going on a Tuesday is "the highlight of my week." She said that she also attends fitness classes at the centre on a Thursday, but drumming is what she loves most. After the sound bath she told us that it unlocks something in her and it reminds her of her childhood in Barbados, and that she never usually thinks about those memories except in the relaxation sessions. She said that the combination of the drumming and the relaxation really makes her use her brain in diverse ways and she loves it.

Participant feedback summaries

Summary of sessions

Venue	Sessions	Participants	Participants +50	(Age not stated)	Carers
Calthorpe Hub	9	100	57	8	0
Chatham Place	5	56	27	24	16
Iridium	6	15	14	0	0
Longbridge Village	6	30	24	0	8
Annand House	3	41	41	0	0
Midland Heart Sampson House	2	19	18	0	0
Ash Grove	6	31	31	0	0
Trusted Local Care	3	42	42	0	0
Dementia Café West Heath Community Centre	2	6	6	0	0
Total	42	340	250	32	24

The table above summarises the sessions where data gathered was made available for evaluation purposes. Please note the figures above are minimum figures as the forms did not cover every workshop that was delivered.

Description of the sessions

The majority of the sessions (around 29) consisted of an introduction and warm-up, followed by rhythm exercises using drums and/or hand bells. This was followed by a relaxation session and sometimes (in around half the workshops) by a group discussion or conversation. Some of the sessions had to be slightly adapted either because of smaller group size or Covid restrictions. Some of these workshops included more of a discussion or chat element or had people trying the relaxation instruments rather than participating in a relaxation session.

What worked well

Something that came out of a lot of the sessions was that the workshops created engagement and energy among participants. They were aimed to work with family carers as well as the people they care for. They were designed to be inclusive and accessible. There was an adaptability to the sessions, for example there was an awareness that drums might be too loud for some groups so different instruments were brought or different exercises attempted. Sessions were also adapted for groups with a higher level of engagement or ability. At Calthorpe Hub this was made possible because there was an extension of the course, so people had the chance to develop confidence as well as skills. Some of the groups were less able to relax or to be quiet enough to enable the relaxation session to run well. In these groups this section of some workshops was instead used as an opportunity to try the relaxation instruments and have conversations about them and about the memories the instruments (especially the ocean drum) sparked.

As the sessions went on at individual venues, there was a sense that groups bonded and became more comfortable over time. In a number of the workshops, participants commented on the importance of it being something different to other activities they usually did. For many of the sessions, the social aspect of the workshops was a crucial factor. This meant it was important to allow time for talking and interaction between participants and facilitators. Various aspects of the course sparked different types of engagement and space was allowed for feelings or memories to be shared.

At many of the venues people were trying relaxation for the first time and many seemed to embrace it (although some needed multiple sessions to feel comfortable). Many participants were able to completely relax, and some even became sleepy during the relaxation element.

“Margaret has been calmer lately; this seems to help her. She takes tablets but as you have seen she can get quite loud. It’s good here where I can sit with her and calm her down and stop her getting agitated. We haven’t been able to get out for a daily walk so this helps to occupy her. I can’t completely get into it myself, have to keep an eye on her, but it does do me some good. She is definitely calmer all round lately.”

What could be changed

While the structure of the sessions largely stayed the same across all of the workshops, they were adapted to reflect lessons about different groups. For example, with the larger groups it was important to make sure that there was enough time to do each element and not rush things, especially in terms of the relaxation portion. For some groups this meant allowing the group to dictate the pace and to adapt the sessions according to what people responded best to.

There were some practical lessons which were learned especially around external noise during relaxation sessions. To minimise distractions windows needed to be closed before the start of the session and people



were asked to turn their phones off. There were also comments about participants being disappointed when some instruments weren't brought to sessions (for example the drums or a gong) so Lynn started bringing a wider range of instruments to the sessions. As the workshops went on, some lessons were learned about the types of instruments which worked well for certain groups. For example, for some of the smaller groups the bells were more popular, and the large drums seemed potentially off-putting to some participants.

Lots of comments in this 'what will you change or add' column were about trying to recruit more people or hoping that family members would come to other sessions. Some of this related to finding the best time to run sessions (especially for people with caring needs or responsibilities), but some were about building momentum at a certain location.

The programme proposed to deliver training to family and paid carers on how rhythm is used to improve people's well-being. Family carers expressed interest in this offer, but none were able to take it up due to the time pressures of being a carer. Instead of this, the team worked with two groups of paid workers who were referred by partner organisations. Through this 19 people completed and gained the entry level qualification. While the aim of the training was not to up-skill people to the level where they can become confident practitioners, the goal was to give people the skills, confidence and knowledge needed for them to incorporate elements of rhythm in their work. This was achieved for all who attended.

I have tried out tapping on the table as you showed us, to gently get the attention and have a little sort of conversation with someone who is non-verbal. It really worked and made her smile. I would never have known to do that before.

After the training everyone expressed their interest in attending further training with the organisation, three people are interested in volunteering with us, and one person is considering working with *Beat It Percussion*.

Other comments from participants

Key themes derived from multiple comments from participants are summarised below:

- Relaxing/ meditative aspect of the session
- Instruments: people specifically talking about their enjoyment of playing or seeing specific instruments or talking about enjoying the rhythms or drumming. People getting something out of the musicality of the sessions.
- Lots of generally positive sessions (it was good etc.). The comments almost entirely positive apart from four negative comments. Three negative comments about distractions or noise in the room which impacted on the relaxation and one about enjoying it in person but not online.
- Lots of comments about it being friendly or sociable or about the importance of the group aspect.
- People commented that the sessions brought up memories for them, or they spoke about being transported to somewhere (for example the seaside).
- Some people talked about wanting to share what they had learned with family and friends or wanting to bring them to the session.

Conclusions

The impact of the programme on participants and beneficiaries has been illustrated throughout the report. Overall, the programme was successful in providing enjoyable and, in some cases transformational experiences for individuals, with dementia and their carers. It also provided an opportunity for social activities in a safe space for individuals coming out from a period of pandemic related isolation.



For *Beat It Percussion CIC* the programme was demanding to deliver (primarily due to the challenges presented by the pandemic) however the organisation has emerged from it stronger, more robust and with greater clarity about their impact and offer to residents in Birmingham. The series of workshops delivered helped the company gather new contacts with venues and individuals and with networks. It also helped the company derive a greater sense of clarity about the purpose, their USP and modes of delivery. The delivery of this programme has led to future work for the company. In the words of Lynn Kay, CEO of the company:

As an organisation this project has been a valuable way of researching our product and consolidating what our offer is. We now have a clear understanding of the impact and effectiveness of two distinct activities, Rhythm For The Brain as an interactive, stimulating activity, and sound relaxation as a relaxing, passive activity. This means we are now able to present our interventions to new customers and partners with a defined offer and clear objectives, whether this be for one of our activities or a combined session that includes both.

The main outcomes of the programme as specified in the funding application have all been met and the quantitative targets have been exceeded. The comprehensive internal and external data collection processes and information gathered through them, have allowed us to claim the successful completion of the outcomes and objectives.

Desired outcomes of the project were as follows:

- Increased social participation is created through clients participating in up to 48 sessions over a 12-month period. *These targets were exceeded.*
- Healthier lifestyles are promoted through cognitive stimulation, physical engagement, and social stimulation/interaction. *Evidence presented from participants.*
- Carers feel more supported because the intervention provides an opportunity for peer support and inclusion in community activities. *Evidence presented from participants.*
- Access to a relevant and diverse community offer is provided and the embedding of a culture which focuses on and supports the strengths, assets and positive outcomes for citizens is *addressed*. *Diversity of locations and venues helped meet this objective couples with iterative development of the programme through learning from initial sessions.*

The learning derived throughout the programme has also been highlighted in this report and we hope that this evaluation is a useful resource for other projects working in a similar area in the future.



Earthen Lamp exists to bring bright thinking to cultural and heritage organisations and creative businesses. What sets us apart is our straight-talking approach, our experience, and attitude to tackle any challenge with gusto. We believe that simple ideas and solutions can light up the darkest corners and solve complex issues.

If you would like to discuss the dark corners in your organisation or business, or just fancy a chat to see how we can help, drop us a line.



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