

# Putting music at the heart of children's development

JULIAN KNIGHT



▲ Children's champion: Julian Knight

Creative Futures was the lucky beneficiary of a special event held at specialist music instrument auctioneers Ingles & Hayday recently. The event featured a performance by a brilliant string trio from the Royal College of Music – Henry Chandler, Bryony Gibson-Cornish and Timothée Bobol – which led us to reflect on pathways into music for children, especially those from more disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds.

At a time when funding for music education hubs has, thankfully, been extended, yet opportunities to study music in secondary schools are fast disappearing (see <http://bit.ly/2ndbWiU>), there remain many challenges and obstacles to embarking upon a career as a performing musician, and only a tiny percentage of children will take that path. Enjoying music and music-making should, however, be something that is available to all children, and which we at Creative Futures believe should be a central part of every child's early life in particular.

At Creative Futures we hope to provide the spark that could start a child's musical journey wherever this may lead. We provide those crucial moments of inspiration which may be pivotal, or may simply enrich and intensify a child's experiences of the world around them giving a memorable moment of expression, enjoyment or interaction.

Our work in early years settings – children's centres with families and pre-schools with children under five and their teachers – enables young children to make music in

their own way, encourages them to express themselves through music, and offers inspiring musical intervention as well as new cultural experiences such as live performances. One of our lead animateurs recently created a show of *Three Billy Goats Gruff* to the accompaniment of a trombone trio. Around 100 children aged three to four attended the two performances: for most of them it was the first 'concert' they had ever been to; and we hope they will have gone home and talked about it so that their parents will be encouraged to seek out further opportunities.

Creative Futures' work is not just about artistic experience, though – important as this is in its own right. We also seek to harness the power of the arts and music in particular to positively impact on many areas of children's early development. All of our programmes have objectives which are non-artistic, driven by the particular needs and priorities which have shaped that particular initiative. For example, Music for Change is a three-year programme tackling below-average school

readiness in some particularly deprived inner London wards. The programme's content has been shaped by drawing on research, learning from other projects we have delivered, and through partnerships.

A particularly fruitful partnership has been with NHS speech and language therapists, with whom our music leaders have co-delivered workshops which aim to support the teachers of children with mild and emerging speech and language developmental delay (estimated to be around 50% of children in many urban areas). Our approach has been shaped by this partnership so that across participating schools we are using methods and activities which are most likely to enhance children's crucial speech, language and communication skills, thus reinforcing the area of learning which will most influence their ability to achieve their potential at school.

In addition to language development – so obviously and closely aligned to music – we also regularly witness how music builds children's self-esteem, pro-social skills, emotional

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