

Good Vibrations; Positive change through social music-making

Good Vibrations is a charity that runs gamelan projects with offenders and in prison and on probation. A recent Birmingham City University study investigating the short-, medium- and long-term impact of the project found that participation in a Good Vibrations project acted as a catalyst for positive change. The research found that not only did participants feel more able to communicate with other offenders within the project, they found confidence in their own voice so as to continue to develop their communication and coping skills within prison and as ex-offenders in the community. Furthermore, the project contributed to the development of anger management skills and provided an outlet for self-expression leading to a feeling of '*being normal*'.

This paper presents the findings of the study and considers why Good Vibrations inspires positive change. Using a three-dimensional model of Activity Theory, the concept of learning through social music-making is explored in terms of how the individual interacts with the social environment in order to develop skills and how participation in a musical learning activity can lead to a positive change of identity.

Keywords: social music-making, offenders, gamelan, identity, participation, Activity Theory

Introduction

Arts based projects have a long and successful history in working with offenders. However, until recently robust evidence of the effectiveness of such projects was virtually non-existent. Recent research on the arts in criminal justice has begun to provide an evidence base, suggesting that arts projects can and do have a positive impact on offenders. However, there is little research investigating the long-term impact of arts projects on offenders. This paper outlines a recent research project looking at the short-, medium- and long-term impact on both offenders and ex-offenders in the community who have taken part in a Good Vibrations gamelan project. The research found that participation in the project acted as a catalyst for positive change, and that this change is sustained as offenders move through the prison

system and out into the community. Using Activity Theory to discuss the findings, we investigate the concept of learning through social music-making and suggest why this should act as a catalyst for positive change.

The Good Vibrations Gamelan Project

The Good Vibrations Gamelan Project is a charity that runs Javanese music projects with offenders in prison and on probation. Gamelan has been identified as being a particularly useful medium for group settings. It has an informal and inclusive approach and the instruments can be played without any prior musical experience (Eastburn, 2003). The communal nature of gamelan means that participants are compelled to work together.

Projects typically run over one week with an average of fifteen-to-twenty offenders. In some prisons, the project is offered to targeted groups e.g. the unemployed, the very low-skilled, people in touch with mental health schemes, self-harmers etc. However, for many, the project is their first experience of prison education programmes. Within the project, participants learn traditional Javanese pieces, learn how to improvise, compose their own pieces, learn about Javanese culture and associated art-forms such as Javanese dance and shadow puppetry. At the end of the week the participants perform to an invited audience of peers, family members, staff and sometimes outside guests.

An early evaluation of Good Vibrations (Eastburn, 2003) discovered that although there were initial difficulties with its implementation, both staff and prisoners reported positive feedback. A later study (Digard, *et al.*, 2007) found significant positive impacts on Good Vibrations project participants. These included an increased insight and reflection in individual prisoners and a stronger cohesion in groups of prisoners. Prisoners reported that they found the teaching in the project empowering. They were given more responsibility as the project progressed and began to share ideas on how to improve the music, resulting in an

increase in confidence. The report also revealed that the process of learning a new skill in an informal, group setting was empowering for prisoners. The prisoners were given ownership of the project by being regularly consulted on the direction that it should take. Furthermore, they were given ownership of the music through the processes of improvisation and composition. The emphasis on creativity allowed the prisoners to engage with their own learning on their own terms, enabling them to participate at their own level rather than at a level imposed upon them, resulting in a high sense of achievement at the end of the project. Digard *et al.* (2007) also found that participants and staff reported improved social skills and the development of self-regulation, needed in order to achieve a range of goals each day, caused by the prisoners interacting with each other.

In previous research Wilson and Logan (2006) found that prisoners who participated in the week-long gamelan project sought out further education and training opportunities after the project had finished. This was attributed to the inclusive approach of the tutors and the ability for participants not only to develop social skills and work as a team, but also to discuss wider issues during gamelan sessions. Through participation in the project, barriers of intimidation towards engaging in education, such as low self-efficacy, were removed. This research also highlighted additional benefits from participating in the Good Vibrations project. These included being more able to cope with the stresses of prison life, overcoming feelings of isolation and for some, stress was relieved so much that they stopped self-harming. The project also helped to increase confidence and self-esteem to such an extent that prisoners began to feel that not only did they want to change, but also that they had the capacity and ability to do so (Wilson and Logan, 2006).

Most recently, research was conducted to review the effects of participating in a Good Vibrations project six months after completion of the project. The research concluded that participating in a Good Vibrations project has a sustained and positive emotional and

psychological impact on participants, leading to positive behavioural change (Wilson, Caulfied and Atherton, 2008; Wilson, Caulfied and Atherton, 2009). However, this research focused primarily on one group of prisoners over a limited time-period.

These findings all demonstrate the short- and medium-term impact of Good vibrations projects on specific groups, but also draw attention to the need for further research to investigate how far these findings are sustained in the lives of offenders. Therefore as well as assessing the impact on new participants in order to test the claims of previous research, this study also investigates the impact on previous participants so as to assess the long-term value of the project. The objectives of the research are as follows:

- To track previous male participants from HMP Grendon in order to assess the long-term institutional impact of participation in the project.
- To follow a sample of previous male participants in the community to assess the long-term impact of participation in the project.
- To test claims of previous research by assessing the impact of participation in the project on a new cohort of participants at HMP Grendon.
- To review the effects of participation in the project on female offenders
- To assess any changes in participants' attitudes, emotions and behaviour, via self-report, assessment, and official documentation.
- To compile data on participants; engagement with further learning, education and self-development.

The Research Process

The research was conducted in four simultaneous stages:

- Stage One considered the potential long-term impact of the Good Vibrations project

to offenders who had taken part in previous research as they progressed through the prison system.

- Stage Two involved evaluating a new cohort of project participants, in order to increase the validity of the findings of previous research.
- Stage Three reviewed the effects of the project on participants from a variety of prisons as they moved out into the community.
- Stage Four evaluated the work of the project with female offenders.

Stage One included interviewing participants and prison staff, assessing emotional and behavioural change, and analysis of disciplinary and other relevant prison records. This stage of the research also investigated any further training, education and personal development activities undertaken by the participants after completing a Good Vibrations project. Stage Two also included interviewing participants and prison staff, assessing emotional and behavioural change, and analysis of disciplinary and other relevant prison records. Stage Three comprised interviews with ex-offenders who had recently been released into the community. These participants came from a range of men's prisons across England and had taken part in a Good Vibrations project with the last eighteen months. Stage Four investigated the impact of Good Vibrations on female offenders. Miles (2005) suggests that female offenders are particularly affected by arts programmes, so focussing on this group allowed for a comparison of data across different prison populations and an assessment of the level of responsivity across each group could be made. Participants at HMP Eastwood Park were interviewed at length and were asked: to describe their experiences of the project; what they gained from it; and specifically to focus on their experiences and behaviour after the project. The interview schedules were based on those used in previous research (Wilson et al., 2008) and amended for use at the different stages of this research. Table 1 outlines the research process for each stage.

Table 1 – The Research Process

Stage	Process	Participants
Stage One Following up previous research participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants at HMP Grendon who had taken part in previous evaluations were contacted. Interviews were conducted with participants about their general attitude, experiences and behaviour. Prison staff were interviewed to validate reports from prisoners and also to comment on participants' general attitude and behaviour, and any changes in these that they may have observed. Adjudication reports were reviewed, with the consent of each participant. 	7 Participants aged 26-56 yrs old. 2 had participated in a second project. 5 classed as high-risk re-offenders, 2 classed as medium-risk re-offenders. All on long- or life-sentences.
Stage Two Recent Good Vibrations participants at HMP Grendon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offenders who had taken part in the most recent Good Vibrations project were contacted. Interviews were conducted with participants about their general attitude and behaviour. Prison staff were interviewed to validate reports from prisoners and also to comment on participants' general attitude and behaviour, and any changes in these that they may have observed. Adjudication reports were reviewed, with the consent of each participant. 	8 Participants aged 31-62 yrs old. 2 were interviewed in Stage One. 2 were unable to be interviewed and 4 were interviewed. 2 high-risk and 2 medium-risk reoffenders.
Stage Three Ex-offenders in the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using details provided by Good Vibrations, the research team identified male offenders who had previously taken part in a Good Vibrations project and had indicated they would have been released by this time. Participants were interviewed either face-to-face or telephone interviews to discuss their experiences of taking part in the project and any impact their participation had upon them. 	7 Participants identified. 5 face-to-face interviews and 2 telephone interviews arranged, however only 5 interviews were conducted.
Stage Four Women at HMP Eastwood Park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offenders who had taken part in the most recent Good Vibrations project were contacted. Interviews were conducted with participants about their general attitude and behaviour. Participants were asked to complete an emotions scale to quantify any changes associated with the Good Vibrations project. Prison staff were interviewed to validate reports from prisoners and also to comment on participants' general attitude and behaviour, and any changes in these that they may have observed. Adjudication reports were reviewed, with the consent of each participant. 	10 Participants. 1 participant resident in a mother and baby unit. 8 participants did not have Offender Assessment System ¹ reviews and so risk category could not be established. This could be due to them either being on remand and not having one yet or being illegal immigrants.

¹ The Offender Assessment System (OASys) was developed by the National Probation Service and Prison Service in England and Wales as a standardised measure to provide a consistent and in-depth assessment measure. Implemented throughout England and Wales, the OASys consists of thirteen sections which assess offenders' criminogenic needs, risk of harm, and likelihood of reconviction based on areas covered in the LSI-R. The OASys provides background demographic data about individual offenders and information on any specific needs they may have.

All interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis by one of the researchers either in the participating prisons or at a suitable public place in the community. Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed.

The emotion scale developed by the research team and piloted in a previous research study (Wilson et al., 2008) proved to be a useful tool for assessing emotional and psychological change over time in project participants. Comparing this data against observed behavioural change proved particularly beneficial. The scale considers twelve different emotions on a five point Likert scale: anger; anxiety; boredom; calmness; contentment; feelings of depression; happiness; loneliness; moodiness; sadness; shyness; and stress. Table 2 shows these scales. In order to circumvent any problems with participants' literacy, the emotion scales were completed verbally with the researcher.

The research was conducted by a team of highly trained researchers who are experienced in conducting research in prisons and with vulnerable populations. This research was based on Birmingham City University's ethical framework and adhered to the standards expected by the social research profession, including the British Society of Criminology's Code of Ethics for Researchers in the Field of Criminology and the British Psychological Society's Code of Ethics.

All data was collated and analysed firstly in light of previous research, emergent themes were identified in terms of the impact of the project and secondly, the data was evaluated using the activity system in order to inform what constitutes change.

Table 2 – Emotion scales**This week I feel:**

Angry	Anxious	Bored
1. Strongly disagree	1. Strongly disagree	1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree	2. Disagree	2. Disagree
3. Neither agree nor disagree	3. Neither agree nor disagree	3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Agree	4. Agree	4. Agree
5. Strongly agree	5. Strongly agree	5. Strongly agree
Calm	Content	Depressed
1. Strongly disagree	1. Strongly disagree	1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree	2. Disagree	2. Disagree
3. Neither agree nor disagree	3. Neither agree nor disagree	3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Agree	4. Agree	4. Agree
5. Strongly agree	5. Strongly agree	5. Strongly agree
Happy	Lonely	Moody
1. Strongly disagree	1. Strongly disagree	1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree	2. Disagree	2. Disagree
3. Neither agree nor disagree	3. Neither agree nor disagree	3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Agree	4. Agree	4. Agree
5. Strongly agree	5. Strongly agree	5. Strongly agree
Sad	Shy	Stressed
1. Strongly disagree	1. Strongly disagree	1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree	2. Disagree	2. Disagree
3. Neither agree nor disagree	3. Neither agree nor disagree	3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Agree	4. Agree	4. Agree
5. Strongly agree	5. Strongly agree	5. Strongly agree

Process of analysis

A thematic analysis of the interview data was conducted based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-point process. A highly structured approach to the analysis was taken, beginning with an in-depth coding process involving working line-by-line through the entire body of data. In this context the codes act as 'shorthand devices to *label, separate, compile and organize* data' (Charmaz, 1983, p.186). Initial themes from previous research literature acted as a basis for coding, supplemented by new themes emerging during the in-depth coding process. Next, the list of codes was reviewed in order to search for themes. This involved a process of assessing whether there were any commonalities between codes. Themes therefore represent a coding of the initial coding. Once an initial broad list of themes was highlighted, these were reviewed. At this stage it was important to consider whether there was sufficient evidence in the data to support each of the themes that had emerged. Some themes emerged as key themes, with substantial incidences of the codes from numerous

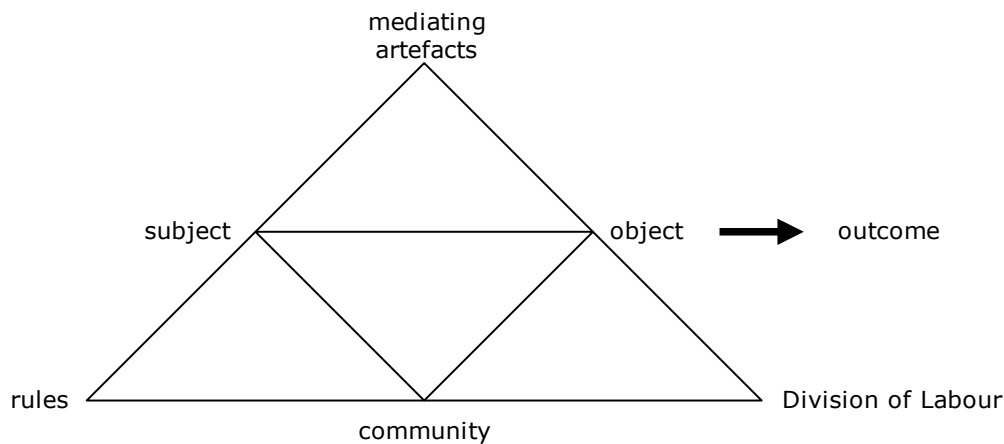
participants. Other groups of codes emerged as sub-themes, relevant to the over-arching themes. The key themes from the original analysis were:

- Continued positive change
- Personal factors
- Anger reduction and improved relaxation
- Confidence, communication and social skills
- Level of impact
- Skills development, training and education
- Emotional and psychological impacts
- Self-expression
- Coping

The activity system

Activity Theory provides the ideal framework with which to investigate these interactions. Taken from Vygotsky's (1930/1994) concept of learning through mediation, Engeström (1999) developed a model of Activity Theory that allows both individual learning processes and social interaction to be viewed simultaneously. The main unit of analysis within Activity Theory is called an activity system (see figure 1). Here the elements of 'subject', 'object', 'mediating artefacts', 'rules', 'community' and 'division of labour' are presented as the main constituents of activity.

Figure 1. Engeström's Activity System



(Engeström, 1999; 31)

In terms of this project, the subject is the Good Vibrations participant and the object is their particular goal within the project, whether that is to learn new music, to try something different or to get out of work for a week. The participant (subject) reaches this goal (object) through interactions with mediating artefacts. These are the tools they use, both physical such as the actual instruments, and cognitive, for example using listening skills, assimilating what they can here and processing that information, in their activity. The use of these tools (mediating artefacts) all occur within a socio-cultural environment. This environment supports the activity by the way that the environment is set up and the cultural history that it is embedded within (rules), how the different people within the environment react and interact with each other (community) and how the input of each member of the community is divided (division of labour).

In effect, the activity system provides a map of the individual and social interactions that occur during participation in a group activity. By using the activity system to analyse the key findings of the research, we can begin to understand the elements of the project that inspire change.

Positive Change

The findings presented below have been divided into the four stages of the project. This separates the findings of the male and female participants in recognition of the significant difference between men and women in prison – in terms of their offending behaviour, personal needs, and previous life experiences – and of the striking differences revealed by the research in the way these two groups responded to the Good Vibrations project.

Stage One – Following up previous research participants

All of the participants who had taken part in a previous evaluation of Good Vibrations (see Wilson et al., 2008) were still resident at HMP Grendon and willing to take part in this current research. Seven men were interviewed – two of whom it transpired had taken part in a second Good Vibrations project the previous week. All of these men had been at Grendon for at least eighteen months and felt settled in this environment and comfortable with the therapeutic regime. The men were aged between twenty-six and fifty years old.

The research participants were asked to first discuss their experiences of taking part in the project. This allowed participants some time to think about the project and aid their memories of taking part. The information given by participants was every bit as positive as it had been previously, but given that only two of these men had taken part in a second project it was important to investigate the reasons behind this.

Taking part in a second project

Both of the men who took part in this second project had gained significantly from their initial participation. One man described how before the first project he was very shy and struggling to engage with the regime at Grendon. He describes how the first project increased his confidence both in the project group and on the wing. He chose to take part again as he

wanted to experience the enjoyment of the project a second time, to experience the calming effect of taking part, and to give himself a further confidence boost. It seems that the second project did not disappoint. This time he felt he was able to take on something of a guiding role – while perhaps not formally, he had the sense that the new participants looked to him for *‘guidance and reassurance that they were doing things right’* (male participant, HMP Grendon). This was particularly significant for this individual who was clearly not a natural leader but had been able to use these experiences to take a much more active role in his community at Grendon. He states that the first project was the beginning of him finding his confidence to speak out and that with the support of his community he had continued in this.

The second man who had taken part previously talked at length about how the first project had affected him, and more importantly, how these effects had been built upon and sustained up until the present time. His reasons for taking part in the first project concerned a need to work on seeing people for themselves *‘and not just what they’ve done’* (Male participant, HMP Grendon). While his main desire for taking part in the second project was simply to *‘enjoy music’*, he explained in detail how he had been able to build on the positive outcomes of the first project. The first project challenged his refusal to engage in conversation with certain types of offenders in prison. However, participation in the project enabled him to see these people as individuals, giving him impetus for change. Interestingly, this participant described how he had always had issues with relationships and had never been able to trust men. In line with this he went in to the project with a suspicious attitude towards the group and the tutor, but now states that:

‘Only good has come from it. I didn’t realise how open I’d become until I walked into that second project and was immediately able to trust the tutors and the rest of the group. I’ve never experienced that before.’ (Male participant, HMP Grendon)

Five of the men who were interviewed did not take part in the project the second time and gave a range of reasons for this. Three cited work commitments and two wanted to ensure that others had the opportunity to take part. Even so, all five were keen to point out how much they had enjoyed taking part in Good Vibrations and that in theory they would take part again.

Continued Positive Change

These experiences are representative of the majority of the men who were interviewed for this research. All participants talked positively about their experiences of the project and overall it seems that for all but one of the participants they were able to use this experience as the building blocks for further personal development. Those men who were relatively new to Grendon experienced the project as a confidence booster and report that this set them on the road to being able to talk openly in group meetings without feeling nervous. One man had gone on to take on a wing representative role, despite presenting as relatively under-confident during the previous research. Several of the men had maintained and developed close friendships with other men from their friends' wings. Some of these men had stated that before the project they would not have even spoken to some of those that they now held close friendships with.

One of the most significant findings of the previous research with this group was that the Good Vibrations project acted as '*a stepping-stone to other education*' (Male participant, HMP Grendon). This '*stepping-stone*' had in effect snowballed for three of the men who had previously been reluctant to engage with education but were now on the path to gaining recognised qualifications. The reasons for this change are primarily twofold: increased personal confidence and the realisation that '*achieving*' was something that they could do.

Stage Two – Recent Good Vibrations participants at HMP Grendon

Eight men completed the most recent Good Vibrations course at Grendon. As discussed above, two of these had taken part in a project previously. All participants, aged between thirty-one and sixty-two years old, found the experience hugely enjoyable and beneficial, describing the week in a vivid amount of details. There are a number of areas where the effects of the project were deeply felt.

Anger reduction and improved relaxation

Anger and aggression were over-riding issues for two of the men interviewed here. Both reported that they expected to become involved in some sort of conflict with either group members and/or Good Vibrations staff. However, this did not happen and this surprised these men.

‘I would recommend the project, especially for people with emotional issues. Not just for anger, you’ve got self-harmers too. I was going through a bad patch, where I was getting those angry thoughts and self-harm thoughts, and for that week I just didn’t get none of it. I was just ... it was chilled.’ (Male participant, HMP Grendon)

Furthermore, even those men with no reported anger or aggression problems explained how relaxing the project was and how this sense of calm helped them deal with prison life during that week but also in the days that followed.

‘It had a bigger impact initially, and then I’ve had to incorporate that impact into daily life on the wing... It’s definitely had an impact on daily life, on how I try to chill. Like now I try to take an hour a day to relax...’ (Male participant, HMP Grendon)

Participants stated that they hadn’t expected to experience any positive mood changes, but they did and these were significant. Two men reported that it allowed them to channel calm feelings instead of angry ones. All of the men described how they have continued to listen to

the CD they were given and they use this to relax:

‘My Gamelan CD has had more use than any other CD in my cell. And it’s not really my sort of things, but if you’re stressed you just sort of chill.’ (Male participant, HMP Grendon)

Communication and social skills

One of the most significant findings in Stage Two was the increase in communication and social skills reported by participants. All participants highlighted positive changes in this area and this is significant as many men in prison have poor and inappropriate communication and social skills. The project enhanced their listening skills, allowed the more introverted participants the space to find their voice in the group, and also brought the men together as a group. Overall the participants felt the group had worked well together and bonded. One participant commented that he would be able to apply these group-work skills to life outside prison in dealing with people he might otherwise not get on with – ‘*you put your differences aside to get the job done*’ (Male participant, HMP Grendon). The men felt the praise they were given after the concert and the huge sense of pride and achievement increased their confidence and self-esteem a great deal.

Interestingly, it was one of the men who had previously taken part in this research and who had some of the most difficult life histories of anyone interviewed that expressed how Good Vibrations had helped him learn to trust people. This was echoed by another participant with a difficult history.

Stage Three – Ex-offenders in the Community

Confidence, communication and social skills

At the time of interview, the four participants in this stage had participated in their Good Vibrations project between thirteen and eighteen months ago. This being the case, the researcher asked the participants to talk through their experience of the Good Vibrations project in order to help their memory. The more introverted men explained how taking part in the project was a step in itself. In prison, introverted men were more likely to want to ‘*sit and watch tv*’ (Male participant, HMP Grendon) rather than take part in any project. For these men, it seemed as if taking part in the project was the first step in improving their self confidence. The men had found their voice in the Good Vibrations project and were able to build on this in the future. One man explained how confidence is important in prison and another said that his increased confidence enabled him to enrol on a vocational course outside of prison – something which he felt he didn’t have the confidence to do in the past.

Interestingly, the participants who suggested that they already had a good deal of self-confidence also commented on how their confidence was increased as a result of the project. They had found the project beneficial in terms of communication and social skills in different ways. One man explained that

‘it showed a different side of me and it let officers see that side. Officers came up and said they didn’t know that side of me existed.’ (Male participant, HMP Grendon)

He went on to explain that this made officers see him as a person and not just as a trouble-maker. Another participant explained that the project:

‘...opens people up. The music, the project, and the people working together. Everybody is listened to, everybody is heard. It’s about respect.’ (Male participant, HMP Grendon)

One participant openly discussed how he had only ever mixed with five or six people in

prison and made a point of avoiding sex offenders, but that through the course he had to communicate with other people and consequently became more tolerant:

‘The course was very intense. All day everyday for a week. But it was extremely purposeful because of the concert and I even came to see the sex-offenders as individuals.’ (Male participant, HMP Grendon)

He went on to explain how these greater levels of tolerance and openness continued both in and outside of prison.

Emotional and psychological impacts

Emotionally, the men talked about the ‘*humanising experience*’ of the project and the freedom it made them feel despite being in prison:

‘Little things like being able to get coffee when I wanted, to smoke when I wanted, really made me feel normal.’ (Male participant, HMP Grendon)

There was a relative lack of discussion of the emotional impact of the project by these men, but clearly spending a week feeling ‘*like we weren’t in prison*’ (Male participant, HMP Grendon) has firmly imprinted itself on the mind of these men.

Stage Four – Women at HMP Eastwood Park

The overarching aim of this section of the research was to review the effects of participating in a Good Vibrations project on adult female offenders and to identify any aspects of the project that work well with this group. All of the women who took part in the project reported how much they enjoyed it and how much they felt they got out of it. One woman had taken part in a Good Vibrations project at Eastwood Park the previous year and stated how much she had gained from her participation on both occasions. Interestingly, she noted that both experiences had been different for her, but that her second project had built upon and

solidified the positive impacts of her previous participation. Three of the women who had not engaged with education projects at Eastwood Park previously explained that Good Vibrations was a welcome change from the ‘*boring*’ programmes they had done previously:

‘The project was engaging and relaxing, it felt like being on the outside.’ (Female participant, HMP Eastwood Park)

Self-expression

Many of the women actively talked of how taking part in the project made them feel ‘*normal*’ again. They attributed this to the calming effect that the music had, but also of how the project facilitator treated them. The attitude of many prisoners is one of self-defence, ‘keeping yourself to yourself’ and avoiding confrontation. Participating in the Good Vibrations project challenged these attitudes in a subtle way by providing participants with a supportive environment within which to express themselves. These findings supports previous discussions on the potential of Good Vibrations to aid participants’ anger management (Wilson et al., 2008) as tension is often able to be dissipated during the project through dialogue and supportive constructive criticism.

Communication and Coping

Previous research on the use of Good vibrations with vulnerable female offenders suggested that the project provides an environment where communication is welcomed and this is psychologically beneficial for participants (Digard et al., 2007). Findings from this current research support this, showing that the project week created a forum for balanced communication. For example, at the beginning of the week it was evident that there were some very dominant, extroverted characters in the group and other less-confident individuals. Participants reported that this created the potential for friction, but that the process of exploring the Gamelan music – having to listen to each instrument – and the calming

personality of the group facilitator, enable all of the group members to feel that they were able to find a voice within the group. As found with men who take part in Good Vibrations, the development in social skills is a key factor in the positive impact of the project with women.

Almost all of the women who took part in the research talked about how taking part in Good Vibrations had helped them cope with prison life. The '*coping strategies*' used fall into two themes:

- Absorbing the qualities of the music and learning process where the women felt like they '*lost*' themselves in the music.
- The creative process acted as an outlet for them, allowing them to express themselves through the instruments.

Both of these themes appear not solely to relate to the time spent in the project, but the women still focused on the music in the evenings and during the weekend before the interviews took place. As the men reported continuing use the calming techniques they learnt during the project, it seemed likely that this would also be the case for the women.

In the few days after completing the project, two of the participants had received difficult news concerning their sentencing. While they talked about this openly, they also stated that they were able to channel their own relaxation techniques acquired as a result of the project so as to stay calm despite their news:

'I've had a really high-stress week, but I've taken the feeling of relaxation away and have seen there are bigger factors than what's happening for me this week.' (Female participant, HMP Eastwood Park)

Emotional Needs and Mental Health

Arts initiatives have been identified as helpful to recovery for mental health patients

(Spandler et al., 2007), from increasing motivation, purpose and meaning in life, to developing new coping strategies. It therefore seems logical that arts projects will also help improve the mental health and emotional problems of non-mental health patients. Given that emotional and mental health problems have been identified as statistically related to increased risk of reoffending and that this is one of the largest areas of need for women in prison, any intervention that addresses this area is to be welcomed.

One of the participants reported recent episodes of self-harming behaviour – which the prison service were aware of – and perhaps one of the most potentially significant findings of this report is that the woman stopped self-harming during the project. It seems that Good Vibrations projects provided a focus to enable the women to deal with emotional distress. Moreover, participants described how *'engrossing'* and *'hypnotising'* the music was, and that they could think of little else all week. The development of group-processes throughout the week also had an impact. In the self-harm case discussed here, the participant came across as under-confident and shy. However, at the end of the week she had clearly become an important part of the group and other participants commented that she had *'blossomed'*. She had been someone who was used to coming second to more dominant individuals, and the sense of self-fulfilment she gained from seeing how important she had become to the group was cited as very powerful for her.

Feedback from prison staff broadly matched the picture that the participants had portrayed of themselves. Staff had observed that several of the women had seemed noticeably *'more upbeat since the project began'* (Staff member, HMP Eastwood Park) and two of the women who had been reported to be particularly quiet characters were seen to have begun to *'come out of their shell'* (Staff member, HMP Eastwood Park). One of the women who was known to suffer some emotional problems and occasional erratic outbursts had apparently been much calmer and happier since the beginning of the project and the days that followed.

These findings suggest that participation in a Good Vibrations gamelan project can provide the starting-block for positive change in offenders. But what is it that inspires this change?

Social Music-Making as a Catalyst for Positive Change

Playing within a gamelan is a social activity. Like any musical ensemble, the parts are all necessary to produce the music. The individual makes their contribution, but the aim of the ensemble is to produce music through the engagement of all members of the group. This is social music-making. When an individual undertakes a social music-making activity they are interacting with their own cognitive processes as well as with the social environment. Therefore if we investigate these individual and social interactions we can begin to understand what it is in the social music-making activity of the Good Vibrations project that inspires positive change for offenders.

Viewing the data through the lens of the activity system allows us to see the relationship between the ‘subject’, in the case of this research the participant in the Good Vibrations project, and their ‘object’. In other words, we can view the process that the participant goes through in order to reach their particular goal within the project. For example, some participants in Stage Four of the research reported that they had elected to participate because they were interested in the music, whereas other participants reported that they participated because they wanted to get out of their cells, or that they were advised to by the Prison Education Officer. Participants in Stages One and Two of the research took part in the project during a two week scheduled break in therapy and it is interesting to note that they did not see the Good Vibrations project simply as an extension of the regime at Grendon, but as a different and beneficial experience that they were keen to discuss in vivid detail.

Creating Ownership

One of the most powerful findings of both this and previous research is the empowerment the offenders found as a result of feeling that they had ownership of their projects. Interestingly, this ownership and sense of achievement arising from engaging in the group creative process is something that has also been found in school settings (Hoskyns and Henley, 2010). As an individual working within a group it is vital that the group facilitates the use and development of ‘mediating artefacts’, also known as ‘tools’, so that the individual can make a valid contribution. These tools are the skills, prior knowledge and experience, cognitive processes, physical capabilities, language etc. that an individual brings to an activity. Participation in an activity does help to develop these tools however it is important that the individual can use their own tools at their own level if they are to feel as if they can contribute. The emphasis of Good Vibrations on creativity allows participants to be creative in both their playing and thinking. Improvisation and composition feature strongly within the project and it is these elements that the prisoners are able to engage with to make an active contribution to the music. As the music has been created by the participants, they are able to interact with their own tools at their own level.

Interaction with and development of tools is supported by the rules of the project. The women in Stage Four of the research found that the creative process acted as an outlet for self-expression and the rules of the project made them feel that they were in a safe environment in which to do so. They also had to listen to each other, respecting each others’ musical contribution. Alongside the development of the tools needed to create the music, this helped to develop the tools needed to be a part of the Good Vibrations community.

In Stage One of the research one of the participants reported that when he participated in a second project, he was able to take on a more guiding role. Here, supported by the rules

of the project, the participant was interacting with division of labour in order to continue to develop his tools. Division of labour is a key element in the progression of any activity. At first a participant may find that they rely heavily on others in the community to help them, however as they get better at using their tools they may find that they rely less on other people and in fact find that other people are starting to rely on them. The participant in Stage One found that through his guiding role he could deepen his interactions with his social skills, listening skills and ability to give and receive constructive criticism, therefore continuing to develop these tools to a point where he could use them outside of the Good Vibrations project.

As participants develop their tools through interaction with the rules and division of labour, the community is created. Once the participant feels that they are an active member of a community they can then begin to feel as if it is their community. This coupled with the creative nature of the music-making gives the participants a sense of ownership of both the music and the group, thus empowering them within their community.

Finding a Voice

This empowerment appeared to lead to a rise in confidence amongst participants. In a number of the stages of research participants described how they were able to find their voice as a result of the project. The division of labour within the project means that participants are able to find their musical voice before having to engage in verbal dialogue. Moreover, as they progress through the project, they engage in musical dialogue within improvisation and traditional pieces. This in turn acts as a model for verbal dialogue. The instruments are not difficult to play and as there are no specific techniques needed, they are able to make music straight away. This allows them space to acclimatise to the community whilst focussing on

the music making rather than the people within the group. During the course of the project the division of labour shifts from being directed by the project facilitator to the participants taking more responsibility for musical decisions. As the participants become more confident in their musical role, they are able to develop their interactions with the community and in turn, gain the confidence to engage in verbal dialogue with other participants.

The findings show that women in Stage Four and men in Stage Two of the project found that through the supportive environment of the project's community, they were able to use both musical and verbal dialogue to release tension, contributing to the development of their anger management skills. Moreover, the men in Stage One reported that they were able to use this confidence to feel able to contribute in group meetings after the Good Vibrations project has ended, one man taking on a representative role in his wing. Here the men are showing development in their interactions with the community as they are able to look beyond the community of the project and interact with the wider community of the prison. Taken a step further, the men in Stage Three of the research found that they were able to use this confidence outside of prison, widening their community even further.

As interactions with the community deepened the participants found their voice. In the case of the women in Stage Four, the community provided them with a '*forum for balanced communication*' (Caulfield and Wilson, 2010; 82). The shift of the division of labour from facilitator to participants challenged the notion of 'keeping yourself to yourself', however the nature of social music-making is such that it allows a person to do just that until they feel able to contribute more to the community. Research has found that in a learning ensemble situation such as a gamelan, the nature of the activity and the learning process is such that at first the individual will interact mainly with their own tools, the rules, the community and the division of labour in an inward looking way (Henley, 2010). They focus mainly on how they as an individual can use their tools to fulfil the object. As they progress

they become more outward looking and their division of labour changes and they are able to interact with the community rather than use it just as a support mechanism. Therefore as participants in the Good Vibrations project progressed musically, they naturally took on more of the labour and they were able to come '*out of their shell*' (Staff member, HMP Eastwood Park).

Working Together

As well as allowing participants to contribute at their own level so that they can find their voice within the group, the musical focus of the Good Vibrations project also facilitates group work. The emphasis on the object of the activity being the making of music means that the individuals are able to see each other as part of the musical community. As one of the men in Stage Two said, '*you put your differences aside to get the job done*' (Male participant, HMP Grendon). Both Stages One and Two of the research demonstrated that some of the men were able to develop trusting relationships with each other and in the case of the men in Stage Two, the project diverted feelings of anger and aggression normally associated with group situations.

The way that the participants worked together towards a common object meant that they could shape their own community. They interacted with each other as subjects of the activity rather than seeing them in the light of their offences. As the findings in Stage One demonstrated, the project allowed participants who had issues with certain types of offenders to look past the offences and see these men as peers within their musical community. Moreover, participants were able to shift aside their own objectives, such as initiating aggression, and allow the project's objective to take precedent. Once the object of the activity was firmly established as social music-making, a different set of rules, community and division of labour applied and therefore different tools were required to do the job.

This shifting of activity is a feature of the activity system. The system is fluid and constituents constantly change as activity deepens, develops and progresses. For example, participants reported different outcomes as a result of participating in the project. The development of coping skills, communication skills, listening skills, social skills, self-expression and anger management are some of these outcomes. At any one time within the project, participants are acting as individuals developing their skills, using the music as a tool in this object, as well as acting as a group member to produce music, using their skills as tools. The ability to shift between individual activity and group activity shows a progression in the participants' interactions with the constituents in their activity system.

Therefore, what is occurring during the project is not just one activity, but layers of different activities occurring simultaneously. The more the subject develops their interactions with the constituents of one activity, the more able they are to shift these interactions to another activity to divert a potentially difficult situation. The notion of working together, which may be difficult for some participants to deal with, is off-set by personal musical gain.

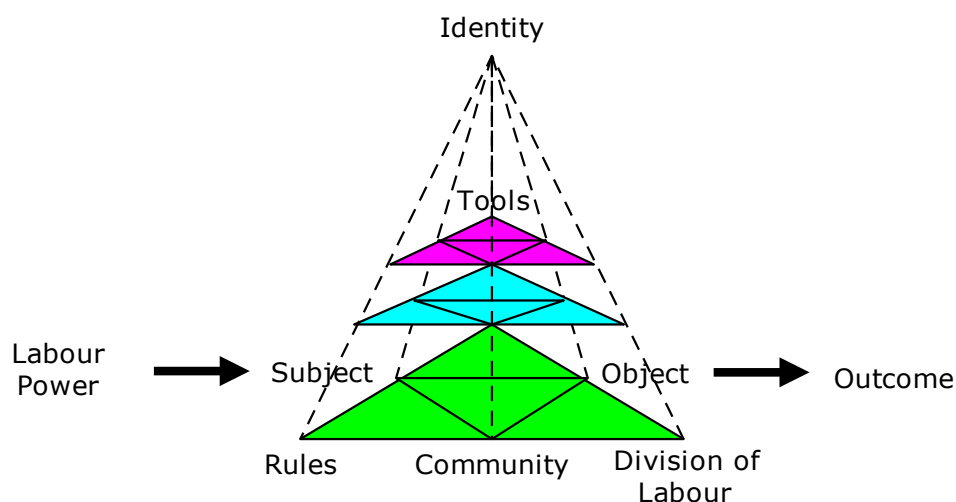
Being Normal

'Learning involves the construction of identities' (Lave and Wenger, 1991: 53). Stages Two, Three and Four of the research show how the participants began to *'feel normal'* as a result of the project. Therefore during the project something in their own personal outlook shifted from being an offender to being *'normal'*. We have seen that different layers of activity are occurring simultaneously within the Good Vibrations project. This being the case, the two-dimensional 'single' activity system cannot show us all of the interactions that are taking place within the project. However, if we use a three-dimensional activity system, we can not only view the simultaneous activities, but also begin to understand how this shift from

offender to feeling '*normal*' occurs.

The key constituent of the three-dimensional activity system is identity. By using different identities individuals are able to change their activity in order to achieve the desired outcome (Henley, 2010). For example a person who is learning to play an instrument may take on the identity as beginner musician in order to motivate themselves in the learning process; the music is the object of activity. However if they begin to find something difficult they may switch this identity to move the music from object to tool – 'I am a nurse who is using this activity to help me relax and take my mind off my work'. Therefore activity systems are layered and a trajectory runs through each constituent leading to identity (see figure 2).

Figure 2. Henley's Three-Dimensional Activity System



(Henley, 2010; 210)

Within this system we can see how a participant in a Good Vibrations project can work as an individual towards individual objects as well as a group member towards group objects. The labour power of the group, or the combined potential of all group members, can

be used when the participant is working towards the group object of social-music making and puts them into an activity system where the community is a group of musical peers rather than individual offenders.

What is interesting about the findings of this research is that we can begin to understand the relationship between identity and activity as a two-way process. Rather than a change of identity causing a change of activity, here participation in a different activity is causing a change of identity. One participant in Stage One of the research found that when he participated in a second project he was immediately able to trust the facilitator and other group members, which was something he had never experienced before. By re-entering the activity, he initiated a change of identity. Similarly in Stage Three, one man described how he felt that other offenders and prison staff saw him in a different light as a result of the project. He was able to interact with the constituents of the group activity system in order to reveal a different identity. Moreover, prison staff in Stages One, Two and Four reported differences in the participants' behaviour either during the project or since the project had finished. This difference in behaviour could be as a result of developing identities initiated through participation in the project.

A catalyst for positive change?

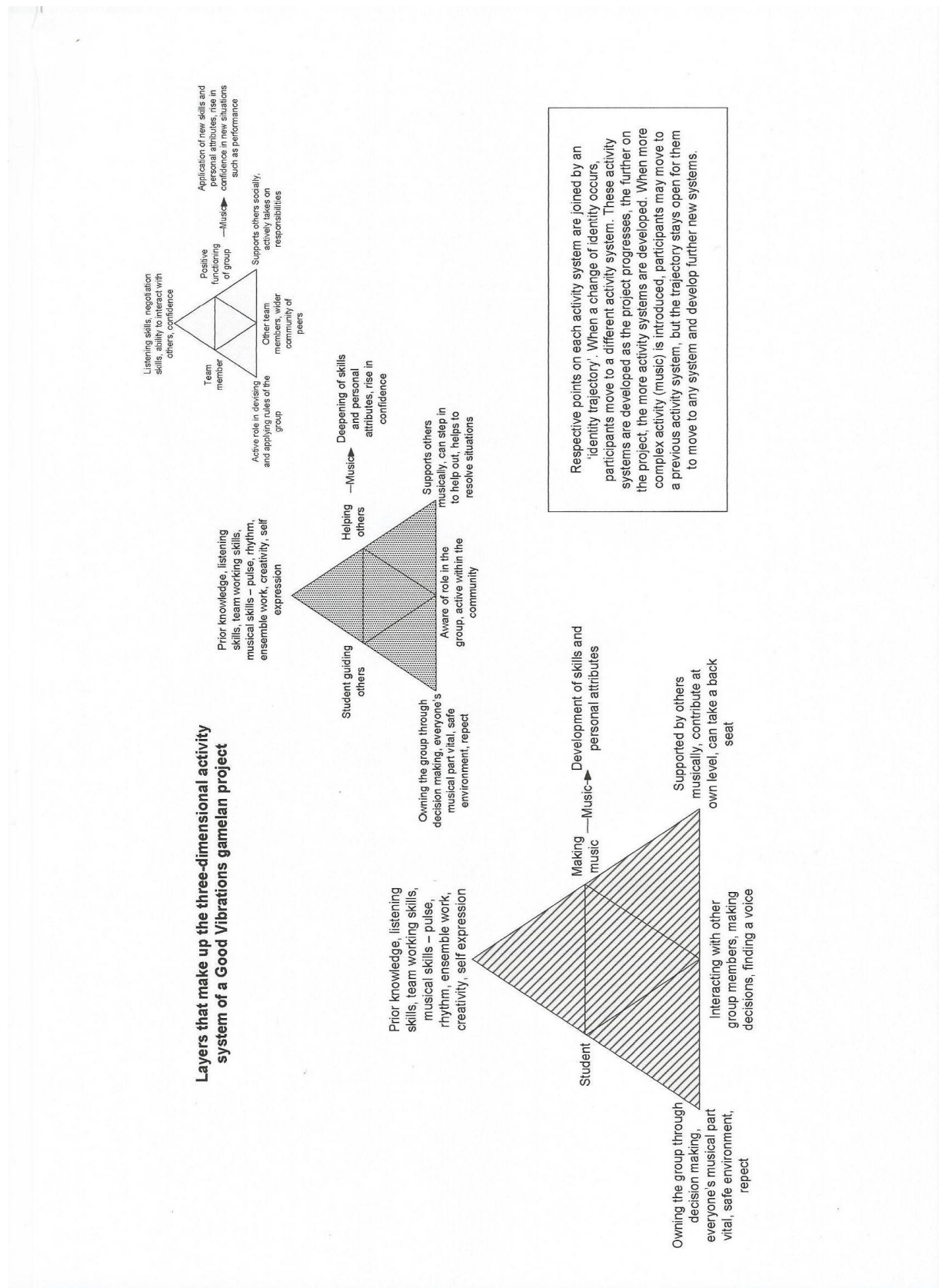
The findings of this research show that positive change is an outcome of the Good Vibrations project. By analysing these results in the context of a three-dimensional activity system we have found that the project allows participants to engage in different individual and group activities, resulting in the creation, re-creation and development of different identities. The benefits of drawing out the data in this way are three-fold.

Firstly, on a local level this enables Good Vibrations facilitators to see exactly what it is in the project that inspires change in participants. By viewing the musical activity, and

relating this to how the participants communicate, work together and develop ownership of the project, they can evaluate their practice and strengthen their provision. For example, the improvisation and composition activities were seen to be important in the development of a sense of ownership of the project. The activity system allows us to view this process; therefore this can inform the facilitators' planning of future activities, ensuring that space is given for the shift in division of labour needed to create ownership.

Secondly, as shown in Figure 3, it brings together the evidence for positive change so that on a national level, government and funders can see that the social music-making activity of the project possesses the right ingredients for offenders to engage in the project at their own level whilst developing their ability to work within a community. This in turn helps them to *'feel normal'* and possibly inspire a change of identity. Therefore, Henley's Activity System provides a way of seeing the evidence in a holistic way and demonstrates how the project contributes to the therapeutic and educational provision of prisons and is therefore a worthwhile part of funded provision.

Figure 3. The Activity System of a Good Vibrations project



Finally, at an international level, using a widely recognised theory to analyse the findings of this research demonstrates how Activity Theory can be used to analyse arts projects within criminal justice systems and gives a framework for comparison to investigate positive change on a wider scale. Moreover, by demonstrating how the Activity System can be extended by the addition of ‘identity’ as a constituent, thus enabling fluidity in the system and layers of activity to be viewed simultaneously, criticisms of the inflexibility and the static nature of the two-dimensional system can be addressed (Daniels and Wormington, 2007). For example, the three-dimensional Activity System allows individual activity to be viewed on different levels. Not only can it be viewed in terms of participants acting as individuals, their community being the immediate project group, group activity can also be viewed where the group is the ‘subject’ and the community is the wider group of the prison staff, education team, other offenders etc. These layers can be built to see all of the contributions to a change of identity that are made within the social music-making process. Arts projects occur in criminal justice systems worldwide and inspiring desistance from crime is a key theme across international projects (McNeill et al., 2011). Within this *‘desistance does involve identifiable and measurable changes at the level of personal identity’* (Maruna et al., 2003). If the three-dimensional Activity Theory provides a way of viewing, and possibly measuring, changes in identity, researchers can apply this framework to different projects in order to provide evidence for the value of arts projects within criminal justice systems and their contribution to inspiring desistance from crime.

However, it is acknowledged that the desistance process is very complex and subjective. Using Henley’s Activity System to analyse the data from this research has demonstrated how a Good Vibrations project catalyses positive change, and the potential for applying this to other arts projects can be seen. Though it can only map out the processes that are made visible through the system’s constituents and does not acknowledge other attributes

in the desistance process that are outside of the main components of the system. Also, as the unit of analysis is the activity itself, the system only provides a framework for viewing this main activity. Although this research has demonstrated that positive change as a result of a Good Vibrations project has been sustained, and the three-dimensional system can accommodate a shift in identity that can be applied to a new situation within the main activity, it is yet to be explored how it can plot the application of this positive change to completely new activities. Therefore, although we might speculate how this change of identity may be applied to new situations and new activities based on the evidence, Activity Theory in its present form does not provide a framework for analysing that process.

Having said that, what this research does show is the worth of using Activity Theory as a way of viewing processes and outcomes in a way that provides firm evidence of the beneficial nature of participating in a social music-making activity, and the contribution that this may make to the rehabilitation of offenders.

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