Evaluation of *Music and Change*:

A new mental health intervention for young people involved in gangs

An evaluation by the Mental Health Foundation

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Acknowledgements:

This report was written by Lauren Chakkalackal and Dr Eva Cyhlarova. Other contributors include Simon Lawton-Smith and Dr Dan Robotham.
Executive Summary

“MAC’s probably the best thing in this area. They’re nothing but positive, innit like. They don’t give up on you either.”

“I know more things than I did before. About mental health, child protection, so many things. So yes, completely different from the guy that I was, before I joined.”

Quotes from young people involved in Music & Change

MAC-UK is a UK national charity working with excluded young people, who are involved in gangs, commit serious youth violence and/or exhibit antisocial behaviour. The vision of MAC-UK is to radically transform the way in which mental health services are delivered to these young people. By taking mental health services into the community, they reach young people who normally would not seek help, but present with a number of complex issues such as homelessness, domestic violence, leaving care, absence of formal education, poverty and unemployment. They are also vulnerable to social exclusion – an important risk factor for youth offending.

MAC-UK developed an innovative model Integrate© which provides mental health and general support in a youth-led way, and considers young people experts in their own experience. Mental health promotion is at the centre of the model which aims to: (1) reduce serious youth violence and reoffending; (2) promote the treatment and mental health needs of young people; (3) engage young people in training, education and/or employment; and (4) bridge young people into appropriate existing services.

The Mental Health Foundation evaluated the founding Music & Change project over a period of 21 months from October 2010 to July 2012. The aim of the evaluation was to investigate the processes and outcomes of the Integrate© model within the Music & Change project in terms of provision of psychological support, impact on offending behaviour, and bridging young people into mainstream services.

Data collection methods included observational field notes, standardised questionnaires, outcomes audit data, partnership agency offending data, young person interviews, and interviews with partnership organisations. Fifty young people accessed Music & Change during the course of the evaluation. The multi-faceted nature of the evaluation resulted in different numbers of young people participating in varying aspects of the evaluation.

Engagement
The results showed that Music & Change is good at reaching and engaging its target group of excluded young people with previously unmet mental health needs. The vast majority (90%) engaged in streetherapy and received interventions for their wellbeing, and some were bridged into appropriate mainstream mental health services where this was necessary. Young people valued Music & Change highly, and reported it helped them better understand their mental health needs. They reported that taking part in Music & Change had a positive impact on their mental health, engagement and behaviour.
Psychological support
The multi-level community psychological approach of Integrate addressed common stability issues, such as not having a fixed abode. A large proportion of young people (80%) made some progress in this area, and some gained a deeper understanding of mental health and wellbeing issues.

Offending behaviour
The evaluation heard of self-reported reductions in offending behaviour of some of the young people. Most promisingly, the partnership agencies, including Community Safety and MET Police Force, suggested that MAC-UK contributed to large reductions in crimes related to youth violence in the Borough. However, limited quantitative data were available on both number of offences and their severity (which was subject to data quality issues). For the small sample available, there appeared to be a trend towards lower and less severe offending when an outlier quarter was removed. However, the figures are small and difficult to disentangle.

Bridging young people into mainstream services
Most young people (90%) participated in employment, education and training actions, such as creating their CVs and professional skills development. Positively, many young people (73%) became junior employees of MAC-UK, enabling them to gain real work experience. However, within the timeframe of this evaluation, only a small number ‘bridged out’ into mainstream employment or lasting contact with other services, such as health care.

Our findings confirm that MAC-UK provides a promising approach to engaging excluded young people in mainstream activities with a potential positive impact on their wellbeing, engagement, and offending behaviour. The results showed that some individuals benefited while others did not, but given the hard-to-engage nature of the young people in the project, with complex needs and entrenched behaviour, even this partial success might be regarded as a significant achievement.

This evaluation represents an important contribution to the limited literature on community-based mental health interventions for this group of young people. The model is being implemented in other London Boroughs, and this will offer an opportunity for more extensive evaluations.

Conclusions
Music & Change seeks to engage and support young people who are involved in gangs and often show antisocial or criminal behaviours. It is reaching and engaging its target group, providing support, bridging some young people out to mainstream services, and offering job opportunities, and there is some evidence that it is improving offending behaviour.

Although the findings from this evaluation should be treated with caution, and some individuals benefited while others did not, given the hard-to-engage nature of the young people with complex needs in the project, even this partial success might be regarded as a significant achievement.

Our findings suggest that outcome monitoring needs to occur over a longer timeframe, with larger numbers. The inclusion of a control group, or a cohort study with a longer follow-up period, would be helpful for the design of future evaluations. Also, as the Integrate model is implemented in other London Boroughs by mainstream services, this will offer an opportunity for more extensive evaluation.
It is clear that community programmes aiming to address the needs of excluded young people and reduce offending need to address the full spectrum of health, social, political and economic factors which lead to the marginalisation of young people, and the development of gang culture (Klein & Maxson, 2006). Though facing many challenges, the Integrate model is a promising approach for addressing the needs of excluded young people and improving their lives.