



*music makes
me happy*

IMPACT REPORT 2025-26

A part for every child

Specialist music-making for disabled children
and young people – every week, for years.

musicoflife.org.uk · Registered charity 1102827 · Since 2003



WELCOME

Our 23rd year – and our sixth record year in a row

This year 1,851 disabled children and young people made music with us every week – more than ever before. Behind every number is a child: a Deaf boy who now chooses to wear his hearing aids to school because he wants to participate fully in music activities, a teenager with severe autism who chose the song that brought a whole room alive, a young man who drummed his way onto a stage at the Houses of Parliament.

We do not simply teach songs, music theory or how to compose or play an instrument. Through music, we nurture confidence, communication, connection and opportunity.

Our thanks go to Ray Longbottom, who stepped down as Chair after more than 17 years, and to every funder, school, musician and family who made this year possible.

Rutger Beelaerts, Chair · Maria Teterina, Chief Executive

THE NEED

Why so many disabled children are still missing out on the life-enhancing benefits of music:

RIISING NUMBERS

1.8m

pupils in England now have special educational needs – up 91,400 in a single year

FINANCIAL PRESSURE

45%

of pupils with an Education, Health and Care plan are eligible for free school meals – twice the rate of other pupils

LACK OF EXPERTISE

76%

of music hubs find it difficult to hire music teachers with the right experience and skills

BARRIERS TO ACCESS

70%

of respondents to a national call for evidence said disabled people are under-represented in music education

“We also have a music teacher for the hearing children and the deaf children just stare at the floor, waiting for the class to finish!”

Teacher, Roding Primary School – a mainstream school with a Deaf unit, where the school’s music lessons fail to engage Deaf pupils. Music of Life sessions are designed so they can take part fully.

WHAT MAKES MUSIC OF LIFE DIFFERENT

Inclusive music practice, every week, for years

Our mission is to build and strengthen the life skills, well-being and confidence of disabled children and young people through music-making.



Specialist musicians

Professional musicians skilled in inclusive practice – at least three in every choir session.



Continuity

Weekly term-time sessions. Many children stay with us for six years or more.



No child left out

Children with PMLD (profound and multiple learning disabilities), autism, sensory and complex needs take part fully.



Lived experience

Music for Deaf children programme designed and led by professional Deaf musicians.



Excellence

Highest standards in graded exams, top venues and unique repertoire

100% free to families · delivered in school hours · 82% of our children are on Pupil Premium





These are not just numbers. Each one is a child too often left out of music – finding their voice, making friends and discovering what they can do.

OUR YEAR IN NUMBERS

2025-26 academic year at a glance

1,851

disabled children and young people made music with us every week

49,120

attendances at weekly music sessions

21

choirs in special schools

5

schools for Deaf children

151

students in weekly 1:1 lessons

104

concerts, assemblies and community projects

132

teacher-training and peer-support days



GROWTH

Six record years in a row

Founded in 2003 – and growing faster than ever

Children and young people taking part every week



Who we work with

82%

are on Pupil Premium

58%

are from global majority communities

68%

have learning disabilities, incl. profound and multiple

58% are autistic · 22% Deaf or hard of hearing · 17% have a physical disability · 8% blind or visually impaired. Most have more than one condition.



THE DIFFERENCE MUSIC CAN MAKE

From a first note to a lifetime of possibility



1 · REACH

1,851 children

who are too often
excluded from music.
82% on Pupil Premium.
Free to every family.



2 · SPECIALIST TEACHING

Every week

23 years of expertise.
Makaton, BSL, colour
notation and songs
written for our choirs.



3 · CHANGE

9 in 10

1:1 students grew in
confidence, wellbeing or
communication as seen by
teachers or family.



4 · POSSIBILITY

**Performing
and leading**

On stages from
Symphony Hall to the
Royal Albert Hall – and
11 new Young Leaders.

Because we stay with children for years, small steps become lasting change – for them, their families and their schools.

OUR IMPACT

Change we can see and track

100%

of 120 1:1 students assessed improved in at least one area of their personal development – wellbeing, behaviour, mental health, communication or speech.

91%

of 1:1 students grew in wellbeing and confidence

Hafsa, once very shy, now plays duets with friends: “Music has brought out a lovely and charming side of her personality.”

89%

improved their social and communication skills

Lewis “has grown into a social butterfly”, learning signs to talk with students from other schools.

77%

improved their speech and language

Aurelia, who is non-verbal, has started to vocalise – and signs along to “We Will Rock You”.

100%

of school choirs saw noticeable or great gains in communication and confidence

“They feel part of a group and the choir fosters a sense of belonging.” – Selly Oak Trust School

95%

of Deaf-school ratings showed great or noticeable improvement

“Focus across the curriculum has improved.” – Heathlands School

CHOIRS IN SPECIAL SCHOOLS

When a school becomes a choir

A choir is more than a music session. Every week it brings together children with very different communication, physical and learning needs to make something together – with Makaton, singing games and songs written by our own team.

1,497 **662** **21** **2014**
singers choral sessions choirs running since

“Learners are able to work together with children from different ages and social groups towards a common goal every week.”

Castle School, Cambridge



► WATCH OUR CHOIRS

Voices Merry and Bright, December 2025

Scan the code or click to watch on YouTube

CHOIRS IN SPECIAL SCHOOLS

Singing together builds youth communities

Joint concerts with mainstream schools

Woodlands sang with High Meadow, and Calthorpe with St Anne's, after a term of shared rehearsals and games that built real friendships.

Every child on stage

At Evergreen, students with profound and multiple learning disabilities joined the end-of-year concert for the first time.

Symphony Hall

Over 30 Woodlands students performed at Birmingham Symphony Hall – “a huge highlight of the year” for the school.

“Parents and carers of the young leaders commented on how amazed they were that their children had got up to lead the choir.” – Woodlands School



NEW IN LONDON

Our first year in Brent: big steps for children with complex needs

120 children · 3 special schools · 6 weekly groups · since September 2025

The Avenue

Young people with severe autism

Young people who barely responded in early sessions now choose songs, respond to musical cues and start interactions. Staff said the change was unlike anything they had seen from previous outside provision.

Phoenix Arch

Children with ADHD and emotional needs

Teachers report that on difficult mornings choir can reset the emotional tone of the day, resulting in better focus, behaviour and mutual encouragement.

Manor

Children with learning disabilities

One group has become a real choir, with better pitch, listening and pride. For the other, rhythm and melody are helping children to vocalise.

At home, parents noticed more confidence, more vocalising and a happier mood.



MUSIC FOR DEAF CHILDREN

Music that speaks their language

Classroom music in small groups and 1:1 instrumental lessons in five schools for Deaf children in London and Hertfordshire – visual, tactile and delivered in BSL.

203

children

5

schools

172

days of music

Meet Ruth Montgomery, Programme Lead

Born profoundly Deaf, Ruth is a professional flautist and fluent BSL user. Since 2017, she has shaped the way Deaf children are taught music at school – and she now trains the next generation of teachers, including at the Royal College of Music.

“It’s so lovely for the deaf children to communicate with someone who understands their language, BSL!” – Roding Primary School

MUSIC FOR DEAF CHILDREN

When music is Deaf-led

LUKAS'S STORY

A fluent BSL user, Lukas became curious about pitch – and started bringing his hearing aids to piano lessons, to the delight of his teachers and audiologist.

“Children are more inclined to wear their hearing aids and implants. They have had a really positive response to music and communication through music.”

Heathlands School

“The team work created through drum circles has made an impact on how the children work together and use eye contact to engage with each other.”

Blanche Nevile School

“They were all able to stand in front of the whole school for our end of year assembly and lead the signing for our school song.”

Roding Primary School

“It is great watching some of our Deaf staff learn alongside the children and see a different side of music.”

James Wolfe School



Frank Barnes pupils led a signing choir at the Royal Albert Hall, alongside 2,000+ Camden mainstream pupils.

INDIVIDUAL LESSONS

One child. One teacher. Every week.

Weekly 1:1 lessons from 20 minutes to 1.5 hours on almost any instrument, plus singing, composition and music technology – shaped around what each young person can do. When a student is ready, their teacher goes with them into a band, choir or youth ensemble for a while to help them settle in.

151
students

5,202
individual lessons

24
special schools

5
music-service
partners

In partnership with Birmingham Services for Education, Resonate (Liverpool), Camden Music, Wandsworth Music and Hertfordshire Music Service.



► **WATCH A LESSON**

See one of our students in action

Scan the code or click to watch on YouTube



CASE STUDY · INDIVIDUAL LESSONS

Meet Oliver

8 years old · Deaf and autistic · learning the piano since January 2026

1 Before

Oliver finds conversation hard and communicates through visuals and sign. At first his hands were tightly clenched into fists, and a standard piano book was not accessible to him.

2 What we provided

Weekly lessons with Ruth, who invented a colour-coded system – coloured letters matched to coloured keys – and used pictures of emotions and improvisation to help him express himself.

3 What changed

His hands relaxed on the keys. He grew in confidence and now plays pieces such as Mary Had a Little Lamb and the Big Ben chimes. His support worker films him so his parents can watch.

4 Where he is now

After just six months, Oliver won his mainstream school's Year 4 Music Certificate for the greatest progress and commitment to music.

"Watching Oliver's confidence and musical ability grow has been an incredibly rewarding experience." – Ruth Montgomery, his teacher

Music that opens doors

Benjamin

24 • autistic • piano

Passed Grade 7 with Merit and now plays in church bands. Once very anxious, he is starting conversations – and has told his teacher he is looking for a friend to talk to at church.

Tayley

14 • Deaf • recorder

Has made friends outside school through an inclusive ensemble and loves teaching others to sign. She inspired three more pupils at her school to start lessons.

Lewis

17 • learning disability • bass guitar

Now writes his own songs and sings lead. He has performed for the Mayor of Wandsworth, will play the Royal Albert Hall next year and hopes to study music.

David

17 • autistic • music production

Grew in confidence and in the language to talk about his ideas. He has set up a home studio and is starting a music technology course at college.

“His mother was very impressed that he introduced himself and announced the piece before playing. She said that he would never have done that before.” – Benjamin’s piano teacher



YOUNG LEADERS

From choir member to choir leader

Launched in September 2025, Young Leaders trains older choir members to lead singing – a first step towards careers in music and education.

11

Young Leaders

3

schools

11/11

led a song in front of others

- At the end-of-year concerts, Young Leaders led full songs to an audience – cueing the pianist, reading the room and making choices in real time.
- Louis, who found it hard to open his eyes in front of others, led his song with his eyes open and in his singing voice.
- Robin, who was anxious about attending, now leads confidently with the help of a script.



► **WATCH A YOUNG LEADER**

Conducting a joint special and mainstream school choir

End-of-year concert · scan the code or click to watch



[Watch the Young Leaders film ›](#)

A JOURNEY OF MANY YEARS

From the school choir to the Houses of Parliament

Barney joined us in 2016. He was never keen to sing, but he loved to drum – so we made a place for him in the band, alongside our pianist. Nominated by Music of Life, he was one of 14 young people chosen to take part in Speakers Trust's My Maiden Speech programme at the Houses of Parliament. On 15 September 2026 he drummed his way onto the stage and got the whole room clapping and stamping.



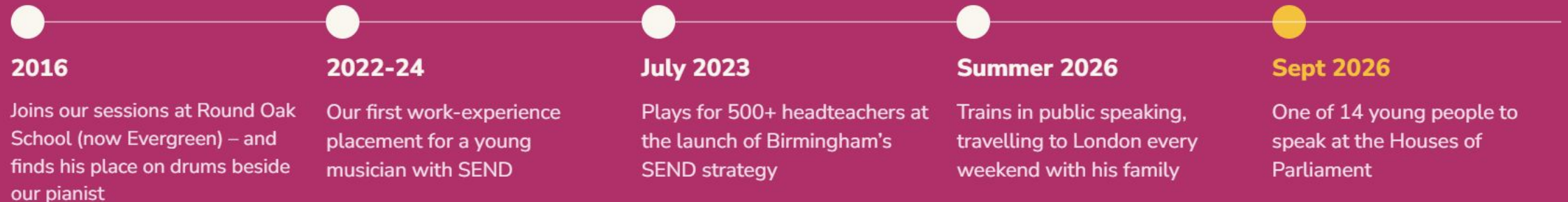
► WATCH BARNEY

Barney's appearance at the Houses of Parliament

Scan the code or click to watch on YouTube



"Hearing Barney say his piece about people with learning disabilities being given real jobs and being treated as adults, in that room, was something we won't forget. He's already asking what's next!" – Barney's family



THE RIPPLE EFFECT

One child's music changes many lives

Families

At sharing concerts, parents see what their children can do – often for the first time. Nika's mum says the family now feels more part of their local community.

Schools

Staff take our Makaton-based songs to the classroom. Teachers speak of a Music of Life “buzz” around the school and learn new skills from our teams for years to come.

Classmates

Tayley inspired three schoolmates to start lessons. Daniel now mentors younger players in his ensemble.

Mainstream pupils

Joint concerts build friendships and change how non-disabled children see their disabled peers.

Musicians

84 training days, four new specialist practitioners for London and a third year of our Royal College of Music course.

The music sector

Our Song Bank of best-loved accessible songs will soon be available to schools and families far beyond our programmes.

QUALITY

Excellence through inclusion

music&drama
education awards 2026
WINNER

AWARD-WINNING PRACTICE
Music for Deaf Children is the
Excellence in SEND (Music and
Drama) Winner 2026

- **Graded exams:** students reaching Grade 7 with Merit
- **Great stages:** Birmingham Symphony Hall and the Royal Albert Hall
- **Training musicians:** a third year of our course at the Royal College of Music
- **Expert guidance:** our Advisory Council includes Prof. Graham Welch (UCL) and Prof. Adam Ockelford (Roehampton)
- **Our champions:** Patron Dame Evelyn Glennie CH, DBE and Ambassador Carolyn Sampson
- **Our own repertoire** and teaching content created by programme leads and practitioners



HOW WE KNOW

Evidence built into every week

Every student

Teachers write an individual progress report on every 1:1 student each year, covering milestones, musical progress and personal development.

Every school

Schools have rated the same outcomes on the same scale every year since 2021, so we can see change over time.

Every session

Music leaders keep session logs and review progress with school staff at the end of each term.

Every voice

Children give feedback in ways that work for them – Makaton, BSL, choice boards – and families join end-of-term sharings.

What we are building next

More structured feedback from families, starting with at least 30 family members in Brent in 2026-27, and a long-term study following our students' journeys over many years.



VALUE FOR MONEY

What lasting change costs

£8

average cost of one weekly session attendance per participant



£264

a whole year of weekly specialist music provision



£1,056–1,584

average cost over four to six years of continuous support – the time real change takes



Every £1 goes further

Support in kind

Venues: every session and activity, and most of our concerts, take place in spaces given free by schools and partner organisations.

People: school staff bring children to every session and make all the arrangements on their side, at no cost to us.

Expertise: music services share their teachers, and the musicians we train stay in the field.

Value that reaches beyond the session

Families: free and in school hours – no fees, travel or time off work for families.

Schools: staff carry our songs and approaches into the rest of the week – training built into every session.

Communities: disabled young people build skills for work and leadership to address the gap in employment in adults with learning disabilities.

LOOKING AHEAD

Our plans for 2026-28

✓ **More London schools**

New special-school choirs, building on our first year in Brent

✓ **Deaf music beyond London**

Taking our Deaf-led programme to Birmingham and Liverpool

✓ **Young Leaders, year 2**

Deepening skills and building a route into paid work



Will you help us reach

2,500+

disabled children and young people making music with us every year by 2028?

✓ **A bigger specialist team**

More musicians and pianists who are neurodivergent, Deaf, disabled, or have BSL skills

✓ **Accredited training**

A recognised route for specialist teachers

✓ **Song Bank**

Accessible songs for schools and families everywhere

PLAY YOUR PART

What your support makes possible

£8

gives one child weekly access to music-making

£20 a month

pays for an annual subscription to an accessibility tool or software

£864

funds a year of weekly 1:1 music lessons

£1,100

trains a Young Leader for a year, with participation in two concerts

£10,000

runs a weekly choir or Deaf music programme in one school for a year

£30,000

sponsors a programme segment with weekly provision, teacher training and concerts

Ways to give

A one-off or monthly donation

Join Chords of Change

Corporate partnership

A gift in your will

Fundraise for us

musicoflife.org.uk/donate

For fundraising enquiries, please contact our Head of Development, Katie Baxter: katie.baxter@mofl.co.uk



Scan to donate

THANK YOU

Our finances in 2025

£524k

income, up 31%

£379k

spent, up 25%

95%

spent on charitable
activities

£178k

free reserves, in line
with our policy

Income includes a £75,000 five-year endowment from the Edward Gostling Foundation. Full accounts: musicoflife.org.uk, the Charity Commission and Companies House.

With heartfelt thanks to our supporters



The Edward Gostling Foundation · City Bridge Foundation · John Lyon's Charity · The Karlsson Játiva Charitable Foundation · The Headley Trust · The Powell Family Foundation · The Baily Thomas Charitable Fund · The Pears Foundation · Scops Arts Trust · The Ironmongers' Company · The Norton Foundation · The RTR Foundation · The Vintners' Foundation · Yuri and Irina Bedny · and every trust, company, donor, Chords of Change member and fundraiser who supported us.

Patrons: Dame Evelyn Glennie CH, DBE · Denise Leigh · John Lubbock OBE ·
Ambassador: Carolyn Sampson

Chair: Rutger Beelaerts · **Chief Executive:** Maria Teterina

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