

# The Urgency of Music

Dismantling barriers to youth creative engagement through research in action



**Music Generation**  
**Cork City**  
Chathair Chorcaí

# The Urgency of Music

*"...it's the urgency of music...it's very kind of in the moment and its energising in every way from the performance side....you're verbalising, you're absorbing information through many lenses and senses and it's not just sitting down and reading or writing...it's so much more engaging. It's hugely beneficial."*

**Frank, musician educator**

## Introduction

A Chairde,

We are delighted to present our new research report 'The Urgency of Music' which aims to capture some of the thinking, development, learning, growth and creativity that has come about through our focused work with Traveller and Roma Groups, Autism Classes and Cork Migrant Centre's Youth Initiative over the past three years, focusing on documenting how we have tackled some of the barriers to participation we have noted through this work.

The impacts of this award will have a lasting effect on Music Generation Cork City itself and on how we design and strategically develop programmes into the future, with immediate effect on our strategic plan which has also been published this year. 'The Urgency of Music' will be shared with the national Music Generation network and will be available as an open resource to improve inclusive practice in the diversity of settings in which we all work.

We are very grateful to our esteemed research reporter Katherine Zeserson and to all of our wonderful team of Musician Educators, Providers, children and young people and partners for engaging so enthusiastically and creatively with this work.

Sincere thanks to Cork Education and Training Board, our lead partner in Cork City, for its ongoing support and for creating the conditions for this work to flourish, as well as our stalwart supporters University College Cork and Munster Technological University, The HSE and Cork City Council and to all of our creative partners in the city.

We are indebted to the Community Foundation of Ireland RTÉ Toy Show Appeal, as well as our advocates and champions for continuing to work to ensure that all children and young people have access to a performance music education that is relevant to their needs.

We look forward to the next chapter and to continued growth through shared understanding.



**Claire Layton**  
Music Development Officer, Music Generation Cork City





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# Glossary

**The RTÉ Toy Show Appeal**

The RTÉ Toy Show Appeal was established in 2020 to raise funds for Irish children’s charities through the televised Late Late Toy Show. Since then, more than €26 million has been raised to support these charities. The funds are awarded to charities via the Community Foundation for Ireland, a philanthropic hub with a mission of Equality For All in Thriving Communities.

**Education and Training Boards (ETB)**

Education and Training Boards are statutory education authorities. They are the driving force of education and training in the local community, with pathways for every learner across Early Education, Community National Schools, Post-primary Education, Further Education and Training, Apprenticeships and Traineeships, Youth Services, Outdoor Education Services, and Community Education Services. Cork Education & Training Board (CETB) is one of the lead stakeholders of Music Generation Cork City.

**Local Music Education Partnerships (LMEP) /  
Cork Local Music Education Partnership (CLMEP)**

Local Music Education Partnerships are groups of local experts, individuals, and organisations that champion and guide the development of the Music Generation programme in their area. Each LMEP is led by a Local Authority or an Education and Training Board.

**Music Development Officer (MDO)**

Music Development Officers are appointed in each Music Generation LMEP Area. They lead and oversee the development of performance music education programmes for Local Music Education Partnerships. Claire Layton is the Music Generation Cork City MDO.

**National Development Office (NDO)**

The National Development Office aims to achieve Music Generation’s mission by supporting the national system of local performance music education provision, through strategic partnership between philanthropy, Government, and Local Music Education Partnerships.

**Performance music education**

Music Generation provides performance music education – that is, the breadth of vocal and instrumental learning in all genres and styles of music. This includes all pedagogical approaches and practices appropriate to musical cultures and traditions and is delivered by professional Musician Educators. Performance music education is recognised by the Department of Education as non-mainstream music education. Performance music education complements and enriches, but does not replace, the mainstream music curriculum provision of the formal education system.

**Musician Educator (ME)**

The team of musicians who teach and facilitate performance music education programmes with Music Generation are called Musician Educators (MEs).

**Children & Young People (CYP)**

The abbreviation CYP is used throughout this report to refer to the children and young people who participate in Music Generation Cork City music education programmes.

**Community Education (CE)**

The term Community Education describes education and learning which generally takes place outside the formal education sector, often using non-formal or informal approaches. Community Education aims to enhance learning, empower people and contribute to society. It promotes personalised learning and flexibility within the learning group.

**Partner Provider**

Each Music Generation programme nationally is a unique programme tailored to the specific educational and geographical needs of the locality. The model developed by the Cork Local Music Education Partnership (CLMEP) to best meet Cork city’s needs is based on forming partnerships with community education partner providers. Throughout this report, they will be referred to as ‘partner providers’ or ‘providers’.

**Autism Terminology**

In this report, we have opted to use the term ASC (Autistic Spectrum Condition) rather than ASD (Autistic Spectrum Disorder) in line with AslAm training recommendations. For detailed notes on terminology, please see Dr. Jessica Cawley’s research notes online at: <https://musicgenerationcorkcity.com/downloads/Autism-Action-Research-Feb-2024.pdf>

**Continuing Professional Development (CPD)**

Continuing Professional Development is the term used to describe the learning activities staff engage in to develop their skills and abilities.

# About the Project and Report

## Overview

This creative research project was proposed as an opportunity for Music Generation Cork City to further develop and expand the offering of inclusive music education programmes being made available to marginalised communities in Cork city, and to children with special educational needs. The original proposal was developed under the theme of ‘*Our musical selves: Dismantling barriers to participation in music making and learning*’, and the project was funded by the RTÉ Toy Show Appeal through the Community Foundation of Ireland. Three individual project strands were developed in collaboration with and under the guidance of MGCC project partners, including Cork TVG STAR project (Supporting Travellers and Roma), Cork Migrant Centre, and Creative Tradition, a traditional Irish music education partner specialising in Autism.

## Background

Founded in 2012, for over a decade now Music Generation Cork City (MGCC) has been providing music learning and participation opportunities to children and young people up to 18 years of age in RAPID (Revitalising Areas through Planning, Investment & Development) areas of the city. Working in partnership with local music providers and musician-educators in a community education approach, our programmes generate inclusive, accessible, and transformative music education experiences for children at risk of exclusion.

### MGCC's core values are:

- **Equity** - we take a proactive and leading approach to inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility
- **Creativity** - we are committed to creative processes that allow for musical expression
- **Fun** - we place fun at the heart of our interactions with CYP
- **Togetherness** - we trust the people we work with and work hard to create a culture of shared respect and support across our partnerships

MGCC programmes take place weekly in a wide range of settings across the city, including primary & secondary schools, special schools, after-school youth & community settings, libraries and more, reaching almost 1800 children per week. We also develop socially inclusive performance opportunities and festivals in partnership with music education providers and local & national stakeholders.

## The Music Generation Cork City Approach

Our approach has always been organic, in that we respond to the needs of each particular area of the city, and work closely with our local partners in those communities in developing music programmes that respond to those needs. Our programme is not a ‘one size fits all’ model – it is a flexible, evolving approach.

## Core Challenges:

As local communities change and develop, so too does our ambition to respond to the change in needs that may be presented. Creating and sustaining this type of responsive model requires a flexible budget which can provide scope for expansion and development where needed.

In recent years MGCC faced some distinct challenges around this work:

- our core funding has remained at a standstill since 2013
- the boundaries of Cork city were newly expanded, meaning that there are entirely new parts of the city we have to find the financial means to reach

While new and changing needs were clearly evident, additional funding has been difficult to secure to offer further opportunities beyond our existing core programming.

In this project, we wanted to engage further with Migrant, Traveller & Roma communities and Autistic children & young people, who have been additionally challenged by:

- Special Education Needs services in Ireland in crisis for many years with understaffing, insurmountable waiting lists and more demand than supply
- Migrant communities based in International Protection Centres experiencing isolation, transport challenges, and difficulty in securing financial and personal independence within existing structures
- Cost and availability of supports required for CYP with additional needs
- Language barriers

Despite these challenges, we recognise that the right to education is a fundamental right and the right to creative opportunities is a human right to which all children and young people are entitled.

This is recognised in international human rights treaties and reflected in the Irish Constitution and in Irish law and policy.

We wanted to expand the knowledge and skills of our team, and the programme delivery to these young people. It was important to MGCC that this be a collaborative process whereby the voices and preferences of the young people and leaders from those communities be clearly heard and form part of the development process right from the beginning. We also wanted to respond to challenges in evidence-based new and innovative ways.

## Project Support

With this desire to expand our programming and reach children within these communities, the idea of the collaborative active research project was developed, and a funding application was submitted to the RTÉ Toy Show Appeal Fund via the Community Foundation for Ireland, from which we were successfully awarded a grant of €97,800. Upon announcing the news in 2021, Margaret O’Sullivan (then co-coordinator of MGCC) said:

*“Music Generation Cork City includes a huge web of people in Cork City and in our wider network so the honour of being selected for this funding is very meaningful for us, given the special place the Toy Show has in all our hearts and the generosity of the Irish public towards the appeal. The award will help us to create more inclusive, creative projects from which we will learn and share to ensure that children and young people can have access to music making and learning experiences that work for them in spite of all the barriers in their way.”*

## Project Development

From the outset, this project has recognised that children and young people are not a monolithic category, and that their experiences, needs, and creative aspirations are reflective of multiplicities of experience within and between cultures, communities, individuals, families, and social groupings. To date, MGCC programmes had already been developed according to local need and context, providing responsive and adaptive context-based music learning and participation opportunities.

With project funding in place, development on this new action research project began in 2022, with a design to create the conditions for young people’s voices to influence and shape creative music-making experiences according to their own needs and creative desires, and in so doing, to influence practice for young people throughout their communities.

Alongside this, an additional aim for this piece of work was to build in CPD training opportunities for the MGCC musician-educator team, expanding on their existing knowledge and skill-sets, providing new opportunities to learn from peers, young people and leaders within the communities they would work in, and to encourage and facilitate opportunities for reflective practice.

Following a public call for proposals, Katherine Zeserson was appointed to the role of project researcher, and we are delighted to now share her final research report here, in the next section.

It is important to note that while this is an action research project, it is not a piece of academic research. The approach and the dissemination of the research is unique to this project and differs in a number of ways from the style of research published by academic institutions.

## Project Objectives

A series of action research projects were initiated in partnership with groups that work with children who are persistently marginalised and excluded from music making and learning. The intention of the research was to do the following:

- Develop and implement action research projects in schools with children and young people with Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC)/Autistic CYP.
- Develop and implement action research partnership with Cork Traveller Visibility Group (TVG) and STAR project (Supporting Travellers and Roma) to address gaps in music provision and identify barriers to participation in existing music programmes
- Develop and implement action research to identify and address ongoing barriers to music participation for children in Direct Provision and amongst migrant communities in partnership with Cork Migrant Centre.

Intended outputs included the production of a research report, as well as visual and aural documentation of the projects for dissemination of the learning from the study. In addition to identifying barriers to participation, the research set out to document actions that may be used to address exclusionary processes and environments, including pedagogical strategies, culturally responsive processes, inclusive language, awareness training and development and any actions that create the conditions for enhanced participation for all young people.

## Project Outcomes

In the immediate term this funding has enabled us to:

- research, develop and deliver these action research projects
- allow all of our staff (32 in total) to complete Traveller and Roma cultural awareness training and Autism awareness training, delivered by the Traveller and Roma Visibility Group Team and AslAm respectively.
- it has made room for conversation around equality of access, challenging stereotypes and prejudices
- It has helped us to document and find solutions for practical logistical challenges, learning more about disability services and education in Ireland and forging links with key liaison people in the community.
- It has helped us to deepen our relationships with other organisations working in the field of community arts, integration, SEN (Special Educational Needs) supports and development and to create connection and understanding on a meaningful level.



# The Urgency of Music

## Contexts

These action research projects were led by three Music Generation Cork City partner providers:

### 01 - Autism (ASC) project:

- Creative Tradition in partnership with South Lee Educate Together (Co-educational/ mixed school), St Mary’s on the Hill (Co-educational/mixed primary school) and Scoil Íosagáin (Boys National School)-21 participants, 8-12 years of age

### 02 - Traveller and Roma project:

- The Kabin Studio in partnership with STAR/Traveller Visibility Group (TVG) Homework club and afterschool club participant -17 participants, 9-13yrs
- Music in Community (MiC) with St Aidan’s Secondary School, Dublin Hill, supported by staff from STAR project and TVG over 8 weeks with 7 participants, 14-18yrs

### 03 - Cork Migrant Centre Youth Initiative:

- The Kabin Studio in partnership with Cork Migrant Centre (CMC) Youth Initiative - 16 participants, 14-18 yrs

Additional documentation, including photos, staff profiles, video and audio from each project is available at:

<https://musicgenerationcorkcity.com/the-urgency-of-music>  
[01 - Autism Research Project – Music Generation Cork City](#)  
[02 - Traveller and Roma Groups – Music Generation Cork City](#)  
[03 - Cork Migrant Centre – Music Generation Cork City](#)

## The Urgency of Music Project Team

Read team biographies online:  
<https://musicgenerationcorkcity.com/the-urgency-of-music/#meet-the-staff>

### Research & Project Management

|                                |  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| <b>Katherine Zeserson</b>      | Researcher & Reporter  |
| <b>Claire Layton</b>           | Music Development Officer/ Coordinator, MGCC   |
| <b>Dr. Margaret O’Sullivan</b> | Director of Quality, Research & Development, Music Generation (Co-Music Development Officer, MGCC at the time of project delivery) |
| <b>Paula Phelan</b>            | Additional Research & Focus Groups   |

### Autism Research Project

|                           |  |
|---------------------------|--|
| <b>Dr. Jessica Cawley</b> | Researcher, Creative Lead and Project Coordinator (Creative Tradition) |
| <b>Ben Janning</b>        | Musician Educator  |

### Research Project with Migrant Communities

|                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| <b>Garry McCarthy</b>      | Creative Director & Project Coordinator at The Kabin Studio |
| <b>Dr. Naomi Masheti</b>   | Programme Coordinator, Cork Migrant Centre                  |
| <b>Fionnuala O’Connell</b> | Programme Coordinator, Cork Migrant Centre                  |
| <b>Raphael Olympio</b>     | Musician Educator, CMC and MGCC                             |

### Research Project with Traveller & Roma Communities

|                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| <b>Gina Miyagawa</b>     | Roma Education Officer, STAR Project Coordinator (TVG)      |
| <b>Rachel Coffey</b>     | Traveller Education Officer, STAR Project Coordinator (TVG) |
| <b>Garry McCarthy</b>    | Creative Lead & Project Coordinator (The Kabin Studio)      |
| <b>Joe Philpott</b>      | Creative Lead & Musician Educator (Music in Community)      |
| <b>Rory McGovern</b>     | Creative Lead & Musician Educator (Music in Community)      |
| <b>Frank McCarthy</b>    | Creative Project Facilitator, TVG & STAR Project            |
| <b>Caoimhe Barry</b>     | Project Support, TVG & STAR Project / The Kabin Studio      |
| <b>Alex Pacino Brady</b> | Project Support, TVG & STAR Project / The Kabin Studio      |

### Project Support

|                                 |  |
|---------------------------------|--|
| <b>Aida Whooley</b>             | Music Generation Cork City Resource Team |
| <b>Aoibheann Carey-Philpott</b> | Music Generation Cork City Resource Team |



## About the lead organisations:

### Music Generation Cork City

Music Generation Cork City (MGCC) is a performance music education programme that works in partnership with community-based musicians and music organisations to bring music education into the lives of children and young people across Cork City.

[musicgenerationcorkcity.com/programmes/](https://musicgenerationcorkcity.com/programmes/)

### Creative Tradition

Creative Tradition was established in 2013 as a non-profit organization to support people of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds to learn Irish traditional music. Creative Tradition believes that providing a variety of pathways into the world of traditional music is the most fun, inclusive, effective, and holistic way of passing on Irish traditional music [www.creativetradition.ie](http://www.creativetradition.ie)

### The Kabin Studio

A not-for-profit vibrant music & creative hub, repurposed Masterkabin in Knocknaheeny in the Northside of Cork City. Established by GMCBeats in 2012 with the support of Music Generation Cork City, The Kabin has grown out of a love for hip hop, songwriting, performance and creative expression.

[thekabin.ie/our-work](http://thekabin.ie/our-work)

### Cork Migrant Centre

Cork Migrant Centre (CMC) runs psychosocial programs for migrants in Cork. CMC utilises a strength-based approach whereby migrant individuals, children and families' knowledge, skills and experience are acknowledged through participatory and collaborative working methods, building capacity and delivering evidence-based interventions. CMC offers its services to all migrants in Cork in Cork City and County, with a focus on direct provision centres in Cork (with close to 1000 residents combined), and those fleeing war. Its Youth Initiative grew out of need for services and resources for children and young people of migrant families, especially those living in emergency accommodation (International Protection Accommodation Services, IPAS) accessing CMC's adult programmes.

[corkmigrantcentre.ie](http://corkmigrantcentre.ie)

### Music in Community (MiC)

MiC works in healthcare settings such as Marymount Hospice, the Ballincollig Family Resource Centre, Westgate Foundation, sheltered housing units for senior citizen residents, Cork University Hospital, Headway and Music Generation Cork City, grounded in the wish to use music to bring communities closer together.

[musicincommunity.ie](http://musicincommunity.ie)

## Summary of Projects



### 01 Creative Tradition's Autism/ASC Action Research: Supporting Autistic children to learn & play traditional music: Documenting our Action Research Project

*By Dr Jessica Cawley, Researcher, Creative Tradition Provider, Musician Educator*

As part of a special Arts Council Agility Award and Music Generation Cork City's Community Foundation of Ireland RTÉ Toy Show Appeal action research project, Dr Jessica Cawley has developed music sessions for Autistic classes and documented outcomes for the participants. Dr Cawley describes how this experience shifted the way she approaches teaching traditional music in schools and in the community, now carving more space and time to better support learners with Autism/Autistic learners, and working more closely with families, teachers, and SNAs to identify approaches to better nurture and celebrate budding musicians.

This work took place in South Lee Educate Together (Co-educational/mixed school), St Mary's on the Hill (Co-educational/mixed school) and Scoil Íosagáin (Boys National School).

**Engagement:** 21 participants, 8-12 yrs

Detailed notes and case studies are available here: [Autism Research Project – Music Generation Cork City](#)



## Summary of Projects



### 02 A The Kabin Studio: *Traveller and Roma workshops and recording project*

### 02 B Music in Community (MiC): *Teen traveller songwriting and recording project*

This two-part project aimed to develop and implement a research partnership with the Cork Traveller Visibility Group and STAR (Supporting Travellers and Roma) to address gaps in music provision for Traveller and Roma youth and identify barriers to participation in existing programmes. By creating Traveller-specific and Roma-specific spaces we explored possibilities for cultivating cultural and musical awareness of traditions and contemporary songwriting, spoken word, vocal performance, beat-making and creative music making. We developed a set of collaborative projects for action research to be implemented in selected schools and youth settings, led by The Kabin Studio and MiC respectively

- The Kabin led intensive 3-day songwriting and beat-making camps at The Kabin Studio during midterm and summer 2022, and a six-week programme in collaboration with the TVG afterschool support project, supported by TVG and The Kabin teams.

**Engagement:** 17 participants, 9-13 yrs

- Music in Community (MiC) worked with Traveller teenagers in St Aidan's Secondary School Dublin Hill, supported by staff from STAR project and TVG. Initially a mixed group, this became an all-female group.

**Engagement:** 7 participants, 14-18 yrs

## Summary of Projects



### 03 The Kabin Studio: *Cork Migrant Centre Youth Initiative*

This project aimed to provide a summer camp that would offer young people an outlet, a safe space for creativity, to meet new people and to discover new musical techniques and processes, using their voices for self-expression, with the objective of creating a new song or developing ideas for composition or for spoken word.

**Engagement:** 16 participants, 14-18 yrs



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Reporter: Katherine Zeserson



Music Generation  
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*This process is about opening up, respecting, allowing learning and growing and being in partnership with young people to celebrate themselves and their culture*



# Ingredients for success

Across the different delivery strands of this programme, three clear elements emerge which can be seen as the pillars of the work – fundamental to the impact on participants and overall success of the programmes:

- 01 Safe Spaces
- 02 Respect
- 03 Musical Energy

Each of these three can be interpreted and implemented differently according to context, but it is the combination of these three elements that creates the optimum conditions for the work to meet its goals.

## 01 Safe Spaces

**Alex, musician educator:**

*“...we wanted to create a safe space and an environment that was non-judgmental and where people can engage with each other holistically through the creations of music and stuff like that. We wanted to create a safe space and non-judgment because it is the opposite of what these young people are used to...”*

The concept of safe space has differently nuanced meanings in social work, psychology, therapy and education. In the context of this project, the team agreed that it had psychological, physical and structural features:

**Psychological:** The culturally specific groups at The Kabin were vital to ensuring that young people felt able to talk openly about their own lives, use their own languages, and generally own the environment they found themselves in. There was always a liaison/support person or teacher present who was well known to the group, and available during the music-making. Similarly, working in the Autistic Spectrum Condition (ASC)<sup>1</sup> classes meant that the

music-making process could be entirely designed to support the particular needs, tastes and culture of the autistic students, and the norms of their behaviours could set the tone of the sessions. The inclusive, dialogic pedagogy adopted by all the practitioners in all of the settings - in which the music-making process was explored as a partnership between musician educator and participants, rather than being a didactic or controlling experience - enabled young people to gradually take more and more creative risks and manifest greater self-confidence as the projects unfolded. Underpinning practitioner attitudes of appreciation, positive regard and hopefulness imbued the creative environments with curiosity and a non-judgmental sense of possibility. An overall energy that was calm, inviting and relaxed enabled greater engagement.

**Physical:** Music-appropriate spaces with the right equipment and resources (and in the case of The Kabin furnished with professional level technology) and a welcoming atmosphere made the work flow more easily for everyone. Support for transport, and in some cases accompanying participants to places, made a huge difference. Where activities took place in unsuitable or uncomfortable spaces, or without appropriate resources, it was harder for young people to engage fully. Familiar spaces were important for the young people in the ASC classes.

**Structural:** Having clear roles and responsibilities across the partnerships, and having robust safeguarding systems in place, meant that all practitioners and partners could work in a relaxed and focused way, free of ancillary concerns. Where the partnerships were less clear, as in some of the school settings, it was harder for musicians to sustain that sense of ease for young people.

Safe spaces are created and maintained by the practitioners and partners working together. When asked ‘*how do you create a safe space?*’ – musician educators said:

- Give yourself time to get ready and set up – physically (in the space) and emotionally / spiritually (in yourself)
- Create a group contract with participants for everyone to work within
- Have the courage to immerse yourself in what’s happening in the moment
- It needs to feel authentic – keep it real
- Bear in mind Maslow’s hierarchy of needs
- Attend to all aspects of safety: including privacy in relation to phones/ recording, no participant ever being forced to do anything embarrassing, no degrading behaviour ever accepted, youth worker or other staff member always present to support

<sup>1</sup> See note on Autism Terminology in the Glossary



## 02 Respect

### **Raphael, Musician Educator:**

*“...as practitioners we’re only there to guide as opposed to lead. The young people actually need to lead every session. Of course, we’re going to have ice-breakers in place and certain things to kind of get them thinking a bit more. But they’re doing all the work, you know, and we’re just kind of guiding them and giving them options as opposed to saying, okay, you’re doing rap and rap is about A, B, C and D. They create their own rules. They create their own agenda and objective. And we just try to guide them to finishing what they plan to finish.”*

The pedagogical approaches of the Musician Educators, whilst diverse and personal to the artists, had several features in common; some explicitly named at the start, and others observed and identified through the reflective process of generating this document. These common features can be brought together around the idea of respect.

Respect can of course be seen as a fundamental attribute of a safe space, but it is worth teasing out as a separate pillar because it was foregrounded and determining in all of the pedagogical processes, as well as in partner negotiations.

Musician Educators working with the Traveller, Roma and migrant young people expressed active, continuous interest in the specific identities and cultural practices of the young people with whom they were working. They took time to learn some words in the languages of young people’s cultures, to find out about musical tastes and generally to orient themselves – entirely authentically – as curious, empathetic and without prejudice.

Threaded throughout all the Musician Educator practice was a common assumption that success is always within reach of the participants, and that it is a continuously evolving, self-determined goal. The processes were fun, interesting, made attractive in ways that were suitable to the participants, and even when new or challenging information / experiences were being introduced, small quick wins were enabled that ensured participants could see, hear and feel success progressively. All efforts were appreciated without spurious over-affirmation – young people’s innate sense of their own achievements was valued, alongside a strong encouragement to take risks and persistent attention to building self-esteem.

### **Jessie, Musician Educator:**

*“...it’s literally just meeting them where they are at ....it’s them knowing that they are being seen and heard...and then after that you might have a (tangible) outcome...”*

There was a high level of respect evident throughout the programme’s eco-system – between specialist partners, providers, musicians and Music Generation Cork City staff – which mirrored and reinforced the respectful energy visible within the music making spaces. For example, MGCC staff’s willingness to hear and take on board the viewpoints of the Supporting Traveller and Roma (STAR) colleagues led to the decision to create culturally

specific spaces for Traveller and Roma young people, which proved a key determinant of the success of those strands of work.

### **Margaret, Co-Music Development Officer:**

*“Gina and Rachel (STAR)...mentioned the need for culturally specific spaces. And while we emphasise the need for inclusion and talk about inclusive, socially inclusive music practice, I realised that in order to be inclusive you might have to create a space that could be – in a way – kind of exclusive, in order to give that platform to the expression of culture and celebration of language...”*

## 03 Musical Energy

### **Jessie, Musician Educator:**

*“...(it’s about) flexibility and presence...the children enjoy it and are in it. Once a child sees music they can’t unsee it.”*

All strands of the work had vivid musical character, from the soundscape stories Jessie Cawley created in and with young people in ASC classes to the sharp, dynamic confident tracks created by participants from all the different groups at The Kabin. All the musician educators in their different contexts sustained a sense of purposeful creative motion; anchoring participant experience in a strong framework of the familiar and progressively introducing and reinforcing the new.

### **Raphael, Musician Educator:**

*“...and (Garry) really gets them to ...nod their heads or something and really feel the rhythm and the rhythm is not only about the words that you’re saying, it’s about how you’re moving with your body. And that’s something they learned that like, okay, they don’t necessarily need to start with words. They can start with movement. And from movement they catch the rhythm and then start to add words to how they’re moving. And then you can really see the difference when they start actually rapping or recording their songs because you can hear the energy is different and the rhythm is different and they’re feeling a lot more comfortable just because their bodies are matching what they’re saying, almost, almost expressing that with their bodies as well as their words.”*

Often starting from young people’s favourite songs, or personal musical ideas, the Musician Educators worked in a fluent and - where not working solo - collaborative way to help



participants experience creative buzz and flow. This was as evident in the slow-moving, note by note composition process used by Jessie in an ASC class with complete beginner tin whistle players as it was in Garry, Raphael and Caoimhe’s fast-moving production process at The Kabin working with the expressive group of Roma young people.

**Frank, Musician Educator:**

*“...And as soon as we included their language and culture, you could see them light up and ... afterwards they were performing and the only word I could use to describe it was electric. They’re amazing kids. And they all were so different and they each brought their own personality. And, it’s not even about trying to contain that energy. It’s just really trying to structure it and channel it..”*

**Underpinnings**

**Rapha, Musician Educator:**

*“...the hardest thing when you are from a disadvantaged kind of minority community is that it is hard to express yourself. You always kind of mute yourself. And I feel like through the music workshops and song-writing and poetry or whatever they use to express themselves, it allows them to speak. It allows them to connect and allows them to find common ground amongst themselves and amongst other people.”*

# Values and ethics

**All three strands of this Action Research programme were characterised by a deeply rooted ethical framework, which in turn arises from the wider Music Generation Cork City value-base. This ethical underpinning was visible in the ways in which musicians consistently worked alongside and in partnership with young people - listening, supporting, responding, encouraging, informing, stimulating and inspiring – with high levels of respect and warmth.**

**Margaret, Co-Music Development Officer:**

*“Traveller and Roma people on a daily basis encounter prejudice in every interaction. And it is very rare, I would think, to get the chance to just be, and just to create in a respectful and respecting environment like that... the space is very important in how this is happening. The Kabin is a safe space – it’s literally its own little world...it’s a place where people are respected.”*

At The Kabin Studio, led by Garry McCarthy, the Musician Educators established an atmosphere of mutual respect, courtesy and care for everyone, without overt rule-setting, which clearly enabled all young people to be able to express themselves and participate freely and safely. Their own behaviours expressed these values and created a warm welcome for all the young people.

At St. Aidan’s, whilst the project faced some contextual and logistical challenges, Joe and Rory sustained a calm, engaged dialogue with young people that enabled positive outcomes for some young people.



**Joe, Musician Educator:**

*“...they asked me a question one week about do I have children or something, and I told them the story and I showed them a photograph because I was comfortable enough to do that and said, these are my two sons... just because they asked me and I thought... I’m going to reveal something about myself to them ....you’ve got to show your cards a bit as well.*

*And the other thing then was when things got a bit challenging, when I felt they were pushing it, I could kind of call them out on that and say, look, we’ve two ways we can do this - we can treat you like children or as you actually are - like young women. It’s up to yourselves, you know, it’s up to you. They were like, grand. Gotcha. And it was done. It was like, well, we’re not going to be children. We’re going to be young women.”*

In the ASC classes, Jessie’s patient, detailed focus on turn-taking and listening created the best possible conditions in which the participating young people could explore individual contribution and the experience of making music in a group.

There is a subtlety in this. Young people were taking many levels of risk through their participation in the programme: going to unfamiliar places, engaging in new and unfamiliar activities, meeting strangers, stepping in the spaces of music creation and skills development and so on.

Furthermore, all of the participating young people had actively experienced some form of societal exclusion, discrimination or marginalisation. In order for these new experiences to be rewarding and not over-frightening, dispiriting or alienating, young people need to be valued, nurtured, accompanied and encouraged in their learning and growth. This young-person centred pedagogy was abundantly evident in all the successful elements of this programme, where success is measured by continued engagement and / or observable creative progress.

**Claire, Co-Music Development Officer:**

*“...when you create a space for that creativity to happen [referencing The Kabin Studio] literally on day one they came out with a song that was bursting with pride in their culture, that told brilliant and beautiful things about their language, their values, their approach to life....they are creative – when there are no boundaries...”*

All of the Musician Educators talked about how much they learned from young people and from the experience of the work. This capacity and enthusiasm for learning and growth in musician educators was allied with an open, equitable demeanour that proved infectious for most participants. This powerful mix of humility, energy, and a passionate commitment to

fairness and justice was palpable in the Music Generation Cork City office-based colleagues involved with the programme as well as the Musician Educators.

**Caoimhe, Musician Educator:**

*“...It’s really important to take time to have an interest ... not to pretend you have an interest...really get to know the young people and talk about their culture, about their community, about everything else. I suppose that’s basically the bottom line for me if I’m starting with a new group...And my thing is, how can you possibly teach someone or tell someone what to do if you don’t know anything about them?”*

**Jessie, Musician Educator:**

*“It’s like we need to advocate for these groups of people we’re working with. We can’t do it unless we understand them. So it’s actually action based advocacy...we’re interacting with the families. And the families are thinking differently about Autism... we’re bending towards Autistic children. Not because we have to but because we choose to. And that’s the whole point. You know, I feel like it’s in the bending you’re taking a stand and you’re saying, this is how we’re doing it. Because we want all of society to bend in that direction.. And I really feel like it’s not teaching kids with autism. It’s actually advocacy. It’s saying this matters, this matters.”*

**Claire, Co-Music Development Officer:**

*“One of the kids on one day was a wheelchair user and she just came in at the same speed as everybody else. And I think that’s essential. It’s just she was absolutely on the same level as everybody else, literally and metaphorically. And that is something that you cannot take for granted in every space. And I think to have a genuinely inclusive project, that’s the way it should be, is you should be able to just roll on in and be on the same level...”*



# Training and research

**One distinctive feature of this programme was the time invested in training and research across both strands.**

In relation to the work in the ASC classes, Jessie undertook training with AsIAM, and carried out extensive personal research into music-making with Autistic young people and related topics in preparation for her programmes, as well as continuing to actively reflect, review and amend her work as the year progressed. This commitment to reflective practice enabled her to develop her own skills and understandings to a high level, and from this position of immersive, lived experiential knowledge she will be able to support and train her colleagues to work more effectively with Autistic young people.

The Musician Educators working with Traveller and Roma young people participated in training led by their STAR project partners. This proved invaluable in supporting them to engage openly and respectfully with participants about their culture and life experience, and gave them a deep understanding of the young people's contexts. The close partnership with Gina and Rachel (Education Support Workers with Cork STAR Pilot Project) functioned almost as a continuing education process – through their presence at sessions they were able to gently inform and influence elements of dialogue and provide wider context and insight as need.

Musician Educators were always trying to understand, learn and use the language of the young people themselves, whatever that might be - visual, physical, verbal - in order to encourage, respect and celebrate the culture and expressive power of the participants.

**Garry, The Kabin, Musician Educator;**

*"...working with the Roma community I learned that there's a completely different language to Romanian. They have their own language ... and something that we try to encourage them to do ...is to put some of their own language words in their raps in order to express themselves so that they kind of take ownership of it. Because, you know, we don't want them feeling like, oh, you have to rap everything in English, no, - you use this to explore your own culture and educate all the people about your culture as well. And with the Traveller groups as well. And they have their own their own languages... language is the thing that interests me the most and how to actually incorporate it into their tracks and almost teaching me how to say what*

*they're trying to say it. Because for me to show them how to rap it, I first have to learn how to say it and then I have to kind of translate it back to them rhythmically. So I find that puts me into their shoes because I often forget that, you know....for a lot of kids it might not come so naturally. So if you're trying to get a kid to rap, even one bar and they're struggling with it, for me to try and rap one bar in Romani and I'm struggling with it, it's reminding me this is how they're feeling when they're struggling with a line that I might feel is quite simple in English. "*

**Jessie, Musician Educator:**

*"...language doesn't matter nearly in Autistic classrooms sometimes, you know... one ASC group that I do have, they're all junior infants, so they're all four or five, so they're going to be young anyway, language wise. But all six of them were not speaking, you know, so they just gesture and stuff. So in that music class, you literally go in for a half an hour and don't say anything, because if you're explaining things to them, it doesn't even help them. So you're gesturing, like signing. And I usually had an infographic of hello, song, dance, shake eggs or whatever it is, so everything was visual ... the less words, the better. It's eye contact. It's moving in gestures and being on the ground with them, not higher than them. And then the uselessness of language was actually kind of interesting..."*

The RTÉ Toy Show Appeal application was grounded in meticulous research into the situation of Traveller and Roma young people in Cork City, and in Ireland more widely. The evidence showed that people from these communities experience widespread social discrimination, severe poverty, various forms of exclusion and challenging living conditions.

Against this background, the music programme was conceived as an exercise in inclusion, respect and equity – enabling the young people to have access to the same high-quality music-making experiences that any other young person might have. In addition, musician educators welcomed the opportunity to learn more about Traveller and Roma culture from participants, and this became a powerful catalyst for confidence building and identity formation.

This pedagogical approach aligned precisely with the framing of the programme as an action research process, enshrining that notion of continuous mutual learning into the fabric of the work.

**Caoimhe, Musician Educator:**

*"I started a conversation (with one of the groups of Traveller girls) and I didn't know where it was going to go... I said I don't want to ask questions in case I come off as disrespectful. And one of the older girls, Lucy, turned around, you don't sound disrespectful, she says, you want to learn about us and that's great. So what I got from that immediately was that they're willing to be open with you if you're willing to understand, to try and understand.....they were telling us the difference between Travellers and gypsies and they were so open about it and they were like - anything*



*you want to ask, just ask us. It's not disrespectful. You just want to learn. And as the conversation was progressing Rapha was writing words and sentences on the board, and the girls agreed to do a song or a spoken word piece or a rap on what it's like to be a Traveller...they're so young and they're so unapologetically themselves. And it's the same with the Roma crew. The culture that's embedded in these children from a young age is absolutely amazing. And then by them telling us we just learn more and become better facilitators."*



# Partnership, planning and staffing

**Establishing and sustaining the partnerships was fundamental to the work, and the model was complex. Music Generation Cork City was the programme lead, bringing together music providers Creative Tradition, Music in Community and The Kabin to work with the STAR project, the Cork Migrant Centre and the schools.**

The partner providers and their musicians were utterly key to the success of the work, and the high level of commitment and skill of the musician educators was truly impressive. The programme could not have been envisioned with such high aspirations without the musician educators, and in some cases (Jessie Cawley's work with Creative Tradition, Garry McCarthy's work at The Kabin) it was the pre-existing interests and curiosity of the musician educators that generated those specific strands of delivery.

They are an outstandingly thoughtful and open-minded group of practitioners, with different areas of expertise and levels of experience; united by a passion to enable young people to do their best, and an active willingness to change tack, try new approaches and learn from the participants. Involving one artist, Frank McCarthy, who is a Traveller, brought a vital depth of insight to the work that was inspiring both to young people and also to practitioner/partner teams.

**Claire, Co-Music Development Officer:**

*"...the success of it is very much because of the participation and cooperation of those leaders and the relationships that they already have with those groups..."*



Detailed, thorough and patient attention to partnership working was a key means of ensuring young people's equity and inclusion. The depth of planning processes had a direct impact on the stability and effectiveness of the programmes., and where there was less investment from partners in focused planning it was much harder for musician educators to anchor the work with and for the participants. In one setting, musician educators had no information about why young people didn't attend, or how decisions were being taken about which participants were being selected. The lack of direct liaison and shared planning with staff certainly impacted on their ability to deepen the engagement of most participants. In another setting, shared content planning was acknowledged by both musician educator and classroom teacher as a weakness of the group's experience of the programme.

**Jessie, Musician Educator:**

*"where the situation was 100% supportive... where the teachers are a part of the social fabric of the class... literally the whole atmosphere, the whole environment for the kids was conducive to connection to Autism and music.*

*So I learned it's not just about the delivery or the tutor or the music educator, it's the whole culture."*

Where planning was close and thorough, it was easier to establish the work. For the projects based at the Kabin, details of transport and logistics, timing, identification of participants and so on were thrashed out jointly, drawing on combined expertise, and thus ensuring best possible conditions for take-up and continued attendance.

**Garry, The Kabin:**

*"...it's also about having the right youth worker or someone that will understand where we're coming from and what we're trying to achieve and also try to promote it and encourage it with the young people and their families as well. ...when the families see what's actually going on and hear what's going on then they really, really get it and they will encourage their kids to take part even more."*

In the case of the Traveller and Roma projects, the decision to deliver Traveller and Roma specific activities, rather than including those young people in more general activities, was made in response to discussions with the STAR partners. This was a key decision, and one which would not have been made without the expertise of the partners. It is clear from musician feedback that the sense of valid identity enabled within these cultural specific groupings nurtured creative engagement and confidence building in ways that would not have been possible in mixed groups.

**Mags, Co-Music Development Officer:**

*"...our objective in partnering with the STAR is that they're already building the*

*relationships, and they offer trust, integrity and support...and we were able to be genuinely be open to whatever is was the specialists were able to tell us. That was a really important part of our consultation process...and we wanted to use this as an opportunity to look at not just program, but also to make structural changes that will continue to inform how programs are developed"*

**Fionnuala, Cork Migrant Centre:**

*"A lot of the groups we work with live in Direct Provision Centres that are located in isolated areas. Because of the nature of Direct provision, residents are also isolated from society. Being new to Ireland, looking different, speaking differently (many speaking two or more languages) and living in a system that is not enabling - has its impacts. A lot of the time, we see that the young people find it difficult to express themselves, so getting them to a space where they feel comfortable enough to speak even in their native language is really important – just to have that freedom and that comfort, that sense of belonging.*

*Art and creativity is a vehicle that we use to move with the young people..... our goal was to get the young people out of the centres ... outside of that environment and to create a space where they could come together and be creative and use their voices and learn new skills and create something that has their voices.*

*One of the other aspects of it was also getting young people aware of the opportunities and services that are available in Cork City - Making that connection with the Kabin studio was very important because you don't know what you don't know, it's another community to connect. It was a little adventure that we'd have. And then meeting Alex, meeting Caoimhe, seeing Raphael in that environment, someone that they are familiar with as a facilitator had an impact - I think that engagement, that connection was so important and kind of expanding their world a little bit and seeing that these opportunities are here, these spaces are here, and you can engage with them after the week is over."*

**Frank, Musician Educator:**

*"...it's a process .. The trust needs to be built up over the course of time...No two groups or no two kids are the same, and I'm as much of a student as they are. It's important to remain in that kind of philosophy or mindset. It's more of a collaboration than anything else.... it's about...investment in those kids. I think about Garry (McCarthy) and his level of respect and humility and empathy and his approach. It has trickled down and influenced everyone that is from The Kabin. I literally just do for youth what Garry did for me. You know how it is, even on a small scale - if you're driving down the street and you are at a junction and you let somebody out. That person would then be more inclined to do the same.."*



# Project Outcomes

## Achievement of Objectives

All three of the primary objectives of this active research project were successfully developed and delivered, via the formation of strong partnerships with each of the lead organisations and musician-educators involved. The learning and findings from all three research projects have heavily influenced the development of Music Generation Cork City's strategic plan 2024-2028.

Here we give a brief overview of the programmes established under each strand:

### Autism Research Project

This project was led by Dr. Jessica Cawley (Creative Tradition), and saw the successful development of action research programmes in three primary schools Scoil Íosagáin, St Mary's on the Hill and Cork South Lee Educate Together N.S.

Dr. Cawley produced an in-depth 25 page resource documenting the experience with teaching notes, case studies and learning from this practice. We would highly recommend reading this 'Autism Action Research Notes' pdf, which is available here: <https://musicgenerationcorkcity.com/the-urgency-of-music/autism-research-project/>

One particular challenge identified in this work was that extra time is necessary for successful facilitation of programmes with groups of autistic children and young people. The use of visuals and other resources that students with ASC need takes time to adapt and create and thus is more resource heavy than mainstream tuition.

Dr Cawley's findings will lead to better outcomes for children and people with Autism/ Autistic CYP's musical engagement in the future.

### Research Project with Traveller & Roma Communities

Through this project, we developed a strong working relationship with the Traveller and Roma Visibility Group and its Education Officers, and have had ongoing engagement with Traveller and Roma children and young people for the past two years including four intensive music camps (during Easter, Summer and mid-term breaks).

The majority of the work was delivered to children aged 8 – 12 years. In addition to this, seven Traveller teenagers from St. Aidan's Community College engaged with the project, with many of them also attending workshops at The Kabin Studio to create and record original music with our team of Musician Educators and professional producers there. The impacts of this support will be felt on an ongoing basis.

The publication and implementation of the '[Traveller and Roma Education Strategy 2024-2030](#)' by Rialtas na hÉireann/Government of Ireland is a welcome commitment to improving opportunities for these groups in the coming years.

### Research Project with Cork Migrant Centre

Through this project, Music Generation Cork City's partnership with Cork Migrant Centre Youth Initiative has been bolstered in a way that has opened up new opportunities for the young people and Cork Migrant Centre as a partner organisation of MGCC and Cork Education and Training Board more generally.

The work has stabilised a high quality performance music education programme for teenagers that travel to the city from Cork's main direct provision centres and has offered opportunities for engagement that would not have been possible otherwise.

Another successful outcome for this project has been the additional support it has offered CMC for the development of Sauti Studio (Swahili word for voice, giving voice, thunder, sound) at The Haven Café, North Gate Quay, Cork and a youth music programme on Saturdays with a particular focus on songwriting, beats and music production. This project has helped to realise partnership goals that we have been working to develop for many years and we will continue to work to find ways to sustain this positive partnership.

**Outcomes:** 'Travel The World', a song composed at Cork Migrant Centre's 5-day summer camp at The Kabin Studio Knocknaheeny by members of Cork Migrant Centre Youth Initiative in collaboration with members of The Kabin Studio. Written, recorded and produced July 2022 at The Kabin Studio: Audio [here](#)

This project led us directly to partnership with Cork Midsummer Festival and Music Generation on developing a youth-led event for the 2023 CMF programme. The young people involved in the CMC summer camp project went on to engage with workshops with Battersea Arts Centre's beatbox artist Kate Donnachie (AKA Special K) and further workshops with The Kabin, including dance workshops with Andrea Williams, to develop a Block Party event called 'Fusion Avenue', a high-energy youth culture take-over at Marina Park, Cork, featuring performers from Cork Migrant Centre Youth Initiative and young artists from The Kabin Studio, providing a platform for new music developed by each group.

This project was part of the Creative Europe and The Arts Council funded BEyond PARTicipation, exploring methodologies and possibilities of participatory cocreation and co-funded by Music Generation / Arts Council and the Department of Education's Creativity and Collaboration Fund.



## Impacts

The impact of the work that took place over the course of this two-year project has been immense.

Across all three strands, these programmes involved building new and strengthening existing partnerships with a range of organisations, schools and individuals. The result has been the expansion, stabilising and development of impactful music education projects, which all have the capacity to be sustained and further expanded, should additional funding be made available to continue this work into the future.

The process has refined our strategic thinking on how to design programmes in a way that alleviates as many barriers to participation as possible. It has also made room for conversation around equality of access, challenging stereotypes and prejudices, overcoming practical logistical challenges, learning more about disability services and education in Ireland and forging links with key liaison people in the community.

The work has enabled us to act upon our strategic objectives to employ more people from diverse socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds, allowing us to employ project leaders from the Travelling community and diverse ethnic backgrounds that better reflect the experiences of the children and young people that engaged with these projects.

### Training

The staff training and upskilling which was delivered as part of these projects will continue to be of benefit to all involved going forward. The learning throughout this process was multi-directional, with the team learning from advocate organisations (including AsIAm, Ireland's national Autism charity, Cork Traveller Visibility Group and STAR Project), from each other, from the educational settings, and from the children and young people involved. In turn, the children and young people's (CYPs) experiences were enhanced by the expanding range of approaches and skills of the team facilitating these music programmes.

### Creative Opportunities

The CYPs involved in all three projects took part in a range of performance opportunities including Rock the Block (presented by MGCC, Rhyme Island and Cork City Council) for Cruinniú na nÓg at Elizabeth Fort. They also had the experience of developing a new youth-led production for Cork Midsummer Festival with leading international artists, small group engagement with MGCC Artist in Residence Liam O'Maonlaí exploring traditional informal music making, professional recording experience at The Kabin Studio Knocknaheeny, podcasting with research reporter Katherine Zeserson and instrumental tuition with MGCC Musician-Educators.

### Limitations and Challenges:

Sustaining project work with marginalised groups requires additional resourcing, as transport and improving accessibility are more resource heavy and time consuming. Organisationally, we have had the same budget since 2012 and with inflation and

commitments to staff means that we are limited in terms of diversifying the existing workforce or expanding programmes to meet developing needs. While this project created a wide range of opportunities over the finite 2 year period, it is noted that new funding streams and partnerships would be needed in order to continue and expand this type of programming.

### Looking to the Future

As the majority of this research project took place from 2021 – 2022, the process and outcomes all very much influenced the development of our current Music Generation Cork City 5 year strategic plan 2024 – 2028.

We are very proud of everyone who was involved in this transformative work and of all that has been achieved. We can see its lasting legacy already, and we are confident that it will have a positive impact on how programmes are developed nationally for children and young people that experience barriers to performance music education.

### Discover more online

From the outset, the intention was that the findings would be presented in a way that would truly reflect the living, breathing energy of these projects.

We invite you to explore the photos, videos, playlists and tracks associated with these projects on the Urgency of Music website: <https://musicgenerationcorkcity.com/the-urgency-of-music/>

## Further Developments

In the time since this project was completed, a very welcome national development has been the launch of the Traveller and Roma Education Strategy 2024 – 2030. This was published by the Department of Education and was developed in close collaboration with the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) and the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, innovation and Science (DFHERIS).

The full strategy and the first of three two-year Plans for Implementation and Action can be accessed online here: <https://www.gov.ie/en/consultation/2545f-traveller-and-roma-education-strategy/>



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To all of you that continue to support Music Generation in any way, go raibh míle maith agaibh.

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## Donations

Music Generation Cork City is a not-for-profit programme, and we are always delighted to receive donations – either of musical instruments, time (volunteering) or financial contributions. If you wish to read further, or to donate online, you will find a ‘donate’ link on our website [www.musicgenerationcorkcity.com](http://www.musicgenerationcorkcity.com) .



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