



INCLUSIVE FOLK

EVALUATION September 2024 - June 2025
Dr. Lizzie Fort - Independent Evaluator, with contributions
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

'Inclusive Folk' is an English Folk Dance and Song Society (EFDSS) programme designed to provide creative, inclusive, multi-sensory folk music and dance sessions for learning disabled young people (up to the age of 30 years) at Cecil Sharp House and in schools for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEN/D) in various London boroughs. John Lyon's Charity has supported this work with five-years of funding, September 2024 – August 2029, enhancing the pre-existing programme with a two-fold increase of work in schools, a performance opportunity for Folk Unlimited participants, and three new pastoral roles - two in Folk Unlimited and one in London Youth Folk Ensemble (LYFE). Programme activity in 2024-2025 involved six schools and included: 36 half day sessions in four education settings with approximately 138 students (three of these schools are new to EFDSS); 17 Folk Unlimited sessions with up to 10 participants (full capacity) at Cecil Sharp House; the first joint Folk Unlimited / LYFE sharing performance held in Kennedy Hall at Cecil Sharp House, attended by friends and family; 3 work experience placements for learning disabled students at Cecil Sharp House; one half day Inclusive Folk Festival at Cambridge School involving an additional 8 participants; one public professional development presentation at the Scottish Storytelling Centre in Edinburgh (with EFDSS in partnership) attended by 150 people, one public Folk Education Development Day at Cecil Sharp House attended by 30 performing arts professionals; one CPD day for the EFDSS Tutors, Trainee and Support Workers; recruiting and supporting another Inclusive Folk Trainee Music Leader; a new downloadable and free resource.

This Report presents an evaluation of the first year of activities, September 2024 to June 2025. The mixed methodology draws on a variety of qualitative and quantitative data collection tools, including monitoring data. Data was triangulated and thematically analysed to identify evidence relating to the three programme outcomes¹, as well as emerging themes. In this first year, there is clear evidence that Inclusive Folk is making excellent progress across the three outcomes with some clearly identified areas for development and enhancement for 2025-2026. The report makes seven key findings, and twelve recommendations.

The qualitative data indicates that the majority of disabled young people in the Folk Unlimited and schools programme show increased participation in music and dance, positively impacting their personal, social and emotional well-being, skills and confidence. There is excellent evidence that Inclusive Folk has provided a range of high quality, meaningful, relevant and well resourced experiences drawing on traditional folk and contemporary music, for young disabled people within Cecil Sharp House and beyond. Parents and carers of Folk Unlimited participants,

¹ **Outcome 1:** Disabled young people show increased levels of participation in a music and dance activity - positively impacting their personal, social and emotional well-being, skills and confidence. **Outcome 2:** Disabled young people are enabled to participate in meaningful experiences with an arts organisation (EFDSS) and its venue (Cecil Sharp House) via a supportive progression route, including work experience. **Outcome 3:** Increased numbers of school/college staff, folk music educators, performing arts Tutors are enabled to use folk music and dance creatively with disabled young people in formal and informal settings.



and school staff continue to be impressed by the quality of the provision, and its impact on disabled young people.

Consolidating the strong school relationships and all partners wishing to continue next year, the report identifies developments to school communication and collaborative planning, to enhance the preparation stage and forge stronger connections to wider school curricula. The EFDSS team will also continue to expand this programme to new schools on the waiting list.

Folk Unlimited is going from strength to strength, with longstanding and trusting relationships between participants and staff. Classes are a lot of fun, and have developed ensemble and performance skills, culminating in a successful shared performance event with LYFE.

The work experience placements for young people with learning disabilities were mutually beneficial for the students, school and EFDSS. To further strengthen the experience for future cohorts, EFDSS will offer one placement at a time, introduce a 'settling in' visit, and enhance the bespoke approach to matching placement student skills with work experience tasks. This report recommends expanding the placement opportunities through other evolving partnerships, such as the Camden STEAM programme.

The quality of music and dance content has been enhanced due to continuing development of confidence and skills of the Tutoring team, and the addition of two pastoral Support Workers (who are also accomplished musicians). Going forward the EFDSS team will consider how the three pastoral support roles in Folk Unlimited and LYFE are distributed to provide support where it is most needed.

There is evidence of an emerging 'community of practice' model within the EFDSS Tutoring team that can be enhanced next year through more peer observation and knowledge sharing. This will feed into the Report's proposition of exploring whether some 'themes-based' projects can be offered to schools, leaning into EFDSS Tutors' knowledge and expertise on folk music and dance, sensory storytelling, and supporting common themes that arise in school curricula.

Beyond the EFDSS Tutoring team, approximately 180 performing arts and education professionals have been supported to use folk music and dance creatively with disabled young people in formal and informal settings. There was some evidence that the skills and confidence of school staff had improved, and this is an aspect identified for enhancement in the next year. All attendees to CPD activities reported that the training was valuable to their practice, and there is an opportunity for EFDSS to capitalise on offering more high quality, public professional development in the next year, for people who wish to expand their knowledge, understanding and skills for inclusive and creative music and dance practices. Developing partnerships with organisations such as A New Direction also presents interesting opportunities for professional development; ideas in the making include EFDSS hosting a CPD/Teacher Network day at Cecil Sharp House in the Spring term 2026. Finally, there are also some clear opportunities to draw on Tutoring team knowledge, skills and experience in the development of new resources on 'queer folk' and Scottish waulking, music and craft practices.



INTRODUCTION AND SCOPE OF EVALUATION

Inclusive Folk, which started in 2020, is an English Folk Dance and Song Society (EFDSS) programme supported by John Lyon's Charity, designed to provide creative, inclusive, multi-sensory folk music and dance sessions for learning disabled young people (up to the age of 30 years) at Cecil Sharp House and in SEN/D schools and settings in various London boroughs. The programme has previously been in receipt of three-year funding from John Lyon's Charity (2020 – 2023). This new funding agreement is for a five-year period (September 2024 – August 2029), subject to successful annual evaluation reporting. In this five-year project, additions / extensions to the programme are:

- Doubling the amount of activity delivered in schools and SEN/D settings (compared to the previous funded project)
- Folk Unlimited giving one performance per year
- Two new pastoral support roles in Folk Unlimited sessions
- A new pastoral staff role for disabled and neurodiverse young people in London Youth Folk Ensemble (LYFE) which runs concurrently to Folk Unlimited in Cecil Sharp House.

This evaluation report has been prepared jointly by EFDSS with Independent Evaluator Dr. Lizzie Fort², who commenced this work in January 2025. In previous years, the independent evaluation has covered the Folk Unlimited programme in detail. This year, with the doubling of the provision in schools, the Independent Evaluator was directed to prioritise this work in the report. This report focuses on the period September 2024 to June 2025, and the commentary centres around the three programme outcomes:

- **Outcome 1:** Disabled young people show increased levels of participation in a music and dance activity - positively impacting their personal, social and emotional well-being, skills and confidence.
- **Outcome 2:** Disabled young people are enabled to participate in meaningful experiences with an arts organisation (EFDSS) and its venue (Cecil Sharp House) via a supportive progression route, including work experience.
- **Outcome 3:** Increased numbers of school/college staff, folk music educators, performing arts Tutors are enabled to use folk music and dance creatively with disabled young people in formal and informal settings.

Following a summary of the evaluation methodology and an overview of the programme's activity highlights and main achievements, a detailed evidence commentary for each of the three programme outcomes is presented. There are two 'Spotlight' pages (pp.31-33) that highlight the schools programme, and work experience programme. The report concludes with a summary of challenges, learnings and enhancements, and findings and recommendations for the future of the programme.

² <https://www.linkedin.com/in/lizzfort/>



METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

The mixed mode evaluation methodology draws on a variety of qualitative and quantitative data collection tools, including monitoring data, across the Inclusive Folk Programme. Data collection was co-designed and implemented between Independent Evaluator and EFDSS Education Manager, using previous EFDSS tools such as parent/carer and artist feedback surveys, as well as bespoke new approaches to observation, surveys and group discussion that were designed and/or facilitated by the Independent Evaluator³.

People who participated in the evaluation activities included:

- The Inclusive Folk Tutor team involved in the evaluation activities and CPD day consisted of three Tutors (Emmie Ward, Nick Goode and Roary Neat), two pastoral Support Workers (Cori Smith and Lucy Rushton) and a Trainee Tutor (Alice Western)
- Two EFDSS staff - Education Director and Education Manager
- Eight school staff across roles of Head Teacher, Teachers, Teaching Assistants and Support Staff who completed a survey
- Four Folk Unlimited parents/carers who completed a survey
- Programme participants observed in Folk Unlimited (10 participants) and two schools programmes (20 participants)
- Three work experience placement students from College Park School
- Three support staff from College Park School
- 13 Folk Education Development Day attendees who completed a survey

DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

Folk Unlimited

- Observation of class by Independent Evaluator (12 January 2025)*
- Folk Unlimited Sharing 23 March 2025 - parent/carer feedback survey**
- Tutor team feedback surveys - Autumn and Spring Term**

Schools projects

- Observation of two classes at The Windmill School (30 April 2025) and St Ann's School (9 May 2025), drawing partly on Sounds of Intent domains of music engagement⁴.
- School staff survey (seven respondents across three schools)*
- School staff survey - Phoenix Arch School (Head teacher)**
- Email correspondence between Lead Tutor and Independent Evaluator (May 2025)
- Inclusive Folk Festival, at Cambridge School, 27 June 2025 - Education Manager observation**

³ * designed/facilitated by Independent Evaluator. ** designed/facilitated by EFDSS

⁴ <https://soundsofintent.org/en/sounds-of-intent-framework/circular-figure/index>



Work experience

- Participant feedback survey (3 students)**
- EFDSS staff feedback meeting**
- Support Worker feedback meeting**

Professional development activities

- Continuing Professional Development (CPD) day 16 February 2025 - attendee survey*
- Folk Education Development Day, 15 March 2025, attendee feedback survey*

Overarching programme evaluation activities

- Group interview with five Tutor team members using drawing and visualisation tools as starter activities, followed by conversation on schools, Folk Unlimited and professional development (12 May 2025). Follow up one-to-one interview with Nick on professional development (19 May 2025)*
- Email Q&A with Trainee (unable to attend group interview) (May 2025)*
- Reflective meeting with EFDSS Education Director (Rachel Elliott) and Education Manager (Jadwiga Słomka), using drawing and visualisation tools as starter activities, followed by conversation. Facilitated by Independent Evaluator (2 June 2025)*

ANALYSIS

The Education Manager conducted some analysis and provided summary reports on Work Experience, CPD day and Folk Education Development Day. The Independent Evaluator conducted a thematic data analysis that triangulated all data sets and identified evidence relating to the three programme outcomes, as well as common emerging themes.



ACTIVITY OVERVIEW

From September 2024 to June 2025, EFDSS have:

- Recruited and supported the Inclusive Folk Trainee Music Leader, Alice Western.
- Employed previous Trainee Roary Neat on a freelance basis to cover Tutors in schools and Folk Unlimited programmes.
- Delivered 18 face-to-face Folk Unlimited creative music making sessions fortnightly (six per term) on Sunday afternoons at Cecil Sharp House with a full group of ten young people with severe learning disabilities (SLD), profound and multiple disabilities (PMLD), and other complex needs⁵, with parents and carers.
- Recruited two new pastoral Support Workers in Folk Unlimited sessions, Cori Smith and Lucy Rushton.
- Recruited one new pastoral staff in London Youth Folk Ensemble, Eloise Pearce, (to support disabled and neurodiverse young people). The role supports the additional needs of the LYFE cohort, of which 43% are either learning disabled, have additional needs (such as ASD, or ADHD), or both. The pastoral staff underwent additional NSPCC training in safeguarding SEN students, and adults at risk (as LYFE is open up to 24 years of age for those who are D/deaf or disabled).
- Hosted the first joint Folk Unlimited / LYFE sharing performance held in Kennedy Hall at Cecil Sharp House, attended by friends and family.
- Fulfilled the delivery of 36 half days of workshops in four education settings:
 - a. The Windmill School, Barnet (12 half days with three groups over Autumn and Spring Terms)
 - b. Phoenix Arch School, Brent (eight half days with four groups in Spring Term)
 - c. St Ann's School, Ealing (ten half days with three groups over Autumn, Spring and Summer Terms)
 - d. Queen Elizabeth II Jubilee School, Westminster (six half days with four groups in Summer Term)

⁵ Disclosed disabilities include autism, ADHD, cerebral palsy, Downs Syndrome, Creatine Deficiency Syndrome, Sotos syndrome, global delay, visual impairments, including participants that are wheelchair users, quadriplegic and tube fed.



- Delivered one half-day Inclusive Folk Festival with students from Cambridge School, Hammersmith and Fulham⁶, taking part in music-making, dance and song.
- Created a new downloadable teaching resource ‘Cut From the Same Cloth: Textiles and Folk Song in Inclusive Settings’ for the EFDSS Resource Bank. At the time of writing, the resource is in production and will include video, audio and notes.
- Organised and delivered one CPD Day in February 2025 for EFDSS Tutors. Training was delivered by Emmie Ward and Roary Neat to Tutors from both LYFE and Inclusive Folk. This training aimed to strengthen inclusive teaching practices and expand Tutor confidence in adapting music workshops for young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.
- Organised and delivered a presentation and workshop as part of EFDSS’ Folk Education Development Day titled ‘Creating Accessible and Inclusive Folk Dance’ in March 2025, for external attendees from across England. Videos of these sessions have been made available on EFDSS’ YouTube channel⁷.
- EFDSS Lead Tutor Emmie Ward delivered a CPD session to 150 people at the ‘Accessible Book and Story Festival’ in September 2024, on sensory experiences in music and education overall for individuals with complex needs.
- Hosted three learning disabled students from College Park School for work experience placements.
- Commissioned a photographer to capture our Inclusive Folk programme in action in schools.

⁶ <https://cambridge.lbhf.sch.uk/>

⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCox2OJP6S2WPSSuW6P7DNdw>



PROGRAMME EVALUATION

ACHIEVEMENTS

During the first year of the five-year funded programme, Inclusive Folk has made great headway.

- Folk Unlimited was at full capacity all year round. The group included one female and nine male participants aged 12-26. Most identify as White British or Any Other White Background, with one Chinese and one Black African participant. There continues to be a waiting list.
- The schools programme has fulfilled its intended 36 half day sessions in four schools.
- Approximately 138 young disabled people with SLD and PMLD took part in the Inclusive Folk workshops across four schools (which is a 50% increase in participants from the previous funded programme).
- Ongoing relationships with schools have been strengthened. All four schools this year provided positive feedback on planning, teaching and delivery, with aims and expectations met. They have all expressed a wish to work with EFDSS again in the next year.
- The reputation of the schools programme has spread resulting in much higher demand for EDFSS delivery, and a waiting list.
- EFDSS staff attended two professional development events; Disability Equality Training for EFDSS staff at Cecil Sharp House (Autumn 2024); and the Roundtable event hosted by the Triborough Music Hub which focused on music education for Visually Impaired and D/deaf young people (Summer 2025).
- EFDSS participation in 'A New Perspective: Advocating for inclusivity within the Arts' John Lyon's Charity's SEN/D conference in July 2024 where Inclusive Folk Tutors led sessions for delegates, has resulted in some new and flourishing relationships - two of the schools from this year's programme were born out of introductions made at the event.
- 30 people attended EFDSS' Folk Education Development Day in March 2025, reaching predominantly new audiences interested in inclusive music and dance practice.



- All Inclusive Folk Tutors, Support Workers and the Trainee report increasing their confidence and skills in working with young people with disabilities over the last year.
- The addition of two Support Workers to Folk Unlimited has had a demonstrable impact on the quality of work produced in sessions, as well as enhancing the Tutor team's ability to respond to group and individual needs.

OUTCOME 1 - EVIDENCE COMMENTARY

Disabled young people show increased levels of participation in a music and dance activity - positively impacting their personal, social and emotional wellbeing, skills and confidence.

Indicators:

- 90% of participants show increased engagement participating in music-making with others.
- 100% of participants increase their range of experiences, knowledge and skills in music and dance
- 90% of participants demonstrate improvements in personal and social skills, confidence and well-being.
- Folk Unlimited at full capacity (10 places full).

Participation and engagement

In summary, the data collected indicates that the majority of disabled young people in the Folk Unlimited and schools programme show increased participation in music and dance, positively impacting their personal, social and emotional well-being, skills and confidence, evidenced through a strong evidence base in qualitative data sources.





In the Independent Evaluator's observation of Folk Unlimited and two schools found that Inclusive Folk Tutors facilitate a range of whole group activities that provide an excellent framework for social interaction and direct engagement, which can range from eye contact and smiles at one another across the circle, to students proactively connecting with their peers to play instruments together and/or share their enjoyment. In these activities students collaborate with one another. Examples include holding the parachute and making waves with Sea Shanties⁸, drumming on the big drum together, or using individual drums to play along as a group. During these group activities there is also room for individuals to demonstrate and develop their skills with different instruments.



In Folk Unlimited and school sessions, all students were actively involved in music making with others, with varying levels of engagement which is to be expected in these settings. This is affirmed by school staff who in their survey responses reported that 100% of students were actively engaged in the activities provided by EFDSS. Staff commented:

“Many students clearly looked forward to their turn, showing this by starting the session somewhat dysregulated then calming down as they focused on the parachute games and awaiting their turn to be sung to.” (Teaching staff, St Ann's School)

“All the learners that participated were fully engaged for the duration.” (Music Teacher, QEII Jubilee School)

“The students were captivated by the lively music and engaging storytelling. Even those who typically do not contribute academically were enthusiastic and participated actively. The group's ability to connect with every student and create an inclusive atmosphere was remarkable.” (Teaching staff, The Windmill School)

“Our class had the pleasure of enjoying a performance by EFDSS and it was an incredible experience. The students were thoroughly engaged and captivated by the

⁸ Sea Shanty - Traditional songs originally created and sung by sailors at sea. (Source: Royal Museums Greenwich)



lively music and storytelling. The group's ability to connect with every student and create an inclusive, enjoyable atmosphere was truly impressive.” (Teaching staff, The Windmill School)



Using the Sounds of Intent framework domains of ‘reactive’, ‘proactive’ and ‘interactive’⁹ to identify the ways students in four classes were engaging with music, the Independent Evaluator noted that most students' engagement was in the range of Level 2-3¹⁰ across the three domains, with one student scoring Level 1 across domains (encountering and relating unwittingly to sound), and one student scoring Level 4 in proactive domain where he played some musical motifs on the ukulele and intentionally made and controlled sound while playing along in the Bruno Mars song ‘Count on Me’.

Through observation, engagement was evidenced in the following ways:

- Eye contact and smiles in response to the ‘Hello Song’ at the start of each class, with some students remembering the ‘Everyone’ verse from previous week’s classes.
- The ‘My Turn Your Turn’ activity, which involved call and response between artists and students, involving eye contact, turn taking and copying sounds - this activity seemed to facilitate more engagement than the Hello Song in all observations.
- Students having the autonomy to choose their own instruments.

⁹ <https://soundsofintent.org/en/sounds-of-intent-framework/circular-figure/index>

¹⁰ **Reactive** - showing awareness of sound (Level 2) and reacting to simple patterns in sound (Level 3). **Proactive** - intentionally making and controlling sound (Level 2) and intentionally making simple patterns of sound (Level 3). **Interactive** - interacting with others using sound (Level 2) and copying others sounds and/or is aware of own sounds being copied (Level 3)



- Students playing along to songs led by Inclusive Folk Tutors and making sounds as a group.
- Students strumming a ukulele or playing a drum in time to the music.
- Confidence using a microphone to amplify voice, with one student initiating conversations directly with others by walking around the circle using the microphone to ask everyone questions.
- Students following a dance routine (i.e. eight promenade walks in a circle, four walks to the centre, four walks back), creating and performing their own dance moves (independently or supported by staff).

At the Inclusive Folk Festival, at Cambridge School, 27 June 2025, the EFDSS Education Manager observed students having fun and responding positively to activities. Teachers shared,

“The way the students responded to you was great. They were so engaged.”

“They (the students) loved the songs and dancing”

In Folk Unlimited and school settings, Tutors work hard to give students agency in the space, for example: choices of instruments they want to play; asking participants to set the drum beat that others follow; asking for ideas for how a song should be composed. Tutors adjust activities spontaneously in response to student requests, showing students that they are seen and heard, and that their interests are acknowledged and acted upon. Some students in Folk Unlimited are given tasks of responsibility, such as going into the breakout room space to ask the other group to come and rejoin the session.

There are many examples observed where Tutors are skillfully team teaching, working to simultaneously manage group activity as well as identifying the need for one-to-one with some students, gently and successfully encouraging alternative ways of participating, such as: modelling the playing of an instrument and/or sound making; responding to students participating in the circle and outside the circle around the space. The two Support Workers in Folk Unlimited sessions provide additional eyes and ears for these responsive and caring one-to-one opportunities.

When school staff were asked to consider the percentage of students demonstrating increased engagement participating in EFDSS classes, survey responses ranged from 40% to 90%, with an average of 70% (Figure 1), which falls slightly below the target of 90%. A larger response pool would provide a more reliable result here, or a more accurate tool for measuring changes in participation and engagement.

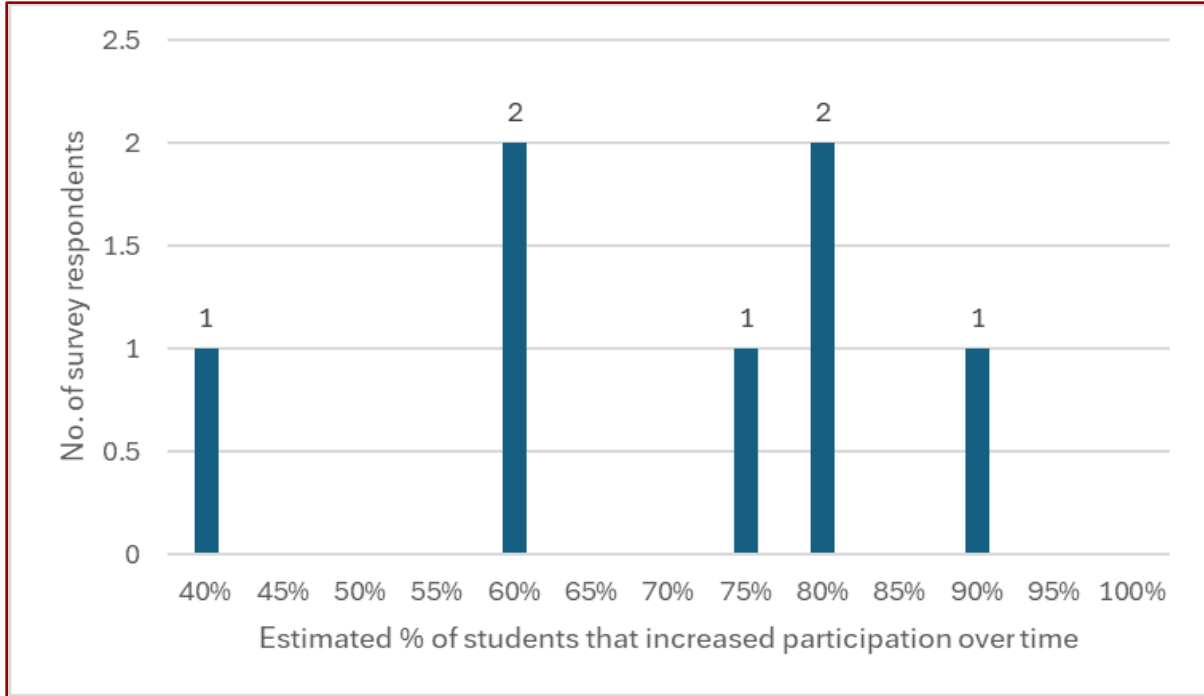


Figure 1: Estimated percentage of students that showed increased participation with others through the schools programme

Experience, knowledge and skill development in music and dance

Across the Folk Unlimited and schools programme, the data from Inclusive Folk Tutors, school staff, parents/carers and Independent Evaluator observations demonstrate that participants have developed a range of experiences, knowledge and skills.





Examples cited across data sets include:

- Singing
- Humming along to the beat of songs
- Playing music together
- Making sounds with instruments and iPad
- Learning new instruments
- Using the microphone
- Call and response
- Learning the words to songs
- Learning accompaniments to songs
- Adapting lyrics
- Creating soundscapes
- Learning and creating dance moves
- Learning to move with rhythm
- Developing confidence to perform in front of others
- Making individual contributions to the workshops
- Learning about other cultures and the history of folk music and dance.

The connection between music and dance is enhanced by well prepared and resourced activities. For example, during a school visit the Independent Evaluator observed Tutors leading a boat themed song with actions for pulling the sails, scrubbing the deck, saluting the captain etc. The Tutors physically demonstrate and use visual PEC¹¹ cards for the dance actions. All students joined in and some shared joyful moments dancing together and smiling, with some individuals demonstrating complete commitment to each action.



While most Folk Unlimited parents/carers agree that their young person developed new skills connected to the performance event in March 2025, one parent did not think any new skills had been developed, commenting, “He definitely enjoyed performing in the big hall, but I don't think he displayed any new skills as part of this event.”

Thinking about the young people’s ability to work together as an ensemble, Inclusive Folk Tutors felt that the development of band style as a focus for the Folk Unlimited sharing was successful.

¹¹ Picture Exchange Communication System ® or PECS ®



“I think the band style really helps participants learn to play with each other, listen and take turns. Also aids with team work and feeling part of something bigger/a group. I think people also enjoy it and find it a lot of fun to make music together!” (Trainee)

Folk Unlimited parents/carers commented that “The Folk Unlimited group worked very well as an ensemble - this is due to the incredibly dedicated and gifted teachers and Support Workers.” Parent/carer suggestions for further skill development included:

“I would like my young person to learn not to talk during the sharing, unless this has been planned”

“I would like my young person to learn the words of the chorus of this song”

Parents have commented to EFDSS staff that they would like a song book in future, to help them support their young person to learn song words. In the sessions, parents were given song words but then gave these back and didn't take them home.

School staff estimated that the percentage of students demonstrating an increase in their music and dance knowledge and skills ranged from 40% to 90%, with an average of 63%, falling below the 90% target (Figure 2). A larger response pool would provide a more reliable result here, or a more accurate tool for measuring development of knowledge and skills.

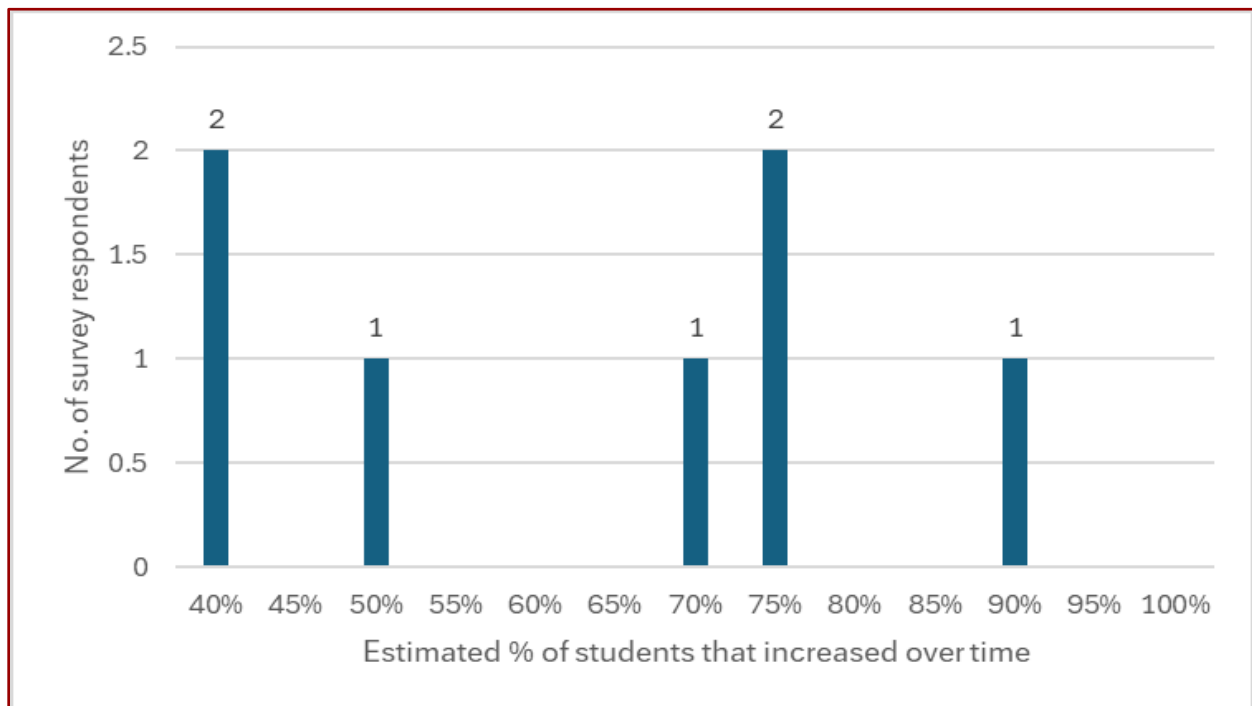


Figure 2: Estimated percentage of students that showed increases in knowledge and skills through the schools programme



Personal and social skills, confidence and wellbeing

“Participating in EFDSS allows students to express themselves creatively, which can significantly boost their confidence and self-esteem. The sense of achievement from learning and performing dance routines can be very empowering.” (Teacher, The Windmill School)

Improvements in personal and social skills, confidence and well-being were cited by school staff, Folk Unlimited parents/carers and the Inclusive Folk Tutor team.

100% of school staff agreed that the classes had improved participants' confidence and 86% agreed that the workshops had developed social skills and wellbeing (Figure 3).

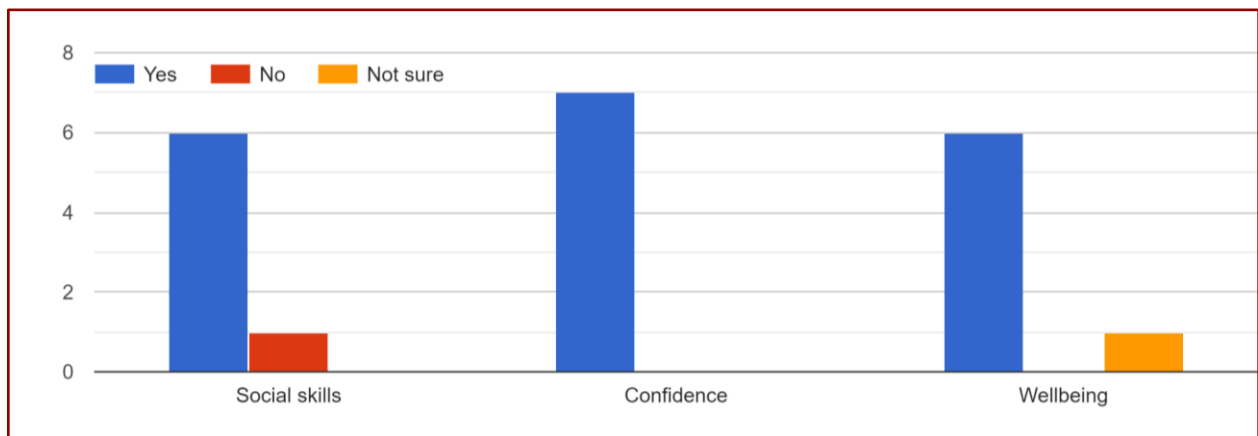


Figure 3: school staff perception of improvements to social skills, confidence and wellbeing through the EFDSS programme

When school staff were asked to estimate the percentage of students that had improved in personal and social skills, confidence and wellbeing, there was a mixed response ranging from 25% to 90%, with an average of 67% (Figure 4). On reflection this question is hard for school staff to answer with accuracy. Also, Indicator 1C has multiple elements to measure; it may be necessary to reword this in the next year, and separate out into three different indicators. It is worth considering what other data collection tools might measure this more accurately.

Through observations, school participants demonstrated social skills, diligence and care at the end of the session, helping to tidy up the space and put the instruments back on the table. There were many examples of students showing and voicing their thanks and appreciation at the end of school sessions; one participant blew a friendly kiss to the Tutor in a sign of affection, others say “That was fun”, “See you next time”, “Thank you”, evidencing their sense of enjoyment in the activities. One school music teacher commented that “Students leaving the sessions happy, sharing their feelings with familiar staff and asking when the Tutors are coming back.” (Music Teacher, QEII Jubilee School).

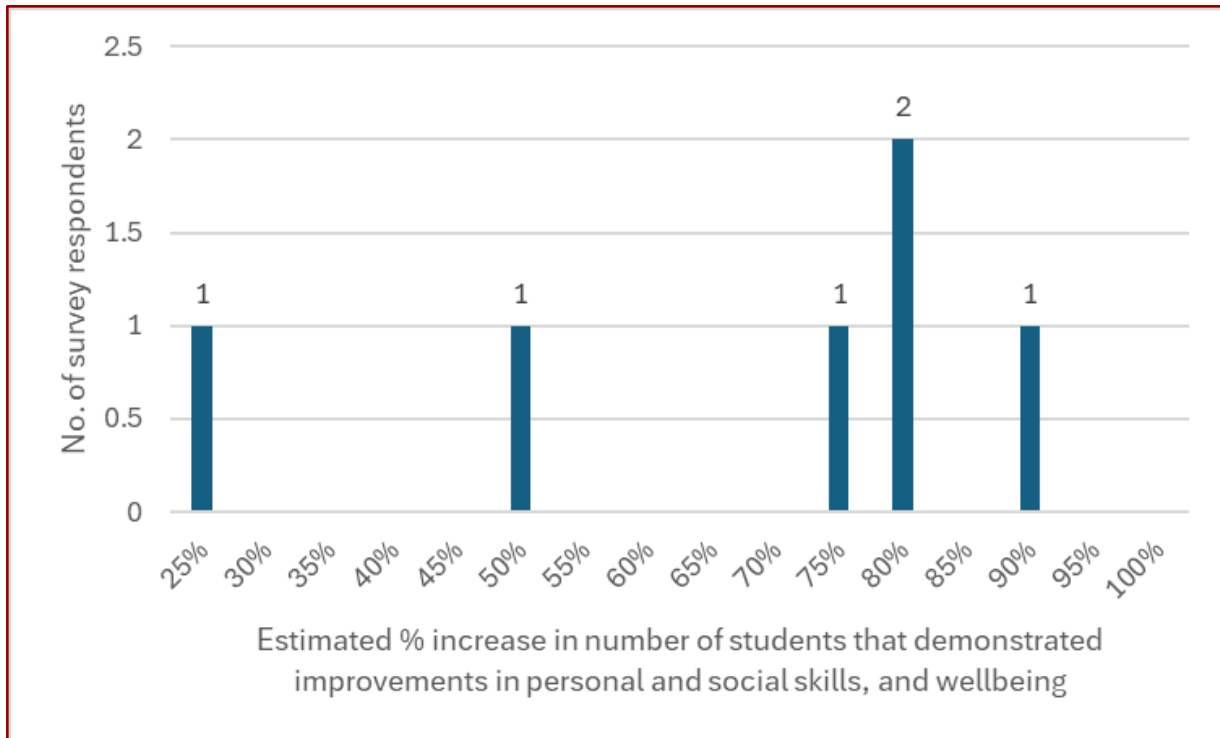


Figure 4: Estimated percentage of students that showed increases in personal and social skills, confidence and wellbeing.

After the Folk Unlimited session observation, one of the parents told the Independent Evaluator that her son had developed his turn taking and listening skills with this class. Another parent noted that their young person had developed more confidence with solos. These aspects of participant experience are developed through group work, taking turns, listening to one another and supporting friends in their turns.

All Folk Unlimited parents/carers reported that their young person had become more confident with performing.

“My young person's confidence grows each time he attends and participates.” (Folk Unlimited parent/carer)

“It's so nice to be a part of something that is so inclusive for both the parents and the young person”. (Folk Unlimited parent/carer)

The Inclusive Folk Tutor team also noted individual examples of improved confidence over the year:

Referring to a participant who is a wheelchair user: “he's really progressed recently in terms of his playing and his ease within the group. He'll come out of his chair and be moving around the space and he's just much more present with the group.” (Lead Tutor)



“I am most proud of the growth of the individuals. Some students were more reserved when I first met them and it brings me a lot of pride to see them seeming comfortable and engaging confidently in the sessions. It's amazing to see the friendships they have formed with each other and I am proud of being part of Folk Unlimited to facilitate that.” (Support Worker)

Referring to a participant singing the song ‘Wild Mountain Time’ on his own, from start to finish. “He was just really surprising. I don't know if a lot of that is just him growing up a bit, but he certainly felt safe enough to do that, which was wonderful.” (Tutor)

Fun, joy and silliness



A ‘sense of fun’ and ‘joy’ emerged as clear themes in data from school and Folk Unlimited sessions. In Folk Unlimited, the relaxed class atmosphere, playfulness and opportunities to make silly sounds together provide exceptional moments of recognition and connection for participants and Inclusive Folk Tutors. In the Independent Evaluator observation of the Folk Unlimited session, students were learning the song ‘Hunt the Wren’ and were encouraged to make bird sounds, which made them all laugh. In a group discussion with the Independent Evaluator, the Tutor team recalled an example where they were encouraging Folk Unlimited participants to create their own silly sounds in a song with other people, taking turns using the microphone and/or passing different instruments round. The Support Worker reported that participants were sharing the space well,

“[They] just got so giddy and so into it. I was laughing so much, and...it was just really fun. And the amount of joy that it brought...they're all just beaming and copying each



other's sounds, because they could see how fun it was for them to do it.” (Support Worker)

OUTCOME 2 - EVIDENCE COMMENTARY

Disabled young people are enabled to participate in meaningful experiences with an arts organisation (EFDSS) and its venue (Cecil Sharp House) via a supportive progression route, including work experience.

Indicators:

- A. 95% of disabled young people are able to participate in a range of meaningful activities tailored to their needs.
- B. Folk Unlimited Folk Band perform outside of the workshop setting at least once.
- C. Staff continue to review and develop approaches to making EFDSS programmes, activities and procedures more inclusive for disabled young people and adults; there is at least one development per year.

Meaningful and student-centred activities

“Together with Tutors, students developed simple dance routines that accompanied the songs, which gave them a sense of meaningful participation from the very beginning.”
(Music Teacher, QEII Jubilee School)

Through the schools, Folk Unlimited and work experience placements, there is excellent evidence of how meaningful activities have been tailored to student needs. A Spotlight on Work Experience provides an overview of how this programme provided a meaningful work based learning experience for three students from College Park School.

In the schools programme, the Inclusive Folk Tutor team responded to challenging and unexpected situations. Of particular note is a situation that arose in workshops with an older secondary age group at Windmill School. After a challenging first week with only one student choosing to come to the class, the Tutors regrouped to assess how their next class could be adapted. In discussion with the students and teachers two things became clear; first, the music session clashed with a much loved ‘craft’ session in the group’s classroom; and second, the group were no longer interested in playing folk music. The Tutors came prepared the next week with a discussion activity that took place in the group’s classroom, while the crafting activity was happening. Roary shared with the class that they are queer and make music about queer issues. A few students in the class also identified as queer, creating a meaningful connection.



Roary reflected,

“I sing a lot about queer issues, because I'm queer. There were quite a few queer students in the group, including a non binary student, and I think it was really good for them to see a Tutor who has that similarity with them, that it's not just a teenage thing or something, and those are the sorts of experiences that one can also connect with music and with music making. There were a few who were really interested, but one of them particularly started talking about how she really loved Chappell Roan and other queer protest singers. And hopefully they felt less like it was a thing that they had to study because they were in school, and more of a way of expressing themselves.”

Lead Tutor Emmie reflected on this experience,

“I think that as a team, we just played to our strengths and we found a way of connecting that was really positive. I found these music conversation cards, so that was the activity we went in with...it...shows that, we have to be very flexible, very, very flexible in our approach”

As well as Roary's conversation about queer music, Trainee Tutor Alice also prepared some session content that played to her knowledge about Scottish waulking¹² songs as an example of where people are working, crafting and making and singing together. This acted as an invitation for the group to craft and sing together in the class. These examples evidence how skilled the team is at adapting their practice to accommodate student needs and interests.

Folk Unlimited Band performance opportunities



¹² Waulking - Waulking songs are rhythmic Scottish folk songs, sung by a group of women while they were rhythmically beating cloth or wool (waulking) to shrink and soften it so it could be woven and made into clothes and blankets. The songs take the form of question and answer type songs, with one woman singing the verse, and the others join the chorus. These songs were sung to maintain rhythm and make the work a little lighter and social (Sources: BBC and Historic Environment Scotland)



Folk Unlimited gave one performance outside the workshop setting this year which was the joint performance event with LYFE on 23 March 2025 at Cecil Sharp House. Following the success of this event, EFDSS are hoping to create other opportunities next academic year.

The performance event with Folk Unlimited and LYFE on 23 March 2025 was highlighted by all staff, Tutors, Support Workers and the Trainee as a very special moment of the year. The Education Manager reflected on the sense of community between the students, parents and carers, and EFDSS staff that she perceived at this event. The Education Manager noted the high quality of the work, and how moving the whole experience was. One Tutor reflected,

“I think people really recognise when we're working towards something, and there's a sense of occasion about it, and they rise for that occasion in a really lovely way. And it gives a real sense of purpose to be to be practising something, for a sharing and I think that we're just working out different ways of giving everybody a chance to shine, but in a way that makes a good performance as well.”

Parents/carers told EFDSS about the impact this event on their young person,

“Wonderful idea that the young people get the opportunity to feel part of something bigger.”

“He is a total showman and loved taking centre stage!”

“My young person really enjoyed the sharing and was also delighted to receive a certificate at the end.”

Developments and programme enhancement

There have been a number of valuable developments to the EFDSS Inclusive Folk programme and activities this year, demonstrating the organisation's commitment to enhancing and extending provision.

Regular and ongoing reflection by EFDSS Tutoring team

In all observations by the Independent Evaluator, the Tutors' pre-class meeting/rehearsal and post-class debrief demonstrate the teams excellent ability to reflect and evaluate their practice. They discuss individuals' participation and responses, identifying what has worked well, and what needs adjusting for the next class. There is a deep sense of care for each other and the participants which shows a clear commitment to their roles and the students they teach.

Pastoral Support Workers - three new roles in Folk Unlimited and LYFE

A pastoral staff role was introduced in the LYFE ensemble this year, taken on by Eloise Pearce. While LYFE is separate from Folk Unlimited, it includes several members with complex needs,



and Eloise's presence proved vital to the group's overall success. Her role combined safeguarding responsibilities with practical support, offering a consistent and responsive presence in rehearsals.



Two Support Workers were introduced to the Folk Unlimited team this year, and one in LYFE. All Tutors reported that the addition of two Support Workers in the Folk Unlimited sessions has made a huge difference to session delivery. Both Folk Unlimited Support Workers talked about the skill of “thinking on their feet” and being responsive in the session, where their role balances playing music, getting resources and providing one-to-one support. Cori and Lucy commented,

“I've just enjoyed it so much, and feel like I've learned a lot, and...I'm excited to learn more... getting to know all the students and the Tutors, it just feels like such a privilege....they constantly surprise you and bring so much joy to like everyone.”

“Really think the team works really well together...such a lovely group of people doing it...just a real joy to be a part of to be honest.”

The Tutors value the Support Workers' music skills and knowledge that they bring, and involve them in some planning so that they feel included in Folk Unlimited's development. Tutors have observed there is a higher quality of work from participants, due to having extra eyes and ears to get more feedback on how participants are responding. Tutor Nick commented that the Support Worker's presence has enhanced his ability to balance the voices heard in the space, where less confident students are given more time and support. Lead Tutor Emmie commented that the quality of sound in the space is enhanced with two more accomplished musicians playing,

“It all sounds richer. And there's so much more for them to experience as well, with all of those different textures and playing and people's personalities. You know, it's just wonderful. We're very, very lucky. We have an amazing team.”



Tutors have suggested that due to the Support Workers' presence, they wonder if there could be fewer parents and carers in the Folk Unlimited sessions now, giving the young people more independence - something to consider as a programme development in 25-26. Interestingly, in the end of year reflection meeting, the Education Director and Education Manager reflected that for the next year, they may consider reallocating one of the Folk Unlimited Support Workers to LYFE, partly because there are no parents and carers present in this session and therefore more support would enhance the work with certain individuals with considerable needs. This balancing of the support provision across the programme is an important point of discussion moving forward into the next year.

Folk Unlimited ensemble skills

The development of ensemble and 'band style' skills at Folk Unlimited has been a successful focus this year, through workshops and the performance opportunity in Kennedy Hall and collaborating with LYFE. Through this focus, students have learned turn taking and working together, sharing instruments and the microphone, listening to one another. Students have become more confident using BigMacks, percussion, and have started to play the violin with the help of Support Workers.

New resource

Emmie Ward and Camilo Menjura are working on a cross-cultural resource which will include songs used previously in this project: 'Yan Tan Tethera', 'My Shoes are Made of Spanish' and 'Por El Suelo'. The resource is a cross-cultural song resource comprising teachers' notes, a video, and audio files, is currently in production and will focus on songs about textiles drawing on English and Colombian traditional songs.

OUTCOME 3 - EVIDENCE COMMENTARY

Increased numbers of school/college staff, folk music educators, performing arts Tutors are enabled to use folk music and dance creatively with disabled young people in formal and informal settings.

Indicators:

- A. 90% of Music Leaders, teachers/TAs and carers report increased knowledge and/or confidence in working musically with disabled young people.
- B. Trainee demonstrates increased skills in providing inclusive music learning for disabled young people.
- C. 90% of school/college teachers report benefits for inclusion of folk music and dance in their curriculums.
- D. 80% of CPD attendees state that the training will enhance their own practice.



In 2024-2025, EFDSS have supported three Tutors, one Trainee Tutor, three new pastoral Support Workers, 180 performing arts professionals (at the Folk Education Development Day and 'My Kind of Book' CPD event), and approximately 30 school staff (including teachers, teaching assistants and Support Workers), to use folk music and dance creatively with disabled young people in formal and informal settings.

The activities that have supported this achievement include professional development opportunities such as internal CPD and the Folk Education Development Day (presented by EFDSS), incidental learning opportunities for school staff through their participation/observations in workshops, taking on a Trainee Music Leader and three new pastoral Support Workers. In next year's evaluation report, EFDSS will be able to ascertain whether there is an increase in these numbers.

Professional development of EFDSS Music Leaders, school staff and carers

EFDSS have demonstrated a commitment to sharing experience, knowledge, skills and practice with their experienced Music Leaders, education professionals such as school teachers, teaching assistants and Support Workers, and other arts professionals from performing arts disciplines.



They have done this through hosting dedicated professional development events such as the CPD day for EFDSS Music Leaders in February 2025, and the Folk Education Development Day (pictured above) that invited external professionals including educators, community practitioners, artists, and individuals working in inclusive and participatory arts, to Cecil Sharp



House in March 2025. 100% of CPD day attendees said that they plan to apply what they have learned in their practice. Particular highlights and direct applications to current practice included:

“How to use PECS symbols in an interactive music session”

“I will use the Sounds of Intent framework to monitor and analyse participant's musical growth and communication skills.”

“Using multisensory facilitation techniques - although sound is the main sense used in a workshop, multisensory activities can aid the delivery of a music workshop. For example using smells to help imagine the context of a particular song (smell of a forest).”

Of the 30 people that attended the Folk Education Development Day, 13 provided feedback. The majority of people attending this event were attending an EFDSS event for the first time. Participants found the day overall highly engaging and informative, citing several aspects as especially valuable. In particular they highlighted the calibre and insight of the Inclusive Folk speakers, with one attendee commenting “Really refreshing to hear such honesty and experience.” The lived experience and practitioner-based delivery were particularly appreciated, especially where these included insights from disabled artists or inclusive practice in action, for example, the “clear examples of adaptations and inclusive methods.” Participants overwhelmingly indicated that the event would have a direct impact on their professional work. Some mentioned using newly learned vocabulary and dance knowledge, as well as reflecting on structural versus more flexible models for inclusion. The video resources from this event have been uploaded to YouTube¹³.

EFDSS has also shared their practice at external professional development events, such as Disability Awareness Training (Autumn 2024), and the Roundtable event hosted by the Triborough Music Hub which focused on music education for Visually Impaired and D/deaf young people (Summer, 2025). Lead Tutor Emmie Ward ran a session on the ‘My Kind of Book’¹⁴ approach at the ‘Accessible Book & Story Festival’ from 13-14 September 2024 at the Scottish Storytelling Centre in Edinburgh. Emmie delivered CPD to 150 people at the event, talking about sensory experiences in music and education overall for individuals with complex needs, which drew on examples from Inclusive Folk bringing the programme to a wider audience. This event provided an excellent opportunity to make some new connections with PAMIS and the CALL centre in Scotland and link with other storytellers and researchers. Emmie commented “the audience were just so talented and skilled and receptive themselves and what fabulous and varied speakers.” And [organiser] Ailie Finley praised Emmie’s session “So many people have told me how much they loved your workshop, Emmie! Thank you so much - it was really great having you at the festival.”

¹³ <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCox2OJP6S2WPSSuW6P7DNdw>

¹⁴ <https://mykindofbook.org.uk/>



Increases in staff knowledge and confidence

100% of Inclusive Folk Tutors, Trainees and Support Workers told the Independent Evaluator that they had increased knowledge, confidence in working with disabled young people over the last year.

They have learned from one another, with less experienced Tutors appreciating the guidance from more experienced Tutors, akin to a 'community of practice' model¹⁵. Tutor Nick (pictured below) commented about feeling more confident in: his facilitation and co-facilitation skills; learning new ways of listening and attending to participants, their responses and needs; using new visual resources like the dance cards and PECS cards.



The two new Support Workers reported learning a huge amount on the job, including communication skills and using Makaton signing, and have appreciated having dedicated workshops and CPD throughout the year, so that they can apply new learning back into the Folk Unlimited sessions. They report being clear about their roles.

This confidence is also evidenced in the team's ability to respond to challenges and try new ideas such as: their 'folk' adaptation of contemporary music such as 'Count on Me' by Bruno Mars, to explore the theme of friendship; previous Trainee Roary facilitating a music discussion about queer music with one of the older classes at The Windmill School; Trainee Alice developing a presentation about Scottish waulking, music and craft practices for The Windmill School.

In the school staff survey, when asked whether staff had increased their knowledge and confidence working musically with disabled young people, 57% (4 people) said yes, 27% (2 people) said 'not sure' and one person said no. This limited data sample suggests that outcome 3A (target 90%) has not been achieved for this particular group. The survey commentary did not

¹⁵ <https://www.wenger-trayner.com/introduction-to-communities-of-practice/#what>



provide much further detail about this. It is advisable for EFDSS to follow up through conversations with school staff to find out how this aspect could be developed in the next year.

Trainee Tutor development and progression

Alice Western



The current Inclusive Folk Trainee, Alice reported some very valuable developments in her confidence and facilitation practice over the last year. In her reflection, Alice said she was proud of,

“Getting to know so many amazing participants and helping them access music; seeing students enjoy music and experience the positives of it; and helping students access communication and expression through music.”

Alice expressed that she has developed her skills in facilitating participant engagement at all levels, in particular,

“knowing when to give someone space, when to encourage, when to help, making people feel comfortable and confident, how to deal with more energetic/disruptive groups, how to organise a performance, how to grab people's attention, how to soothe with music.”

In terms of professional development, Alice would like to learn more about planning sessions and writing lesson plans. Thinking beyond the Traineeship, Alice is starting to think about how she can continue this work and also develop her own opportunities.



From Trainee to Tutor - Roary's progression

"I am most proud just to be able to say I'm a fully-fledged Tutor now... It feels really nice to be able to continue to work for EFDSS but also do freelance work in the same field for others, much of which I secure because of my experience with EFDSS. Makes me feel like a proper professional in this area!"

Previous Trainee (2023-2024) Roary covered some classes this year and commented that their confidence and skills had progressed from following what Tutors are doing, to taking a more active and independent role. Roary has felt valued and supported in their role thanks to the collegiate nature of the Music Leaders and positive feedback. In the group discussion, one of the Tutors said that some of the silly games that Roary introduced to Folk Unlimited are still regularly requested by participants. In this way, Roary's legacy lives on in the group. Roary has also developed by leading professional development workshops such as the two mentioned in this report (CPD for EFDSS Tutors in February 2025 and Folk Education Development Day in March 2025), and is also applying their skills in work beyond EFDSS.

Impact on school curricula

Inclusive Folk aimed to see their work have an impact beyond the school classes and into the wider school curriculum. 85% (6 out of 7) of school staff survey respondents felt that the Inclusive Folk sessions had a positive impact on the wider work of the group or school, which is just below the 90% target - although this is most likely due to the small sample size of survey respondents. The comments in the survey are very positive, for example "folk music is very dance based and intuitive, both of which benefit our students". One staff member noted that the chosen theme tied in well to the school curriculum, and others stated that the sessions are a valuable extracurricular activity to widen their knowledge and expose them to unfamiliar activities, with one staff member stating,

"Remarkably, even those who typically do not contribute academically and have a strong dislike for subjects like Maths and English were enthusiastic and participated actively."

When the Independent Evaluator spoke to the EFDSS Tutor team about this, Tutors stated they did not have a clear sense of the impact of their workshops on the class activities beyond the session, or the school curriculum more broadly. They reported that this is more likely to happen if there is a music lead at the school. This disconnect could be remedied through a post project debrief for each school, including the Education Manager, Lead Tutor and school staff, to help better understand if and how the work resonates beyond the classroom and the project duration. The Education Manager will conduct an 'end of project debrief' with the Inclusive Folk team to discuss these topics once all reporting has been submitted: this will also help inform future planning of the schools programme in 2025-2026.



SPOTLIGHT ON THE SCHOOLS PROGRAMME



EFDSS has worked in five schools this year; The Windmill School in Barnet, St Ann's School in Ealing, QE2 in Westminster, Phoenix Arch School in Brent and Cambridge School in Hammersmith and Fulham. The latter three schools were all new to the programme this year, demonstrating the growth of the programme. The Inclusive Folk Team worked most closely with the Windmill School and St Ann's School. The Windmill School¹⁶ is an SEN/D school for primary and secondary and Post 16 pupils. EFDSS provided workshops with three groups on six occasions in Spring and Summer terms on the theme of friendship. St Ann's School¹⁷ is SEN/D secondary school. EFDSS provided workshops with three groups on ten occasions in Autumn, Spring and Summer terms, focussing on Sea Shanties¹⁸ and creating soundscapes.

The focus of these classes is to support the development of students' confidence, social skills, to have fun and learn some new folk music and dance skills together. A typical class includes:

- The 'Hello Song' to welcome everyone into the circle, where Tutors play their instruments and greet each student individually.
- 'My Turn Your Turn' activity, with call and response between artists and students, involving eye contact, turn taking and copying sounds.
- Students choosing instruments to play, and playing along to songs led by Tutors.
- Students taking turns with the microphone to amplify their voice and sounds.
- Students following a folk dance sequence in a circle, with opportunities to create and perform their own dance moves.

Students' participation and engagement varies, which is to be expected in these settings, ranging from eye contact and watching Tutors, smiles, quietly exploring the physical features of an instrument, to bigger gestures such as banging a drum loudly, amplifying voice with the microphone and joining in group songs. Tutors are skilled at balancing group activities with one-to-one interaction, responding to student interests and requests. As well as developing music and dance skills such as playing instruments in time to the music, singing along to group songs,



students also have developed skills in turn taking, listening to one another and sharing instruments. Feedback from school staff has complimented the Inclusive Folk Tutoring team on their high quality and creative delivery.



“Many students clearly looked forward to their turn, showing this by starting the session somewhat dysregulated then calming down as they focused on the parachute games and awaiting their turn to be sung to.” (Teaching staff, St Ann’s School)

“All the learners that participated were fully engaged for the duration.” (Music Teacher, QEII Jubilee School)

“Together with Tutors, students developed simple dance routines that accompanied the songs, which gave them a sense of meaningful participation from the very beginning.” (Music Teacher, QEII Jubilee School)

“Hands on activities kept children enthused.” (Head Teacher, Phoenix Arch School)

“The students were captivated by the lively music and engaging storytelling. Even those who typically do not contribute academically were enthusiastic and participated actively. The group’s ability to connect with every student and create an inclusive atmosphere was remarkable.” (Teaching staff, The Windmill School)

“The students were thoroughly engaged and captivated by the lively music and storytelling. The group’s ability to connect with every student and create an inclusive, enjoyable atmosphere was truly impressive.” (Teaching staff, The Windmill School)

¹⁶ <https://www.thewindmillschool.org/>

¹⁷ <https://www.stannsschool.co.uk/>

¹⁸ Sea Shanty - Traditional songs originally created and sung by sailors at sea. (Source: Royal Museums Greenwich)



SPOTLIGHT ON WORK EXPERIENCE

As part of its commitment to inclusive practice and accessible arts pathways, EFDSS partnered with College Park School, a specialist SEN school in Paddington, to offer tailored work experience during the academic year. Over the Spring and Summer terms (Half Terms 4 and 5), EFDSS hosted three students—two in Half Term 4, and one in Half Term 5. Each placement was adapted to the student's interests, learning needs, and abilities, aiming to provide a meaningful and confidence-building experience.

Staff from across EFDSS, including Education, Hires, Marketing, Operations and the Library, collaborated providing a meaningful work experience to the young people. Students engaged in a range of adapted activities such as admin support, archiving, and basic research, offering them insight into work at EFDSS.

Feedback gathered through forms and informal discussion was overwhelmingly positive. All students rated staff five out of five for friendliness and helpfulness. One Support Worker praised the tasks as “well suited” and thoughtfully aligned to each student's skills. A student shared that working on the computer was their favourite task, while another enjoyed packing leaflets, saying they learned about “pairing shoes and putting t-shirts into sizes.”

Key successes included a student applying familiar research skills with the Hires team, boosting their confidence, and another excelling in a sorting task from the Education team—completing it quickly and enthusiastically.



CHALLENGES, LEARNINGS AND ENHANCEMENTS

Through the evaluation activities, feedback from the schools staff and EFDSS Tutor team, Education Director and Education Manager identified some challenges and key learnings, with some thoughtful and practical enhancements to the Inclusive Folk programme for consideration.

CECIL SHARP HOUSE - BUILDING ISSUES

One of the challenges that impacted the Inclusive Folk programme this year was the building work and the broken lift at Cecil Sharp House. The Takeover youth performance event on 28 June had to be scaled back due to the building work at Cecil Sharp House which meant that unfortunately there wasn't the capacity to safely include participants from Folk Unlimited. On the plus side, once the building work is completed (in September) an additional studio space will be created in the basement, plus a greatly improved cafe area. Additionally, one session had to be cancelled due to the lift breaking down (a new part needed to be ordered taking around four weeks to deliver), therefore there was no level access to the building. It is on the medium-term plans for EFDSS to seek funding for scoping out the feasibility of installing a ramp into the building which is likely to be complex and costly due to the layout of this historic building in a conservation area. Improved accessibility is essential for the secure delivery and growth of the Inclusive Folk programme.

SCHOOLS PROGRAMME

School communication

School communication has been successful overall but has also been challenging at times due to school staff schedules and availability. The EFDSS Education Manager reflected on how busy schools are which impacts on planning and preparation: often school staff are not responsive to phone calls and emails. In the planning of school programme work next year, The Education Manager will try to establish what works best for each school, so that communication is more frequent and productive for both the school and EFDSS needs. The Tutoring team also encountered some challenges with classes showing up very late, room changes, staff requesting schedule changes on the day, and classes being scheduled at a time when other much-loved student activities were on the timetable. While the Tutoring team managed these unexpected issues with professionalism, flexibility and grace, it did highlight the need for some schools to better understand their responsibilities in their partnership with EFDSS.



Collaborative student-centred planning and delivery

For a bespoke and student-centred approach to delivery, the Tutors suggested more collaborative planning and having information about the class and students in advance. For example, their interests, support needs, auxiliary aids, behavioural challenges. All parties agree that more collaborative planning would be beneficial. As well as co-planning, one school staff member also suggested implementing co-teaching models “where general and special education teachers collaborate to deliver instruction. This approach allows for differentiated instruction and better support for all students.”

Themes and curriculum connections

This year, EFDSS Tutors have responded to the school's ‘themes’ suggestions such as The Olympics Values, and Friendship, which on the whole have worked to an extent. However, Tutors felt that they could offer a richer folk experience that draws on Tutor knowledge and expertise, by working up some ‘themed’ packages that EFDSS propose to schools; schools can then choose the one that best suits their needs and the curricula. This is where collaborative planning could really enhance the preparatory stage.

Inclusive Folk Lead Tutor, Emmie, also felt that the connection between the session themes and content, and impact on wider school curriculum is an area that could be developed. For example, making use of Google Classroom to host resources, such as audio recordings that students can listen back to in between sessions - enhancing learning and reflection.

Resources

One school suggested that “for students requiring mobility support, it would be good to have dance props and extra bodies who could lead the students in a special dance sequence designed to involve their mobility aids.” This is where more detailed advanced planning, and more staff would enhance delivery. Some schools suggested using PEC symbols more in sessions.

Class size, duration, space, and management of comings and goings

Some school staff suggested changes to the delivery model such as smaller class sizes based on teachers' knowledge of ability/sensory needs, and/or longer class duration (and fewer classes in total), to optimise the student experience and relationship building. EFDSS' experience in the planning stages was that these matters were discussed with the schools, and it is thought that this feedback may have been from staff not involved in the preparatory stage. Nonetheless, this will be reviewed for 2025-2025.

Feedback from one school suggested, “having the flexibility for students to drop in and out of sessions to meet their behaviour/regulation needs and personal care needs would help students build a more positive association and engagement with the workshops.” The Independent



Evaluator observations affirm that this is already happening in school environments, where a student requires one-to-one support.

One of the challenges at St Ann's school was a room change to a large, newly built space with high ceilings, meaning that sound was loud and amplified and overwhelming for some students. This space also had two doors that students could leave through if the doors were not monitored which impacted the session staff resourcing; staff on the doors could not be in the circle with students, which was detrimental to supporting delivery. For successful partnerships with schools, agreeing expectations for spaces and staffing could be reinforced further in preparatory meetings.

Inclusive Folk Festivals

EFDSS intended on hosting three Inclusive Folk Festivals with schools this year. However, similar to previous years, there were some challenges in being able to coordinate these events with the schools. An introductory Inclusive Folk Festival took place on 27 June at Cambridge School, Hammersmith and Fulham. The planned Inclusive Folk festival in March 2025 did not receive as much interest as anticipated, due to schools' availability. The planned Inclusive Folk Festival at St Ann's School did not materialise due to date clashes and it was not possible to rearrange this Festival at short notice. Suggestions for next year include offering more workshops in schools so that nobody is left behind from the experience.

WORK EXPERIENCE

The placements were mutually beneficial and reinforced EFDSS's role as an inclusive, welcoming workplace. To further strengthen the experience for future cohorts, the following improvements are proposed:

- Based on office space and staff resourcing: EFDSS can only host one work experience student at a time.
- Preparation: through closer communication with partner schools, EFDSS staff will be clearer about the types of tasks that the work experience will involve, so that the partner organisation can find work experience participants that are suitable and will get the most benefit from the experience.
- Introductory 'settling-in' session: A short visit ahead of the placement could help students become familiar with the setting and reduce any anxieties.
- Contextual introductions: providing a clearer explanation of EFDSS' work and the various staff roles could help students better understand the nature of a cultural organisation and the diversity of careers within it.



FOLK UNLIMITED

The EFDSS staff team are planning for Folk Unlimited to perform at next year's Takeover, where participants perform to a new crowd: their peers. This focus will enable the team to develop the 'band style' and ensemble skills from this year's programme.

Folk Beyond

An important development coming out of Folk Unlimited is Folk Beyond¹⁹, a separately funded programme for participants that have reached Inclusive Folk's maximum age of 30 to enable them to continue their relationship with EFDSS. This is funded by the Seneca Trust, an introduction made by parents of previous members of Folk Unlimited. The Education Director reflected on how Folk Beyond is an important part of the Folk Unlimited story, which has been made possible because parents wanted the adults they care for to continue taking part in sessions with EFDSS and shows how much they valued the Folk Unlimited approach.

EFDSS TUTORS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Inclusive Folk Tutor team members value regular CPD opportunities to revisit and build on inclusive practices. Expanding on this, they would value peer observation opportunities to embed multisensory and accessible strategies across programmes, and a way of sharing resources (e.g. symbol banks, activity templates) for ongoing reference. Again, this aligns with the aforementioned community of practice model, where knowledge and resources are shared within communities, which in this case is the Tutor team. When asked about specific professional development needs, the Tutors, Trainee and Support Workers discussed more training in sign language and Makaton to enhance their roles. They also talked about expanding their folk dance and song repertoire as musicians. Some requested some additional first aid training. In response to some experiences of challenging behaviour, some Tutors asked for additional support to learn about strategies for responding to these situations when they arise. It was clear that the team ensured particular cases and team responses were evaluated and discussed with relevant team members. However, this group conversation concluded that the Tutor team could revisit this to ensure that the working approach was clear so everyone feels supported and equipped.

When thinking about the Trainee progression, the previous Trainee Roary expressed wanting more consistent opportunities to be a regular Tutor on some projects, rather than stepping in as ad hoc cover. This is a consideration for staffing in 2025-26 where there might be one term where previous Trainees have a constant block of work to see a project through from start to finish, say, in one school.

¹⁹ <https://www.efdss.org/learning/adults/folk-beyond>



KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this first phase of the five-year programme, there is clear evidence that Inclusive Folk is making excellent progress across the three outcomes, with some clearly identified areas of development and enhancement for 2025-2026.

KEY FINDINGS

KF1: High quality provision. Inclusive Folk has provided a range of high quality, meaningful, relevant and well-resourced experiences drawing on traditional folk and contemporary music, for young disabled people within Cecil Sharp House and beyond. The quality of music and dance content in Folk Unlimited has been enhanced due to continuing development of confidence and skills of the Tutoring team, and the addition of two pastoral Support Workers (who are also accomplished musicians). Parents and carers of Folk Unlimited participants, and school staff continue to be impressed by the quality of the provision, and its impact on disabled young people.

KF2: Folk Unlimited membership and progression route. Inclusive Folk has built on the foundations of its previous work by continuing to have full membership of the Folk Unlimited group as well as making provision for those who reach the maximum age of 30 by setting up Folk Beyond, which is funded separately.

KF3: Trusting Relationships. The Tutors demonstrate collegiate, caring and inclusive approaches to learning and teaching, and have built trusting relationships with Folk Unlimited participants and their families.

KF4: Community of Practice and Professional Development. The Tutor team, including the Trainee and new pastoral Support Workers, feel well supported in terms of professional development. There is evidence of a 'community of practice' model emerging that provides supportive and collegiate professional development for the Tutor team. This is most notable through:

- More Tutors nurturing new members of the team, involving them in planning and delivery, increasing responsibility over time.
- Incidental learning is occurring through peer observation.
- Regular team debriefs provide collegiate opportunities for collective reflection, developing artistic, pedagogic and leadership practices of the team

This community of practice is bolstered by EFDSS providing more formal CPD opportunities and training for the team as required. The team has requested more opportunities for peer observation, sharing knowledge and practice.



KF5: Specialist CPD external provision - an opportunity. The public facing reputation of Inclusive Folk is growing - most recently as a result of the Folk Education Development Day, bringing together external specialists and EFDSS staff to deliver learning opportunities for other professionals. There is a clear opportunity to capitalise on this, with more public facing CPD in 2025-2025.

KF6: School relationships. Established school relationships have continued, and five new school relationships were developed, with all schools requesting to work with EFDSS again next year. There is also a waiting list of schools who are keen to join the programme.

KF7. Work experience. The work experience placements at EFDSS this year have been a valuable and rewarding initiative for all involved. Through thoughtful planning and staff engagement, EFDSS offered students supportive, relevant, and engaging experiences. The Support Workers have mentioned that they would be happy to return next year.

RECOMMENDATIONS

R1: Cecil Sharp House Building. Continue to prioritise improving accessibility for wheelchair users in the building. The current status quo limits the number of wheelchair users that can be safely accommodated in the building at any one time, thus impacting the programme's growth potential.

R2: Schools programme development. Continue to build on the success and reputation of the schools programme by developing relationships with current schools and providing new opportunities for schools on the waiting list (e.g. Cambridge School and College Park School) as resources allow.

R3: Schools communications and collaborative planning. Explore the opportunities for more / greater levels of co-planning and preparation with schools, to help improve communication, increase the connections between the workshop and wider school curriculum, support school staff professional development, and may increase the likelihood of Inclusive Folk Festivals happening as planned.

R4: Themes based workshop packages. The Education Manager and Education Director will be following up with Inclusive Folk Tutors to talk about planning schools work for next year, to consider whether some 'themes based' projects can be proposed to the school, therefore leaning into EFDSS knowledge and expertise on folk music and dance, sensory storytelling, and supporting common themes that arise in school curricula.

R5: Folk Unlimited Ensemble skills. Building on this year's programme, continue to build band style skills and provide further opportunities to develop confidence and skills in performing. Provide song books to support home learning of song words - consider the use of Google Classroom for resource sharing.



- R6: Work placement opportunities.** Expand the work experience placement opportunities through other partnerships, such as through the Camden STEAM programme. Review work placement briefings, and staff resourcing for supporting one work placement at a time over the year.
- R7: Pastoral support roles.** Consider how the three pastoral support roles in Folk Unlimited and LYFE are distributed to provide support where it is most needed.
- R8: Inclusive Folk Tutor Team Professional Development.** Building on the emerging community of practice, find mechanisms for further sharing knowledge and practice, and peer observation
- R9: Public facing CPD.** Continue to offer high quality professional development for wider public audiences who wish to expand their knowledge, understanding and skills for inclusive and creative music and dance practices. This includes developing a partnership with A New Direction²⁰ with a view to EFDSS hosting a CPD/Teacher Network day at Cecil Sharp House in the Spring term 2026, where inclusive Folk Tutors would lead a CPD session on sensory storytelling, integrating practical use of this in song.
- R10: Resources.** Continue to develop new resources that draw on Tutoring team knowledge, skills and experience, which could include Roary's 'queer folk' practice, and/or Alice's presentation of Scottish waulking, music and craft practices.
- R11: Evaluation methodology and data collections tools.** Independent Evaluator and EFDSS staff team review the successes and limitations of the methodology, to consider how data collection can be enhanced to provide more robust evidence of achievements in 2025-2026
- R12: Outcomes and Indicators.** Outcome and Indicator wording will be reviewed, to ensure that EFDSS is able to measure each aspect accurately with the resources available. For example, Indicator 1C has three interconnected elements for evaluation - social skills, confidence, wellbeing. Another key challenge is school staff availability and time for evaluation; the schools staff survey was an efficient way to gather school feedback, but more qualitative data from teachers and teaching assistants would have been gathered through an interview or focus group. Two to three one-to-one interviews with participants and parents/carers would add a stronger 'participant' voice to the commentary.

Thank you

Thank you to the EFDSS staff, Tutors, Support Workers, school staff, parents/carers and participants for their willingness and openness to contribute to the Inclusive Folk evaluation report.

²⁰ <https://www.anewdirection.org.uk/>



SOURCES

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