

My Inclusion Journey:

Claire Tyler, Learning Development Lead, Coventry Music

From early work as a primary school music teacher, to a senior management role in a secure training unit, inclusion has been a thread running through Claire Tyler's career. Now as a Learning and Development Lead with responsibility for inclusion, she's able to use her experiences to support music teachers and build partnerships with local authority teams.



How did you come to be working in your current role?

I'm a qualified singing teacher and voice coach, and a musical director with several musical theatre societies and theatres. I started my career as a singing teacher with Coventry and Warwickshire Performing Arts (CWPA), the forerunner to Coventry Music, before becoming a primary school teacher. Initially I worked as a learning support assistant and music teacher, on supply, and then took a

permanent class teacher position.

After a few years, I spotted a job as the music and performing arts lead in a secure training unit. The students were 12-18 year old who had committed crimes and had many additional needs. It was a huge leap, but I felt a calling: that I needed to be there. I wanted to bring some musical joy to these young people.

I hadn't had any specialist training. I'd done a certain amount of training to

understand things like autism, ADHD, and behaviour difficulties, but at the time, there really wasn't that much available. I also had some personal experience visiting people in prison. It can be intimidating – things like the search area, time locks on doors, high security technology – but it didn't phase me. I think what really helped me was my performing arts background.

I eventually worked my way into management and became a senior leader. It was intense, and after five years I decided

to go back into mainstream teaching. I worked in a private school for a few years, and then a state primary school in one of the most deprived areas of Coventry.

At the time, I knew about Coventry Music as I'd done my music A-level with CWPA, and was involved with them through school: but I didn't know what a music education hub was. When a job came up there, I did my research and realised, this is where I should be, this is where I can really make a difference. So in 2018 I took up the role of Music Engagement Officer at Coventry Music.

How did you first come across MAC Makes Music?

Quite soon after I joined, I was offered the chance to take part in a course on [Music with Children and Young People who have Social, Emotional and Mental Health Difficulties](#), with Dr Phil Mullen. We went to MAC every six weeks and so we got to meet Holly and the team too. One of the great things about it was that it involved a wide range of people – from experienced teachers like me, to newly qualified tutors straight out of conservatoires, to other people working in music services.

I hadn't really had any formal training for work with these young people, even in the secure setting. So it gave me the chance to think back on what I'd done there, to re-evaluate my approaches and consider what had worked, or what I could have done differently. Chatting to Phil

and others about our experiences and comparing strategies was really helpful, and there were many new things to think about. The whole SEMH area had grown so much since I was in the secure setting, and I learned a lot.

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It was particularly useful for my whole class music teaching, where I come across a lot of challenging behaviour. And it's more important than ever before because post-pandemic there are so many more emotionally damaged

children. I think everyone doing whole class music teaching should do this training: to think about what's happening for these young people when they present with challenging behaviour.

As visiting tutors, we don't always know what young people are coping with in their lives outside school, or what additional needs they may have. When I was in a primary school in a deprived area, we knew what children came from families who were known to police and social care, which children had additional needs, and what trigger points to avoid. We encourage our tutors to try to get that information from the class teacher before they begin teaching.

How have you continued to be involved with MAC?

Last year I was promoted to being part of the senior leadership team (SLT) at Coventry Music so I now join the meetings of the MAC MEH

Claire and Stephen Plummer in Coventry





Claire Tyler playing the Ukulele

(Music Education Hub) Strategy Group of five West Midlands hubs.

We've been revisiting our inclusion strategy and slimlining it. Although it's been RAG (red, amber, green) rated, it can be difficult to work out how we're doing and what to do next. We decided to take one strand for each SLT meeting, and we invited hub partners from each of the five

music services too. It's been an interesting exercise. We've realised there are things that are happening that we didn't know about, and so, as a hub, we're often doing better than we think on our RAG rating. We're realising there's a huge amount already happening and we need to make it more joined up.

Holly (Radford-James, producer and lead for MAC

Makes Music) has been really helpful. She's a font of knowledge and connected with so many different people, a great central point for stopping us reinventing the wheel! We'll often mention something in passing after a meeting and she'll say, "I know X has been working on that, I'll put you in touch." Without MAC we wouldn't have those connections.

What does the 'inclusion' part of your job title involve specifically?

I'm Inclusion Lead, alongside my colleague Mark Patton. Mark does more of the targeted delivery such as in Extended Learning Centres, or with Looked After Children and he's also the lead on Positive Choices, our afterschool programme working with young people at risk of offending.

I bring inclusion into the core provision of the Hub, and I do work around school attendance and inclusion with the Education Inclusion Workers in the council. We're looking into how we can integrate our music workshops and services, with support sessions they provide to help young people stay in schools, before they end up in Extended Learning settings.

Inclusion isn't just about access, there's also a business case for the Hub. We know there's a budget to prevent exclusion of pupils – and it's been estimated an exclusion can **cost the taxpayer £370k in the long run**.

But beyond that we want to extend our team across the wider education system, the City Council teams and school teams. It's about putting the right people in the right places, extending the workforce, helping the existing workforce become more inclusive so it benefits both targeted and core work. We're then better able to support pupils in an all-round way. For example, we try to ensure that pupils coming from Extended Learning Centres back into mainstream have the same music tutor throughout. It's important for young people to have consistency of provision and constant people in their lives, because so often, that's not been their experience. It's all about relationships.

What tips could you share for other music service teachers and tutors?

The first thing to ask yourself is, are you engaging all children in your classes? Are you building those relationships or just playing to the ones who want to do it and ignoring those who seem disengaged?

Make it your main goal that everyone has an enjoyable experience – rather than everyone gets to a particular stage of technical proficiency.

Being adaptable is key: changing the pace of the lesson with games and activities, interactive question and answer sessions, and getting children to demonstrate things. Moving

between body percussion, theory, history, listening – breaking up the lesson with lots of different elements.

Remember that when you address a class you need to be upbeat, take your energy up a notch, and then up a notch again! It's really helpful to video yourself so you can see how you come across to your classes, and even better to be able to discuss this with a peer.

Think about relationships first, and remember your music time could be the only thing they enjoy about school.

I've always wanted to give children the highest quality ambition in what they're learning. BUT it's also hugely important for tutors to be very mindful that, if you have some children who aren't engaging, they're not naughty: there's something else in that young person's emotional state that's stopping them being able to engage or concentrate. Also, many young people who've experienced difficult family lives have delayed processing skills and that can affect their ability to listen and concentrate. Everyone has to enjoy a lesson to the level they can manage. They won't all get the same outcome. They won't all bring you the 'big successes'. But they will get to a level of competency or enjoyment that's right for them.

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Coventry Music Hub is part of the MAC MEH Strategy Group – five hubs who meet monthly, to support and challenge each other to move the needle on inclusion in their organisations and partnerships. The group is facilitated by Holly Radford, who leads 'MAC Makes Music', part of Midlands Arts Centre. The work is backed by [Youth Music](#), thanks to the National Lottery via Arts Council England.

This post is part of a set of case studies, '**Working together to move the needle on inclusion in five West Midlands music education hubs**', produced by [Anita Holford](#).

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Interested in receiving inclusion consultancy support for your hub, from MAC Makes Music? This is a charged-for service but can be tailored around your budget and goals.

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