

I have been running workshops or classes for adults with learning disabilities for more than 12 years. Although many of my workshops are music-based, I have run and continue to run workshops or classes in drama, story-telling, citizenship, life-stories and current affairs. I have written and produced a large number of performances combining music and drama.

Music Workshops

I tend to work in a circle and aim to create a relaxed, friendly and supportive atmosphere, with the emphasis on fun and participation. I lead with voice, guitar and djembe and come with a kit of mixed percussion, including djembes, shakers, tambourines, Boomwhackers, chime bars, and an open-tuned guitar.

People are encouraged to join in through singing and playing, or through movement or other ways suited to them. I interpret the terms 'singing' and 'playing' very broadly, and the ethos of the group is very much to appreciate everyone's contribution, including one's own. People who need the help of a carer are very welcome.

Workshops can be one-off events or part of a series. My preference is to run a number of sessions: it's important to get to know people and tailor activities to them personally. A core part of the experience is the developing relationship between everybody, and the remarkable things that can happen as trust builds up.

I tend to draw on a variety of world music for my workshops. In fact, I often use songs from my community choir work, even working with different languages. People at all levels of ability can appreciate the feeling of connection to different cultures, and relate to the energy and rhythm of the selected songs with great enthusiasm. I also draw on more familiar things, such as pop music, and use a variety of specially written pieces for warm-ups and 'musical sharing'.

The workshops include singing, playing instruments, dancing, soloing, listening, and arranging. Sessions often include some degree of discussion, whilst bearing in mind the needs of non or less verbal participants. For example, people may be asked about things they enjoy and these can be sung about. Or we may look into the meaning of a song and relate it to our lives, perhaps adapting or adding to songs. Song-writing is often a part of the process and these songs are occasionally recorded and put onto CD.

Sessions can be as short as an hour. Two hours with a tea-break is also a format that can work well: the break, with its opportunities for social contact, can help with the sense of belonging to a group. The best group size varies according to situation, but somewhere between 8 and 16 people gives some idea.

The benefits of music and related matters

Music can be a great way to express yourself (never under-estimate the power of the tambourine!), but it's also a great way to practice giving attention to others. Playing music

together and singing together builds a sense of community: it also supports ideas of self-worth, as people see their own creativity and receive positive feedback from others. Participants may be involved in decision-making processes, including expressing their point-of-view.

They will be heard by others and receive positive attention from others. They will have a chance to express their own experiences, preferences and enthusiasms.

Although the emphasis is on fun and participation, group members will practice genuine musical skills at their own level, and may improve and meet challenges, for example, playing or not-playing as appropriate, and learning new songs. Some of the skills that may be included are - participating in singing, playing as part of a rhythm, taking part in arrangements (loud and soft, fast and slow, playing and not playing), selecting and finding out the properties of musical instruments, and song writing.

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Amongst organisations I currently work with are [Stallcombe House](#), [Magic Carpet](#), and the WEA.