



## Improving Children's Mental Health through School-based Music and Dance Programmes

### Project Aims

According to recent NHS England statistics, 1 in 5 young people experience a mental health problem, with most mental illnesses being established by age 14. Poor mental health can negatively impact young people's prospects, limiting their life opportunities and resilience to cope with adversities. Given that professional mental health services are under high pressure, with wait times for an initial appointment reaching 18 months at the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), it is critical to provide preventive measures that sustain and enhance young people's mental health in their everyday environments, such as schools.

Across Nottinghamshire, many schools integrate music and dance activities into their lessons to support pupils' mental health and academic outcomes. However, there is little evidence for how these activities affect children's mental health, making it hard to understand the potential positive impact of music and dance initiatives. Further, such activities are often undertaken on only a short-term basis due to practical issues, limiting their capacity to make a positive impact.

According to Census 2021, 58% of households in Nottingham are classified as 'deprived', with most Nottingham neighbourhoods being amongst the top 20% of income-deprived areas in England. To have the strongest community impact possible, this project will focus on children living in Nottingham's deprived neighbourhoods as these children are at the highest risk of developing mental illnesses and having poor academic outcomes, which can limit future opportunities.

To address these concerns, this project looks to identify how different elements of music and dance (i.e., coordination and composition) enhance children's mental health through strengthening social connections and improving academic outcomes. This project, undertaken with support from the Freedom Foundation, an organisation that delivers music and dance lessons to children and young people in Nottingham, will also explore potential challenges to the adoption of school-based music and dance programmes through interviews with children, parents, programme providers and schoolteachers.

This project has been co-created and is supported by researchers from Nottingham Trent University, the University of Nottingham and partners at the Freedom Foundation. The successful candidate for this project would be enrolled at Nottingham Trent University.



## Project Aims

1. To identify how school-based music and dance activities benefit children's mental health and strengthen their social connections.
2. To explore how school-based music and dance programmes can be adopted on a wider scale across Nottinghamshire schools.

## Supervisory Team

1. Lead Academic Supervisor: [Dr Bahar Tunçgenç, NTU](#)
2. Academic Co-Supervisor: [Dr Sobanawartiny Wijekumar, UoN](#)
3. Community Supervisor: [Laura Grant, Freedom Foundation](#)

## Key Details

<b>Host University:</b>	Nottingham Trent University
<b>School / department:</b>	School of Social Sciences
<b>Start date:</b>	03 April 2024
<b>Financial offer:</b>	Tuition fees covered in full (worth approx. £15k across full PhD programme). Monthly stipend based on £18,622 per annum, pro rata, tax free.
<b>Working hours</b>	Full-time (minimum 37.5 hrs per week), or part-time (minimum 20hrs per week).
<b>Working Style:</b>	Primarily in-person at host university. Flexible working supported. Working pattern to be agreed between successful candidate and lead supervisor.



# Competencies

## Co(I)laboratory Core Competencies

Category	Competency	Assessed: Application (A), Interview (I)
<b>Comprehension and evaluation</b>	Strong understanding of the project and its subject matter.	A / I
	Analytical, researcher mindset with keen attention to detail.	A / I
	Communicate complex concepts with clarity and precision.	A / I
	Able to identify connections, patterns, gaps, and irregularities in information/data.	I
	Able to interpret data/information confidently with logic and empathy to derive meaning.	I
<b>Social and emotional</b>	Demonstrable experience of responding effectively changing contexts, information and demands.	A
	Ability to persevere in the face of challenges/failures and to remain constructive in developing solutions.	A
	Demonstrable passion for learning with clear drive and curiosity to undertake this specific research project.	A / I
	Willingness to immerse oneself in the research subject matter and make a contribute to new knowledge through a PhD.	A / I
	Strong desire to make a positive community impact through the research.	A / I
	Willingness to think deeply about complex concepts and engage with academic ideas and theory.	A / I
<b>Preparedness and potential for success</b>	Experience of working, collaborating and communicating effectively with different stakeholders.	A
	High level of self-motivation and ability to work with minimal guidance.	A / I
	Strong organisational and time-management skills with the ability to balance and prioritise multiple tasks.	A / I
	Ability to identify potential challenges and complexities and thoughtfully consider possible solutions.	A / I
	Able to identify the technical, personal, or professional skills required for a task and take action to develop these.	A / I
<b>Community Context</b>	Genuine desire to undertake community-engaged research over more traditional approaches to research.	A
	Understand the impact of and need for the inclusion of diverse experiences and points of view in research.	A / I
	Appreciation/understanding of the importance of community insight and experience in the generation of new knowledge.	A / I
	Awareness/understanding of the broader societal context related to the subject matter of the project.	A / I



Project Specific Competencies			
Essential	Assessed: Application (A), Interview (I)	Desirable	Assessed: Application (A), Interview (I)
Experience working with schoolchildren and/or with arts organisations.	A / I	Experience delivering or evaluating programmes in schools, liaising with teachers and other relevant stakeholders.	A / I
Ability to engage with children of all ages, their families and schoolteachers in a professional, enthusiastic and sensitive manner.	A / I	Knowledge of psychology research methods and experience with quantitative and/or qualitative data analysis.	A / I
Prior experience or interest and ability to learn complex data analyses, including computer programming.	A / I	Experience of applying performing arts or other creative arts approaches in a professional or community setting.	A / I
Understanding of the intricacies of how scientific approaches can help tackle community needs in highly sensitive settings.	A / I		
Knowledge or understanding of core concepts in cognitive and developmental psychology.	A / I		

## References for Further Reading

- NHS (2021). Mental Health of Children and Young People in England, 2021: Wave 2 Follow up to the 2017 Survey.
- Mansfield L, Kay T, Meads C e al. (2018). Sport and dance interventions for healthy young people (15–24 years) to promote subjective well-being: A systematic review. *BMJ Open*;8(7):1-16. doi:10.1136/bmjopen-2017-020959
- Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2021). Census 2021.
- Alegria, NeMoyer, Falgàs Bagué et al. (2018). Social determinants of mental health: Where we are and where we need to go. *Curr Psych. Rep.* 20(11):95. doi:10.1007/s11920-018-0969-9
- Welsh RO, & Little S. (2018). Caste and control in schools: A systematic review of the pathways, rates and correlates of exclusion due to school discipline. *Child Youth Serv Rev.*94(June):315-339. doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2018.09.031
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- The Children’s Society (2019). Loneliness in Childhood: Exploring Loneliness and well-being among 10-17 year olds.
- Rennung & Göritz (2016). Prosocial consequences of interpersonal synchrony. *Z Psychol.* 224(3):168-189. doi:10.1027/2151-2604/a000252
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- Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. <http://ies.ed.gov/>.
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## References for Further Reading

- Conceptualizing, Measuring, and Supporting Developmental Trajectories. *Annual Review of Developmental Psychology*, 3:1, 139-163
- Zinelabidine, Elghoul, Jouira & Sahli (2022). The Effect of an 8-Week Aerobic Dance Program on Executive Function in Children. *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, 129(1), 153–175.  
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- Chichinina, Bukhalenkova, Tvardovskaya, etal. (2022). The Relationship between Executive Functions and Dance Classes in Preschool Age Children. *Education Sciences*. 12(11):788.  
<https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci12110788>
- Rodriguez-Gomez, & Talero-Gutiérrez (2022). Effects of music training in executive function performance in children: A systematic review. *Frontiers in psychology*, 13, 968144.  
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