



Report and Feedback Music in the Ville Christmas Session HMP Pentonville 22nd December 2022

Funded by ELMO Winter Appeal

On December 2022 Emma Dogliani (an Official Prison Visitor, OPV at Pentonville) took three other professional musicians - Kate Shortt, Dominic Stichbury and Kate Conway - into HMP Pentonville as part of ELMO's Music in the Ville project. Also attending were Alex Wakefield an ELMO trustee, Helena Konneh ELMO Fundraising Advisor, carrying out a requested consultation exercise for a future funding application, and Isabella Dogliani who assisted collecting information for the consultation exercise.

Context

HMP Pentonville is a bleak Victorian prison in London housing 1200 prisoners although designed to hold 520. After several challenging years, mental health of the inmates has worsened, not helped by extensive lockdowns in cramped cells. Self-harm, depression and suicide rates have grown significantly and following the pandemic, prison morale is almost non-existent. The run up to Christmas is a particularly difficult time for prisoners as they reflect on their situations and separation from loved ones.

Music in the Ville

'Music in the Ville' brings live music into the heart of HMP Pentonville, performing directly on the wings. Professional musicians run monthly one-day workshops for prisoners, engaging with them through group songs and performances. We encourage the prisoners

to also make their own music and perform to each other. Our aim is to boost morale, collaboration and self esteem in difficult circumstances.

Christmas Session 2022

The Music in the Ville team met at 8:30am and getting through security, searched and all the group and the musical equipment being checked took about half an hour. They arrived on J Wing at 9am. Many of the men, having enjoyed sessions over the previous year, and knowing they were coming, were up and ready and greeted them warmly.

While the other musicians set up, Violinist Kate Conway played unaccompanied Bach and more prisoners began to assemble on the ground floor of the wing and to sit down near the musicians. Others watched from the higher landings. Around 40 men were engaged in one way or another and 5 officers.

Kate C and Emma then performed O sole mio which drew in more men and was warmly received. Early on, one of the prisoners new to the sessions, who was identified by a regular as a good singer, volunteered and sang a wonderful rendition of My Way accompanied at the keyboard by Kate Shortt. The others applauded loudly.

Lyric sheets were given out and many Christmas songs performed by the musicians with many men and staff gathering and joining in. Kate Shortt then performed her specially written Christmas rap which was received extremely well and drew more men into the group. A rapper volunteered to perform and sang a lively Polish rap. None present understood the words but everyone felt the energy and sentiment. The session ended with everyone singing White Christmas. Chocolates and biscuits were handed out to all and many consultation forms filled in by the men, making suggestions and giving feedback for future sessions.

On leaving J wing, unfortunately there was a full lockdown on A wing, but a passing E wing officer suggested performing up on E5 where he knew some men were currently unlocked. It was a very confined space but around 20 or so men were nearby and other landings were near enough to at least see and hear what was going on. The team repeated some of the music from earlier and again, many men joined in singing the Christmas songs. The group then performed in the central part of the prison where Emma D sang the operatic aria Casta Diva, the sound travelling a long way along the wings. Cheering and banging on the cells was heard. The four musicians sang some a cappella carols and ended with White Christmas. The final session of the morning was on G1 which is the new Neurodiverse wing, where the group repeated much of the music from earlier. Again Kate Shortt's Christmas Rap went down particularly well and caused several men to join in and perform raps of their own.

After lunch and a long wait at security, the musicians came to F wing where Phoenix Futures (a drug support group) had assembled a group of 12 men in a classroom for the Music in the Ville team to run a workshop. Warm-up name games and a Blues called 'Mama don't 'llow were used to get all the men laughing and joining in together. All sang several Christmas songs together as a group and then KS performed her Xmas rap and an amazing rapper shared his own rap with the group. The musicians and the men from the workshop all moved out together onto the main section of the wing, and reset up the instruments. Kate Conway performed Vivaldi Winter and more classical and jazz

performances followed, with several men again performing solos, and many more joining in the Christmas songs. Governor Lawrence was present for this part of the session and continues to support the project. More chocolates and biscuits were given out by the team and more feedback was collected. At the end of the session, many men came and thanked us and there was a very enthusiastic mood on the wing as we left.

Prisoner Feedback collected on the day

Well, I think this is very good for the mental state of the inmates and think they should come in more often. The live music is very soothing and calming especially the Opera singer and the Violin.

It's a good project. Something different

Having the music moved me and felt like something good for Christmas-that there is hope. I liked the violin and the Opera singer

I would like to see it become more regular and for them to get on all the wings

Integrate talented people and let people out of their cell and showcasing their talent

Best thing is the way people interact with each other

Was impressed by older prisoners getting involved

I think this is great, it brings people together

More Rock and roll, more regular sessions

Really uplifting of mood and lovely to listen to. A help to take mind off things for a moment.

This is great for bringing people on the wing together in a communal way. It helps to release tension and allows people to open up in themselves. If you're feeling a bit down then after one of these sessions your spirit is sure to be elevated.

All good things, we can listen to good live music from very talented people , sometimes we have the chance to sing our own songs or rap. Very good time, very friendly people. For the minute all is very nice. Hope nothing stops the people coming to visit us

Be nice to do it in larger groups at once. Prisoners who saw it enjoyed it. I thought I was in the Italian job

It gives people a little bit of a different vibe to being in prison. Gives people the opportunity to express themselves.

Well, it's always good to hear cheerful and joyful sounds of music and singing. Everyone liked it. Maybe more of it to lift spirits of all inmates and officers... weekly sessions.

With thanks to all who contributed to the ELMO Winter Appeal. We have also collected enough funds to support a January session.