

**Story, Rhythm and Rhyme
Derbyshire County Council
2010–2011**

**Evaluation report
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Music and education research

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Introduction

Story, Rhythm and Rhyme builds on a legacy of previous Rhythm and Rhyme programmes in Derbyshire which have brought music workshops for under-fives and their parents/carers to libraries across the county. The previous phase of Rhythm and Rhyme (evaluated in 2007) took 'orchestral music' as its theme. The evaluation of this phase recommended that:

As the responses of parents, library staff and musicians have shown, Phase 3 of Rhythm and Rhyme has undoubtedly been a positive experience for everyone involved. [...] As the collaboration between the music leaders, ViVA musicians and library staff has been so successful in this phase, this association should be allowed to continue and develop in future phases of the programme. However, in a new phase, rather than aiming for library staff to become music leaders, the specialist skills of both library staff and musicians should be used in conjunction. This could be achieved by structuring the programme around a number of narrative or literary themes, which could be linked to set children's books from the libraries. The sessions could therefore involve story-time elements, combined with music-making and movement, and the focus on these different elements could shift from session to session depending on the specialisms of the staff and musicians available. Thus library staff could still develop and use their musical skills if they wished, or could simply offer their expertise in leading story-time sessions, accompanied by a musician to provide songs or musical activities based on the narrative theme. This idea would mean that the facilities libraries have to offer in hosting the workshop are fully made use of, enabling sessions to impact on both children's musical and language development.

Story, Rhythm and Rhyme (funded by Youth Music and Derbyshire County Council, Cultural & Community Services) was developed to follow up these recommendations, aiming to create a model which **enables young children to begin a lifelong love of music and stories through their local library**, and which further links the music-making activities of previous Rhythm and Rhyme phases to the library context and to the specialisms which the county's library staff can offer. The programme was designed to reach new groups of children in some of Derbyshire's most deprived areas, with groups running in Bolsover, Gamesley, Heanor, Staveley, Swadlincote and Matlock.

The project's overall aim in full is:

to enable young children to begin a lifelong love of music and stories through their local library. We will do this through a two-year programme of sustained, high quality, creative group music-making, based on

storytelling, which will incorporate elements of percussion and storyshaping to provide a unique sensory experience. The children will generally be from deprived areas where access to musicians, musical instruments and storytellers is either very limited or non-existent. It is unlikely, for example, that any of the participating children will be from a family in which anyone plays a musical instrument.

The intended outcomes of the project are:

- Children who have been given a top quality first experience of group music/story making in a creative and safe environment.
- Improved communication skills for children, through the social and imaginative benefits of group music/story-making.
- Parents who have developed skills in using music and stories in creative play, which they can use at home.
- Library/Children's Centre staff who have been trained in how to use combined story and musical activities with children in their day-to-day work.
- An online resource for the future.
- Strengthening the partnership between library staff, children's centre staff, musicians and families.

The programme was designed to take place over three eight-week phases, with the intention that the same participants would attend the sessions across all three terms. The sessions were delivered as collaboration between Derbyshire's library assistants, Children's Librarians and Sure Start Librarians, music leaders from *Opus* (who have been involved in Derbyshire Rhythm and Rhyme programmes from their inception), a trainee musician, and a storyteller. In each eight-week phase, the *Opus* leaders, the trainee musician and the storyteller were all present together for four sessions at each library. The trainee musician and *Opus* were present together at a further two sessions, with the storyteller attending a further two sessions. Library staff took an integral role, with a qualified librarian or a library assistant present at each session; after the first phase, responsibility for planning the sessions passed from the musicians to the library staff (training and planning days took place at the beginning of the project, and after the first phase). Overall, 214 children (99 under two years; 115 aged two to four years) and 173 parents/carers participated in the project.

Evaluation methods

This evaluation report focuses on assessing the success of the programme through reference to the aims and outcomes defined in the Youth Music funding proposal. Ninety-three questionnaires were completed by parents/carers. Questionnaires were distributed at the end of phase 1, and during phase 2 for new

participants or those who had missed the opportunity to complete a questionnaire in phase 1. A shorter questionnaire was distributed at the end of phase 3, which comprised core questions from the longer version that was distributed earlier. Examining the questionnaire responses indicated that a very small number of participants (c. 5) completed both the long and short versions of the questionnaire. The sets of data from the two questionnaire formats have therefore been pooled, with analysis conducted across the total dataset.

The artistic team (storyshaper, *Opus* music leaders and trainees, and drummer) and 15 members of library staff completed questionnaires at the end of the project; additionally, library staff completed a feedback questionnaire after attending the training and planning days at the beginning of the project.

Responses from parents/carers

2.1 Achieving a 'top quality first experience of group music/story making in a creative and safe environment'

Responses to the programme from participating parents/carers were extremely positive. When asked to rate the way the workshops were run (on a scale of 'excellent, good, average, poor'), 87% rated 'excellent', and the remaining 13% rated 'good'. Responding to a question asking what they had liked best about the workshops, participants identified the **enthusiasm and welcome** provided by the staff involved...

The people who run it are so happy and friendly and seem to appreciate us coming.

The ladies who run it are very enthusiastic and good at what they do.

The people who do them, they are so warm and friendly.

...and the **involvement and creativity** engendered by the combination of music-making and storyshaping activities:

The way the children get to interact by improvising and playing instruments and also the way children can recall what has happened in the book that has been read etc.

The instruments and songs that let the children become part of the story being told.

They were a good mix of rhymes, songs, stories and the kids loved joining in.

The different instruments that the musicians bring and sound effects they add to stories.

One participant who had attended as a childminder described the sessions as '*absolutely the best children's activity group I have ever been to*', attesting to the quality of the experience provided by Story, Rhythm and Rhyme. Some participants who had attended previous phases of Rhythm and Rhyme commented on the addition of the storyshaping element, believing that this has enhanced the sessions, particularly through encouraging children to use their imagination...

The kids love being part of the stories e.g. putting their wellies and hats on when they go on their bear hunt. It has helped their imagination immensely.

...and by ‘*maintaining interest throughout the sessions – [the] variety of approaches keeps children engaged*’. The majority of respondents indicated that their experience of Story, Rhythm and Rhyme will make them more likely to visit their local library more frequently, with the few who responded negatively to this question adding the caveat that they are already very frequent library visitors.

Many participants indicated that that there is nothing they would have wanted to change about the Story, Rhythm and Rhyme programmes. Other responses are indicated in Table 1.

TABLE 1: *Sample responses to ‘Is there anything about the workshops you would have changed?’*

Maintaining interest with more frequent change of stories	<p><i>A new story every week to keep interest better.</i></p> <p><i>Perhaps more stories - I found that if she did not respond the first time then sometimes it did not work again. Or else alternate weeks.</i></p> <p><i>Where using the same story two weeks running it'd be nice if the library had enough copies for each child to take one home to explore between sessions.</i></p>
Musicians attending more frequently	<p><i>There is nothing I would change however I would like it if the musicians were there more regularly. As I believe the children concentrate more when the musicians are there.</i></p> <p><i>To have musicians there every week would be a bonus.</i></p>
Numbers present and age-groupings	<p><i>Check numbers; sometimes a bit crowded.</i></p> <p><i>Maybe the group to be split into different age ranges.</i></p> <p><i>Some things were harder to grab 2 year olds.</i></p>
Continuing provision	<p><i>Have heard today that this is the last workshop in the series. Would like this to continue.</i></p>

2.2 Outcomes for parents/carers: ‘developing skills in using music and stories in creative play, which they can use at home’

As outlined in the introduction, the overarching aim of Story, Rhythm and Rhyme is **to enable young children to begin a lifelong love of music and stories through their local library**. In order for this to take effect, the sessions needed to provide parents/carers with skills, new ideas and enthusiasm, so that the

young children's interests in stories and music will continue to be nurtured beyond the end of the Story, Rhythm and Rhyme programme.

The majority of questionnaire respondents indicated that the sessions had introduced them to new songs, rhymes, or storytelling activities. While most identified new songs that they had learnt (the hello, goodbye and little green frog songs were particular favourites), some also described learning new techniques for engaging in rhymes and story activities:

There are too many to list them but they have been inspirational and really given me new ideas to take home with me

To use nursery rhymes, break them down and turn them into stories. 'What happens next'.

How to make up stories. Teddy bear song, jungle song, frog song. Using toys and songs to enhance story telling.

Eighty-six per cent of respondents indicated that they had used activities from the workshops at home. Importantly, the types of activities ranged widely and encompassed far more than just singing rhymes, with participants describing making up stories, engaging in craft activities to make instruments and props for stories, dancing, and discovering new ways to approach familiar stories.

TABLE 2: *Sample responses to 'Please tell us which activities you have used at home and how you have used them'*

- ❖ *Row row row the boat - encouraging movement. The wheels on the bus - encouraging actions to music.*
- ❖ *We sing the songs. My son enjoyed the instruments so this encouraged me to have some at home and make some with rice and pasta and a water bottle.*
- ❖ *Made stories up from songs. Made songs up from stories.*
- ❖ *Singing with the different words learnt to the rhymes. Making a drum and a rocket out of lego for one of the stories.*
- ❖ *Telling story without book using soft toys.*
- ❖ *Singing, retelling books in a different way i.e. Going back again and asking questions.*
- ❖ *The echo game was a great favourite - used in car and at table when waiting. Making up stories using random objects - used instead of reading story from book.*

Some participants also thought that as well as clearly providing inspiration and encouragement, the sessions had also prompted changes in the ways that they play with their children. This was particularly evident in the ways storytelling was brought about, with participants describing taking a more interactive and fluid approach:

Gave me ideas and confidence to use different voices and songs to tell stories and how to make up simple stories as you go along.

Have increased our song bank and given me the confidence to make up songs and stories.

Try to explain book rather than just read.

The way we tell stories - much more active and participatory. The way we sing songs - doesn't matter if we can't remember the words, we just make them up.

Yes, more free flow as opposed to straight reading.

Yes, they have really helped me to find a fun and active way to tell a story.

Use more expression when reading and get my daughter to interact more i.e. explain what is happening if a character is happy or sad etc.

Finally, the participants' attitudes towards musical activities were changed too, with 100% of respondents who answered this question indicating that their experience of the project would make them and/or their children more likely to engage in musical activities in the future.

2.3 Outcomes for young children: skill development

A primary aim of Story, Rhythm and Rhyme for children was the development of **communication skills, through the social/imaginative benefits of group music/story making**. With the broad age range of the children attending Story, Rhythm and Rhyme in mind, communication and social interaction are skills that can be developed and nurtured across the Early Years age bracket, allowing children to gain confidence through participating and interacting in a group context.

Fifty-five per cent of respondents indicated that their children's experiences in the workshops had helped with the development of communication skills; while 72% indicated that their children's skills in social interaction had developed. One respondent described how her child *'has developed her skills with other children'*, while another noticed how her child was now capable of *'sitting to listen, taking turns, being mindful of others'*. The social and imaginative benefits of group music/story making were also noted by one of the musicians, who described particularly enjoyable aspects of the project as:

Watching the development of the children from start to finish. Seeing and hearing about the benefits that the children and their parents gained from doing this project with us long term – “this week X has been a dolphin most of the time” – stimulating imagination and creativity etc.

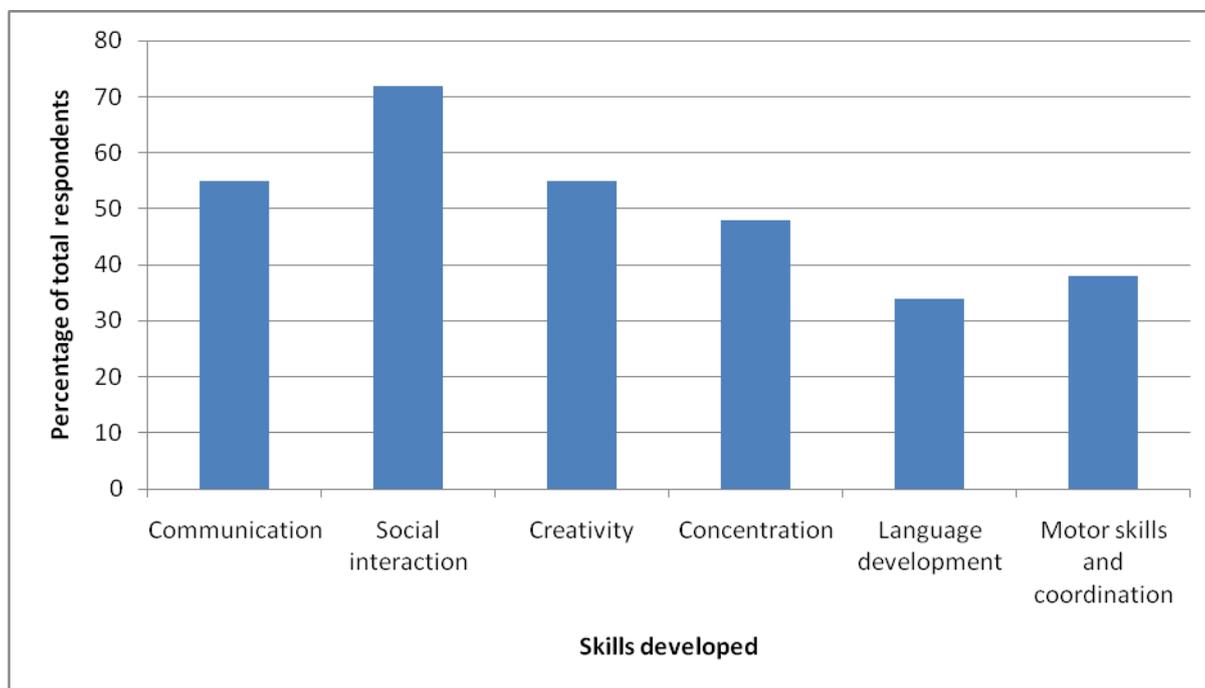


FIGURE 1: *Percentage of parent/carer respondents indicating that their children’s experiences in the workshops had helped with the development of particular skills*

In addition to the extra-musical skills outlined in the graph above, parents/carers also frequently noted aspects of their children’s musical development. This was particularly the case through the development of rhythm and pulse...

Can keep the beat and dances to any music all the time.

Very much getting the rhythm.

Her timing and rhythm to join in with music at home and dancing.

He shakes instruments in time with music now.

...and through a new or increased enthusiasm for music and musical activities:

We skip home singing the songs we've done and although my little boy doesn't always want to join in he has stood up and done a solo of a 'new' incy wincy! Thanks for that - one to remember.

He loves music and dances along to lots of different songs now.

Amelia likes to sing a lot, especially some of the songs she learnt.

She is interested in bassoons and violas.

I think she has grown in confidence because she wouldn't join in at first, but now loves it.

Responses from library staff

3.1 Training in how to use combined story in musical activities with children in their day-to-day work

For the library staff involved in Story, Rhythm and Rhyme, a main aim was for the programme to deliver training in combined story and music activities, so that these can then be incorporated into Early Years sessions beyond the end of the Story, Rhythm and Rhyme funding provision. Feedback from the training sessions and from a questionnaire completed at the end of the project indicated that developing the library staff members' confidence – in addition to their skills – was a critical part of the training delivered.

Members of the library staff varied in their levels of confidence at the start of the project: while some felt '*reasonably confident*' from the start, for others confidence developed during the programme:

I feel that I started off low in confidence as it was all quite new to me but as the weeks progressed my confidence really grew. I felt really pleased at the end by what I had achieved.

At the very beginning of the project I wasn't feeling terribly confident about my ability to lead sessions and sing in public, but by the beginning of phase three I felt able to use what I had learnt and to draw upon the ideas of the musicians and lead the sessions with confidence.

The growing confidence of the library staff was also noticed by the artistic team, as shown in Table 3.

TABLE 3: Responses from the artistic team on the library staff's confidence and skills

- ❖ *I really enjoyed seeing the progression of the library staff as they took hold of the planning and their ideas started flowing. It was great seeing their confidence and ability grow.*
- ❖ *I have enjoyed watching the library teams grow in confidence and develop their oral storytelling skills. Also watching how they inspire and encourage the families visiting the library to engage and share more fully in their children's imagination and creative play.*
- ❖ *This has been an extremely positive project for me. I have seen the confidence and enjoyment of most library staff increase greatly, and have gained many useful ideas from their creative planning! I still see a need for professional musicians to visit such sessions on a regular basis, however library staff are now able to lead sessions with confidence. It is great to see library staff planning to continue delivering sessions, and to see this sometimes happening in partnership with talented/confident/enthusiastic parents. This is a great legacy from this project.*

All of the library staff we worked with grew in confidence during the project in terms of leading sessions, and several of them demonstrated really excellent workshop leading skills by the end of the project with a confidence for devising and planning sessions and choosing suitable musical material to complement the story. Ideally, the librarians could continue to plan and run sessions and to book musician(s) to come in to support as and when they were needed.

All of the library staff who completed a questionnaire at the end of the project indicated that they now felt confident to use combined story and music activities in their daily work. A few added concerns that the musical activities they offer could not match what the professional musicians have brought to this context:

Yes, but I feel limited musically. The musicians really drew the crowds and I feel that there will now be a gap that is difficult to fill given that I don't play any musical instruments. I am happy to sing songs and shake a shaker but this isn't quite the same as a flute, violin or ukulele.

However, a number of respondents also used this opportunity to write about ways in which they were already developing combined story and music activities in their day-to-day work:

I have combined storytime & rhythm & rhyme sessions at Staveley & want to increase frequency

I do storytime on a Monday most weeks now. The kids enjoy getting the instruments out and singing along

Yes I now feel I have the confidence to move forward & would feel happy to do a session on my own – which at the start I wouldn't have believed.

The project has given the staff at Gamesley more confidence in leading an activity so that the sessions are to continue on a Monday afternoon.

This ongoing work will be supported by the online resource that has been developed throughout Story, Rhythm and Rhyme to create a bank of session plans and ideas. As the project's storyshaper describes, 'I feel very proud of what the library teams achieved and created. The SR&R session plans are their legacy and serve as a wonderful record of how much libraries are valued and treasured by their community.'

All but one of the library staff indicated that the level of training and support they had received had been adequate. Many added additional comments to this question; sample responses are presented in Table 4. In general, it seemed that the second training day (taking place before phase two) was more successful than the first, enabling phases two and three to then progress smoothly:

The training improved the second time around and meant everyone was a lot happier and more confident because we had a pool of different ideas to choose from.

TABLE 4: Sample responses from 'Do you feel the level of support and training provided by the music leader(s) and storyteller throughout the course of the sessions has been adequate?'

- ❖ *Partly. The initial training was good but the communication between sessions during the second and third stages has been limited at times. This meant I wasn't always sure how the musicians/story tellers would be able to contribute during the sessions I had planned. I still feel that more input regarding how to use simple tunes/beats etc would be useful to me personally.*
- ❖ *Although we always had a plan for the sessions ,the musicians and storyteller were always open to new and different ideas during the sessions and were happy to change direction.*
- ❖ *Because the musicians and storyteller took turns to attend the sessions , it felt less crowded and gave me more space/confidence to lead while still feeling supported by them in phase 2/3.*
- ❖ *Musicians were brilliant all the way through and were really quite instrumental (no pun intended) in the success of the project. Storyteller's role became less significant as staff confidence grew.*
- ❖ *The training we received at Matlock was very good and the 'leaders' have been very good about sharing their skills subsequently*
- ❖ *Lots of communication and backup, especially from the musicians.*

Overall suggestions for improving the training and support mainly focused on including more time for planning and for the sharing of experiences with other colleagues:

The only thing was that the sharing of sessions plans didn't seem to happen as well in Phase 3 so we ended up planning from scratch sessions which other libraries had already done. Also don't think that feedback from individual sessions as to what worked and what didn't in the sessions across the county weren't shared that well.

Another planning/evaluation session with musicians/storyteller & all library staff between phase 2 & 3 would have been useful.

I think the planning could have been improved especially in the 3rd phase – no time was allowed for us to discuss the sessions with the 'leaders' before the start of the sessions hence it was all a bit rushed and last minute.

Finally, the library staff stressed the new skills and approaches they had developed through the programme. As Table 5 shows, these predominantly fell into two categories: skills in combining music and stories; and new approaches to telling stories and running a story session. In general, it seems that taking part in Story, Rhythm and Rhyme enabled the library staff to adopt a more fluid approach to working,

where they learnt to respond to the participants' particular needs each session, rather than always sticking to a pre-formed plan.

TABLE 5: Responses to 'What skills did you learn or develop during the project?' and 'What are the most useful things you have learnt from the artistic team?'

Combining music and stories	New approaches to running sessions
<p><i>More confident in running singing and story sessions and got lots of ideas of how to combine the two rather than just running a pure story session followed by singing.</i></p> <p><i>More confidence in singing; better able to prepare a structured rhythm & rhyme storytime; started to practise keyboard again!</i></p> <p><i>Ways to use music during a story that isn't just songs related to the subject/story.</i></p> <p><i>I gained the confidence to play instruments such as guitar/melodica/chimes. Using props, more songs, working with a theme.</i></p> <p><i>I learnt that being in front of a large group isn't so bad, I learnt to put rhymes to stories.</i></p>	<p><i>Being happier trying new things, such as changing words to songs the families already know.</i></p> <p><i>I learnt that you don't have to sit still to express the story and to add toys and fabrics.</i></p> <p><i>Storyshaping which is a great skill to have as a children's librarian. To be more fluid in my approach to planning and to pass on decision making to the children involved.</i></p> <p><i>Importance of pacing a session- allowing children time to explore an element. Hopefully, becoming more flexible and laid-back; when I have made a plan, I tend to want to stick with it.</i></p> <p><i>I've learnt that you can pick a story and from that one story you can do so much and come up with so many great ideas.</i></p>

3.2 Strengthening the partnership between library staff, children's centre staff, musicians and families

All but one of the library staff who responded to the end of project questionnaire indicated that they felt that Story, Rhythm and Rhyme had helped to strengthen partnerships in their work. This was particularly the case with the families who had participated, some of whom were now attending the library and library activities more frequently:

Particularly with the families involved, many of which have stayed with us throughout and have become regular library users as a result and have since brought other siblings into the library.

Yes, many of the families have continued to use the library & attend other rhymetime sessions.

We already have a lady volunteering to help with any activities we plan & many families signed up for summer reading challenge activities for their older siblings as a result.

In some cases, this involvement has extended, with parents now being involved as volunteers to help run future Story, Rhythm and Rhyme sessions in collaboration with library staff. Additionally, Sure Start librarians will now be taking the Story, Rhythm and Rhyme work into Children's Centres, and will be using their experience to provide training in that context.

On a broader level, library staff felt that the Story, Rhythm and Rhyme sessions had increased the perceived accessibility of the library...

I feel the parents became more friendly and comfortable with the staff members.

...and had forged new relationships within the community between participants:

The families started to get to know each other well & definitely formed friendships during the sessions.

Finally, although slightly outside the scope of this evaluation, it is also important to note that the artistic team described the benefits of the project for their educational and artistic practice, particularly in terms of the partnerships and collaboration that Story, Rhythm and Rhyme had instilled:

Out of all the previous R and R sessions we have done, the groups seemed to remain most constant during this project, which is a testament to how valuable people perceived the sessions to be. This enabled us to develop good relationships with the families involved. Having worked with some of the library staff on previous projects, we immediately felt more comfortable working together and I think this developed as the project went on. The library staff grew in confidence in their delivery throughout the sessions until it really did feel like a team delivery between musicians, story teller and staff.

I feel the project has made a strong link between the deliverers – creating a strong ethos of collaborative working and facilitating the hand-over of ownership from music leaders and storyshaper to trainees, and ultimately to library staff. The training session after phase 1 allowed this to happen in a way that all understood and responded to in a very positive way.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The data gathered for this evaluation depicts Story, Rhythm and Rhyme as an exemplary Early Years programme, using staff and resources in creative ways to provide children with an early and sustained exposure to high-quality music- and story-making. The responses have shown that the sessions have contributed highly to developing children's enthusiasm for engaging in music and literature, while also helping to develop their confidence, communication and social skills. Importantly, the sessions have created a means of sustaining this enthusiasm and development by supporting and encouraging parents/carers to continue these activities at home. The programme has been successful in training library staff in the skills of combining music and story activities, meaning that similar sessions can be continued beyond the end of the current funding provision. This model therefore adds to the librarians' toolkit, using the incorporation of music into storytimes to provide a means of development and progression for the staff involved. The online resource developed throughout Story, Rhythm and Rhyme will help to sustain a legacy from the programme, and will provide a strong base should other libraries wish to begin providing sessions of this kind. Given the success and extremely positive reaction to the programme, I therefore hope that future funding and provision will enable Story, Rhythm and Rhyme to continue and grow, and make the following recommendations:

- ❖ A sharing session where library staff across the county can demonstrate approaches to each other and reflect on their practice during the programme, with the primary aims of sharing knowledge and skills, and providing each other new ideas for moving forwards in libraries where the sessions are continuing.
- ❖ In future Story, Rhythm and Rhyme programmes, it will be important to schedule more time for planning: between the music leaders and storyteller; and between the artistic team and library staff.
- ❖ Future phases of Story, Rhythm and Rhyme may not need continued input from a professional musician, particularly in libraries where the programme is now continuing into a second phase, run entirely by library staff and volunteers. However, the presence of live, professional musicians is a clear strength of the programme, and so a model should be considered whereby musicians could be 'bought in' as and when required. Professional musicians have been critical to the success of Derbyshire's Rhythm and Rhyme programmes, and it is important not to lose sight of the important role that live music plays in the Rhythm and Rhyme model.

Appendix 1

Contacts & Background information.

Project Partners:

Derbyshire County Council, Cultural & Community Services (Libraries & Heritage)

Contacts:

- Ann Wright, Head of Arts
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Funders:

Youth Music

Derbyshire County Council, Cultural & Community Services Department

Musicians:

Nick Cutts
Laura Zobel
Richard Kensington
Sarah Matthews

Library Staff

Bolsover Library

Chris Bertenshaw, Library Assistant (now Assistant in Charge, Bakewell Library)

Jenny Downsborough, Children's Librarian

Gail Bellamy, Library Assistant

Lyn Freeman, Sure Start Librarian

Gamesley Library

Sarah Daubney-Marsden, Assistant in Charge

Andrea Bailey, Library Assistant (now Assistant in Charge, Hadfield Library)

Rose Glenton, Sure Start Librarian

Annabel Wilson, Children's Librarian

Heanor Library

Laura Griffin, Library Assistant

Jan Nicholson, Sure Start Librarian

Matlock Library

Julie Hartley, Library Assistant

Jo Peck, Assistant in Charge

Angela Wilkinson, Children's Librarian

Staveley Library

Caroline Hewitt, Library Assistant (now Assistant in Charge, Staveley Library)

Rebecca Machin, Library Assistant

Swadlincote Library

Emma Highton, Library Assistant

Natasha Hyde, Sure Start Librarian

Sarah Phillips, Sure Start Librarian