

Struggle and achievement – the creation of Music Makers new building.

From the start of Music Makers, young people in the Forest of Dean have been asking us for places where bands can practise without getting complaints from neighbours. The Cinderford MusicSpace project started when Heywood secondary school in Cinderford offered out of hours use of an unused caretakers bungalow on their site.

We were aware that building projects involve major hassle and therefore spent quite a bit of time checking things out before we started. Over 40 young people, already involved with our activities, were consulted about the choice of location and the design priorities for the building. It quickly emerged that they wanted enough soundproofing to play real rather than electronic drums and that it would not be a simple job to do this. They also needed somewhere they could get to independently and which their parents would see as safe. They wanted it open for long hours and affordable. We looked at various other site options, but it was clear that the Heywood site was the best.

Involvement of young people is central to the way Music Makers works. Our participation group have been involved in the development of the project throughout and asked about various issues as they arise, such as levels of charges for rehearsal sessions.

Over 30 young people have been involved with planning and running fundraising gigs and playing at the gigs. One of the young people has become so good at e-marketing of gigs that we are attracting over 300 young people and struggling to find big enough venues.

Young people were also highly involved in getting local public votes for our “Coalfields Quick Win” funding. This process enabled them to see the relevance of the current regeneration programme in the town to their needs interests. Four young people were directly responsible for making two successful Youth Capital Fund applications. This involved presenting and discussing the project with the County Young People’s panel, hosting a visit to the building and making a presentation to officers and councillors having been nominated as a possible Gloucestershire entry for the National Youth Capital Competition (We came second!).

After 3 years of planning and fundraising, over £300,000 has been raised. We have actually received nearly every grant applied for, but it has been very hard work. The biggest problem has been repeatedly reaching a target and then finding it is not enough.

A 30 year licence agreement has been negotiated with the school, giving some security – just this process took 4 months! Relationships with the school have

gone through some difficult patches, but are now very good. It has helped considerably that the school site manager is both a parent of two of the young people involved and also on the board of directors of Music Makers

The building work started on 8th January '07. There have been some serious design difficulties, including having to add a new roof due to a surveying error, and other delays such as waiting for gas and power connections.

In the early summer of 2007 it became apparent that the only way of managing the cost overruns and completing the project to the standard we needed, was to create a second phase with a combination of paid and volunteer work by our own team.

The builders (King Builders of Gloucester) handed over the building on Tuesday 10th June '07. They had done an excellent job, considering the difficulties.

We were very pleased to recruit Tom Sandall as volunteer coordinator for the second phase. He had attended Music Makers first every holiday workshop in 2001, worked with us a volunteer and paid tutor and then gone away to college and just completed a degree in Music Management. He is both capable practically and brilliant with the young people.

When the builders finished there were many things still to do. During the summer holidays at least 12 volunteers contributed to the hard graft of filling holes, rubbing down walls and fitting acoustic treatment. While we working together, against the clock, to fit acoustic treatment between window frames before the second lot of glass was fitted one young person said "People are going to really respect this place now we know how much work has gone into it".

The builders had finished at least 6 weeks later than planned and the fitting of the acoustic treatment proved much more difficult than expected. With funds tight it was decided that doing the job well and within budget were more important than speed, so the work continued throughout the autumn term. This included more rubbing down, cleaning decorating and then the fun part of unpacking, security marking and setting up the equipment.

At this point we had two main volunteers:

Dan, aged 17, who had been involved with the project from the beginning, offered to work as an informal apprentice. Each week he has spent time helping lead other sessions for younger children at Heart of the Forest Special School, at Whitecross School in Lydney as well as at Heywood school. He also helped run a series of taster session for children at 3 local primary schools. In between this and work on a BTEC music course at college, he did many, many hours working on the building. He is now working on both his own recording projects and creating music for a documentary on Gloucestershire Rural Renaissance Project

(one of our funders). He has just been on an exchange visit with us to Norway and is working on his Gold Arts Award.

James, aged 14, had been excluded from school in summer term 07 with a long history of disengagement and other problems at school. He came into contact with Music Makers through guitar lessons in the summer at the local pupil referral centre and completed a Bronze Arts Award. He then asked to help with the building and attended very regularly most days throughout the autumn term, working very hard indeed. He was highly engaged – the professional decorator working in the building offered him further work experience and the Pupil referral unit were amazed at how much happier he was. He is now working toward at Silver Arts Award and learning to use the recording equipment.

We started using the building in Jan 2008 and have been working with the young people on rules, procedures and hire rates. Some of the other young volunteers submitted a further successful funding application to the Youth Capital Fund, raising £9K towards further fitting out and equipment and some of the costs of external work. A further grant of £16,500 has been secured from Gloucestershire Environmental Trust to create a paved area and landscaping outside the building.

The building is now completed inside and is a testament to the commitment and hard work of the young people, the support of the funders and the hard work of everyone else involved.

There is a deep sense of pride in what has been achieved and in the quality of the final result and that a town like Cinderford, can have something that young people really want and which is the best in the County! New generations of young people are beginning to use the building and discover that they too are capable of making music.

List of Funders.

Further information: Sound proofing – practical and technical lessons

MB 26/02/2008