

Music In Detention Independent Review of Evaluation Data, 2014-2017 Professor Norma Daykin, with Katie Bruce

Executive Summary

Music in Detention (MID) is a unique organisation focused on music provision in UK immigration detention centres. In 2016, 28,900 people entered these centres. Music activity is offered as part of recreational and educational activities that support the health and welfare of detainees. Through a variety of delivery formats, including regular one-off workshops and more sustained musician in residence programmes, MID uses music activities to encourage self-expression and support wellbeing. MID also organises community exchange projects that seek to connect detainees with the outside world, educating community participants about immigration detention and supporting their wellbeing. In community exchange projects, detainees collaborate with participants from local community groups to create and record music, facilitated by MID artists.

This document provides a summary of a data review undertaken by independent evaluator Professor Norma Daykin. The main report reviewed a substantial amount of data collected between 2014 and 2017. Data were collected by MID staff as part of routine monitoring and evaluation. They include feedback from up to 270 participants and stakeholders, including from over 150 detainees, as well as musicians, detention centre staff, community participants and community partner organisations. Secondary analysis of the data was undertaken with a view to exploring impacts of the project for participants, identifying factors affecting project delivery and formulating a grounded understanding of artistic quality.

An accompanying report on MID's evaluation methods recommends ways in which MID can further improve its evaluation processes, including the need for more extensive quantitative research to identify project outcomes and further research into the lasting impact of music activity. The review also identified gaps in qualitative data, for example, little is known about the views of detainees who choose not to engage with music. Deeper understanding of a wide range of responses to music activity in detention contexts would help MID to address factors that limit and encourage participation, as well as contributing to a broader understanding of what works, for whom, and in what circumstances.



1 What are the impacts of music activity on detainee participants?

Distraction and coping with detention: Music activity helped detainees cope with detention by providing distraction, relaxation and a sense of structured time, offering a way to deal with negative thoughts and feelings, and providing temporary relief from worries. Some detainees who took part reported that music activity helped them to feel that they were using their time productively.

Mood and relaxation: Music can affect mood, and participants reported that the activity supported positive moods and relaxation, often engendering a sense of happiness in the moment. While most detainees found distraction in the immediate experience of music activity, some detainees spoke of lasting effects of music activity on mood. Detention staff reported that MID activities contributed positively to the detention environment.

“It was an experience to savour, you know what I mean? An experience that’s probably going to stick with me for a very long time, like he said, to stay positive in a place like this is very, very hard, trust me.” (Detainee participant)

Expression and freedom: Some detainees seemed to enjoy the expressive power of music activity. In their feedback, expression was linked with a sense of freedom. The theme of expression was also recorded in artists’ logs where artists reported that most participants took an active role in shaping the creative direction of the activity, and visibly improved in confidence during it.

Social connection: Many detainees wanted to socialise, and music activities provided a vehicle for this. Detainees’ accounts reveal the pleasure of making music with others, the value of making new friends and how music had helped to overcome barriers between people. As well as connecting with each other, detainees valued the opportunity to forge connections with non-detainees, including IRC staff and community participants, through music. The visits by MID artists and staff were welcomed as a further connection with the outside world.

Stigma: Stigma strongly affects detention environments. The music activity offered an opportunity for some detainees to feel that they were challenging stigma and addressing unhelpful stereotypes, by showing that they could work cooperatively to create something worthwhile. Some detainees felt awkward about how their music activity might be viewed by the outside world. They were concerned about being portrayed as having fun, and worried that this might undermine them by minimising the difficulties of being in detention.

“Just because we’re here, being detained for immigration matters, it doesn’t mean we’re not normal human beings like everybody else. We can do things... So I felt proud that they saw what we’re capable of, saw that we can be civil, amicable, and perform.” (Detainee participant)

Learning and development: Some detainees were motivated by a desire to learn and make music. Detainees who were more experienced musicians were able to reconnect with their skills, through facilitated music activities such as song-writing. Detention staff reported that some detainees had too much on their minds to want to learn, and needed simply to enjoy music for its entertainment value.

Identities: The detention environment separates participants from their usual activities, roles and relationships. MID’s delivery offered points of connection, affirming aspects of personal and cultural identity for musicians and non-musicians. Data shows how MID’s delivery supported existing musical identities and created space for emergent ones, encouraging participants to reflect on the potential role of music in their lives and engendering hope in what could be a despairing situation.

2 What are the impacts of music activity on community participants?

Enjoyment: Participants who attended were generally positive about the activities, which were described as enjoyable, although some had experienced negative responses from peers for taking part. They enjoyed laughing and joking during the music sessions and they also enjoyed being able to experiment and try out different activities. Their feedback also reveals challenges.. For example, some young participants were sensitive to the fact that certain activities made them feel like children.



Learning and achievement: The project enabled community participants to work towards goals such as performances and recordings. Many seemed to value this aspect of the project. Young participants were able to voice and discuss expectations and aspirations.

“I think we probably wouldn’t have got as much done, I think because we had something we were working towards, we had a goal, it pushed us to work that much harder.” (Community participant)

Learning about detention: Most of the community participants had little awareness of immigration detention prior to taking part in the project. Young community participants asked lots of questions as they tried to imagine life in detention. They asked about meal times, routines, family visits, and about what happens to child migrants and children of detainees. Comparing themselves to detainees helped some young people to reflect on their own life goals.

“It’s a bit harsh on them because they’re just like normal people like all of us they’re just the unlucky ones that didn’t have the right background where they lived, so they have to be sent back to their country or put in detention.” (Community participant)

Connection and empathy: Some participants reported difficulties in relating to detainees’ experiences. Comparing their own lives with those of detainees seemed to help with finding points of connection. Those who were able to relate to detainees described them as ‘ordinary people like us’. From this perspective, detention was seen as harsh and detainees viewed as unlucky. Some community participants were experiencing difficulties in their lives and they seemed to value the opportunity that the project gave to connect and empathise with people who were also experiencing difficulties. Connection and empathy worked in both directions, hence these community participants appreciated the support they got from detainees during the project.

“Yeah that was really cool, like they’re hearing exactly what I’m saying, I can’t go in there and walk straight in and be like ‘Hi guys, I’m X, nice to meet you’ but it’s something special that you feel, that they’re actually listening to what you’re making it’s just a really good feeling.” (Community participant)

Power of music: Community participants stressed the power of music both as an expressive tool as a vehicle for communicating and creating supportive connections.

“Yeah, cos it’s not like, if I said to you, ‘hi my name’s X, and I’m supporting your cause’, it’s different if you have a beat to it as well, and do some stuff with it.” -(Community participant)

3 What factors mediate positive and negative impacts of music in detention?

Project challenges derive from participants' diverse cultural and musical backgrounds, their wide-ranging skills and experiences, their various life challenges and the different levels of engagement that they seek.

Detainees are drawn from diverse backgrounds and have widely divergent experiences and attitudes to music. While music can transcend social, cultural and linguistic divisions, addressing the diverse needs of participants required sensitivity and skill from music leaders. When it came to more focused activities such as recordings, it was not always possible to include everyone to the same degree: music leaders were aware of the need to balance openness and accessibility with the motivating force of artistic achievement. For detainees, the experience of life challenges and the detention environment could get in the way of creativity and engagement. While MID activities offered a point of connection for many detainees, a small number found it challenging to be reminded of the suspension of their careers as professional musicians.

Music leader attributes, beyond musical knowledge and skills, emerged as an important mediator. Being able to work in an empowering and respectful manner was, for musicians, key to being viewed as 'professional' by participants and stakeholders.

Project impacts in detention centres are influenced by many factors, including time and resource constraints, operational requirements, scheduling, security procedures, staffing levels and attitudes. MID's familiarity with operational procedures was viewed positively by staff. Limited time and resources for music activity, together with the transient nature of detention environments, meant that music activities created pressures for participants and music leaders. Many detainees wanted more music provision and higher quality equipment to support sessions.

4 How does artistic quality affect MID delivery and impact?

Artistic quality has emerged as a strategic priority for MID. Rather than viewing artistic quality as a set of components that can be universally applied, it is better to approach artistic quality as a nuanced concept, understanding of which needs to be grounded in specific contexts. The qualitative data include indications of key considerations that can inform the development of appropriate definitions and measures of artistic quality in MID delivery.

Although some participants simply wanted to have fun and enjoy the music activity for its entertainment or distraction value, others focused on the quality of the musical outputs. Having artistic goals was a key motivating factor for many participants. Participants saw that achieving these required dedication and effort as well as a degree of professionalism in areas such as teaching, music performance, production and post-production. However, participants were aware of the limits to creative activity and delivery of outputs in the detention environment. In general, they were pragmatic, accepting that performances and recordings needed to be 'good enough,' concurring with the view of musicians that musical recordings should be seen as a work in progress supporting reflection and growth rather than a definitive artistic statement.

While cultural and linguistic diversity within the detention environment posed challenges, they were also a source of strength, enabling exploration, sharing and leading to innovative fusions. The notion of originality emerged as a key dimension of artistic quality in music in detention. Linked with this was the notion of meaningful expression. There was a sense that dimensions such as honesty, empathy and real-life story telling were valued by participants more than conventional notions of talent, or technically driven production values.