



Finding ways to support successful group work

By Sarah Wilson, Wavelength Music Leader, Quench Arts

Working with young people with mental health difficulties can be challenging for many reasons but one thing that we as practitioners encounter regularly is low self-esteem. Confidence is a massive stumbling block for young people and when you have mental health difficulties it can be even more problematic. This means that the concept of group work is incredibly daunting for these young people. Playing, performing, contributing ideas, talking, even just being in a room with other people, can all be real sources of anxiety. So how do you raise people's self-esteem and confidence so that they can begin to access group work and work in bands and collaborate?

This is something that Wavelength as a project does really well. We as practitioners are given the time, support and resources to work with young people on a 1-2-1 basis, to build the skills and self-recognition required to support self-esteem. We are allowed to gently work with the participants at their own speed, exploring the areas of music that they are interested in, what they would like to make and the instruments that they would choose to play, whilst building strong and trust-filled relationships with them. These skills, this creative self-awareness, this confidence and these relationships are invaluable as we introduce collaboration and group work and make those transitions. The young people have someone in the room that they trust; someone who knows their needs and understands the support that they might require for different activities and interactions. They better know their own strengths and skills and they have had the space to work out what interests them, what they want to learn, what they want to play, what kinds of collaborations they want to be involved in and what they want to make.

All of this preparatory 1-2-1 support work leads to much more successful and safe group work for the participants on the project. Instead of feeling forced, the sessions are friendly and more comfortable. Self-expression is much more forthcoming and young people actively encourage and support each other, sharing skills and ideas with an understanding that each person has a great deal to offer and that all the ideas in the room, including their own, have value. There are also added benefits for us as practitioners. We know that someone in the room can actively support all the young people and has a better understanding of their wants and needs (*as at group sessions all the 1-2-1 music leaders are present who work with participants individually*). We can share creative skills and by taking turns to lead group sessions we can support and learn from each other's practice.

As the young people become established in the project, they actively seek out collaborations and form bands so that by the end of each year the show is filled with young people supporting each other and working together to help each other achieve and perform in all the ways that they have chosen. It is so refreshing to be part of a project that properly

understands and supports group work by finding the resources to build confidence and self-esteem in the participants so that they actively choose to collaborate and share with each other. Group work can be wonderfully successful if everyone is given the level of support that they need to choose to be in the room.