

Free music tuition changes lives

Pulse of the Place – an open access, out of school drumming project in Edinburgh and Lothians – have secured another year of crucial public funding awarded by Creative Scotland’s Youth Music Initiative.

Their grant of £30,000 [announced today](#) will keep them going for another year, putting music front and centre in the lives of young people.

Project Leader, Rohan Seilman, reflects on how free music tuition offers children so much more than an opportunity to learn an instrument, explaining he has seen participants develop confidence, form friendships, and even overcome bullying.

By: Rohan Seilman, Project Leader at Pulse of the Place/A.R.Ts Afternoon



Pulse of the Place fundraising with a march across the Forth Road Bridge on 4 March 2023. They will also parade across the Brooklyn Bridge when they are in New York in April. PHOTO Martin P McAdam

“Currently celebrating 20 years of putting music at the heart of young people’s lives and learning, it’s important for me to make some noise about the incredible work the **Youth Music Initiative** does behind the scenes by sharing the transformations that I witness first hand every single day.

“YMI funding has been instrumental in allowing the drumming project I lead –**Pulse of the Place** – to both widen its reach and deepen its impact. We focus on areas of high multiple deprivation, often receiving referrals from schools of those struggling with social anxiety, among other mental health challenges. We’ve built a reputation of being able to work with such young people, as well as neurodiverse participants.

“With inclusivity at the beating heart of Pulse of the Place, we also recruit a high number of ethnic minorities: 17% in a

city with 2% population. As someone from ethnic minority myself, there is often an immediate connection there.



Pulse of the Place rehearsing in Inverleith Park with the Castle behind before going to New York to lead the parade on 15 April PHOTO ©2023 The Edinburgh Reporter

“Our **A.R.T.S Afternoon** project takes place across primary and secondary schools for pupils aged 10 to 17. Supported by YMI funding, we have been able to create pathways that not only help participants progress musically but ease the transition between primary and secondary school. It’s not like the lessons they receive in school; our approach is very different, informal, we always use first names for participants and tutors. Young people who are struggling have had their lives turned around by their involvement in the programme.

“I’ll admit, I’m no Ringo Starr. In fact, most of the young people are better drummers than me. My forte is engagement, bringing participants out of their shell and – crucially – creating a fun environment that, for me, is key to helping

quiet children become visible. The growth in skills, confidence, and resilience among participants means they're able to address other issues in their life.

"For example, we had a child who hadn't spoken for years after being repeatedly bullied. He has now passed his exams and is a competent drummer, which encourages others. He has been with the project since he was 10; now 17, he's left school, is more confident and is working with other organisations such as Action for Children.

"Being part of a band – where young people bond and play together – is another important aspect of building confidence. Drumming is an equaliser: first we build the band then, within that, we work to build the individuals. Very engaged children practice between sessions even though tutors don't expect this – they do it because they want to progress. In creating a relaxed environment that boosts mental health, YMI's emphasis on engagement over musical excellence has been key.

"During Covid, many children lost their confidence and getting this back has taken a while. The negative impact has been severe and, as we come out the other side, we're placing huge importance on creating new opportunities for socialisation to prevent long-term damage. I was recently told by a parent *"making music is huge for [my daughter]. It's hard to remember how isolated she was during COVID lockdowns. Now she goes into town with drumming friends, some of which are from different schools, who she wouldn't have met otherwise"*.

"Consistent YMI-funding has been key to unlocking the longer-term benefits of music-making. Consider the worry caused by the move from primary to secondary school, let alone other factors that are affecting children's lives. The value of having adults they know, and trust, is significant. Having already reached hundreds of thousands of lives over the past two decades, it's crucial that YMI funding is secured long into the future. Thanks to YMI, Pulse of the Place can do our

bit to reach many more.”

Pulse of the Place are still fund-raising for their imminent trip to New York to lead the Tartan Day Parade with Gail Porter and their Patron, piper Louise Marshall.

If you can then [donate here.](#)



Louise Marshall piper and Patron of Pulse of the Place PHOTO ©2023 The Edinburgh Reporter