



Theory of Change - Accompanying Narrative

1. Introduction

A wide variety of research shows that engagement with music can have a profound effect on children – from improving their educational attainment (including language development, literacy, and numeracy); to supporting their health and wellbeing; and fostering vital social, emotional, and cognitive skills (including concentration, self-confidence, teamwork, and self-discipline).¹ Despite this, the value of music activity and learning is poorly recognised in the education system in England. Music is not a priority in statutory curriculum delivery (and often even less so in free schools and academies), and teachers are not given the initial training or ongoing development and learning opportunities needed to equip them with the skills and confidence to deliver high-quality music education.

Even with the continued support for Music Education Hubs and the release of the Model Music Curriculum in England in March 2021, music education is still being systematically undermined and devalued, as it has over the last decade, with greater focus on what is variously referred to as the ‘core knowledge curriculum’ or ‘academic’ subjects. Non ‘core’ subjects such as music have been titled “soft” by Government ministers and previous governments’ comparative lack of support for these subjects has been described as “betraying a generation”². It should be noted that the Model Music Curriculum is clearly subtitled as non-statutory guidance. This has had an insidious effect on the value placed on music education and its contribution to children’s development and education. Children attending schools facing additional challenges or with fewer resources are particularly likely to miss out. On top of that, Covid-19 has reportedly eliminated multiple years’ progress towards narrowing the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their classmates in England,³ meaning that now more than ever, there is a need to increase access to high-quality music education for our most vulnerable children. Singing has been found to pose no greater risk in terms of Covid-19 transmission than speaking loudly,⁴ and Voices Foundation, alongside other music organisations, are working hard to address the residual resistance to singing following Covid-19 that threatens children’s access to music making.

Voices Foundation envision a country where all children, and particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds or circumstances, have access to high-quality music education. To better understand and articulate how we aim to achieve our vision, we created a Theory of Change. A Theory of Change is a way of describing the change we want to see and our plans for achieving it. Our Theory of Change outlines the impact that we aim to create for children, and it describes our theory about how that impact will be achieved. It enables us to reflect on our ambitions to change the way that music education in England is valued, prioritised, and delivered; scrutinise how we intend to accomplish those goals; and articulate our plans to others.

This document presents our Theory of Change. First, we outline the benefits of music education and the need for our work. We then present how we aim to eliminate that need – transforming music education so that access to consistently high-quality music activity and learning is a reality for every child.

2. The need for our work

The benefits of music activity and learning

Music is central to the human experience and present in the everyday lives of people of all ages and cultures.⁵ Participation in music activity is a unique multi-sensory experience that engages a wide variety of brain functions. As a result, music activity has the potential to benefit children’s learning, skills, and life outcomes in important and unique ways. Many of the brain functions used when taking part in music are also utilised by children to achieve key developmental milestones. Speech

and music, for example, have several shared processing systems. Musical experiences can therefore impact on the perception of language, which in turn impacts on learning to read.⁶ Other research suggests that engaging with music may enhance the development of cognitive functions that are key to children's learning, such as planning, working memory, inhibition, and flexibility.⁷ Studies have also found that children who participate in music activities perform better in English, maths, and science, regardless of their socioeconomic background and previous academic achievement. In some cases, the difference between children who do and do not participate in music activity can equate to several months' academic progress.⁸

Beyond learning and academic achievement, music is a form of communication that can convey meaning, regardless of whether it includes words or lyrics. Through music activity, participants can share emotions and express themselves non-verbally. This is empowering for all children, but particularly important for those who are less comfortable or able to express themselves through speech. Music activity creates opportunities for children to be heard, and it may consequently improve children's self-esteem and confidence to express themselves in non-musical ways too.⁹ Music provides educators, parents, and guardians with an additional form of communication too. Adults can quickly and powerfully communicate an instruction or set a mood by giving a musical signal or playing a particular song. As a result, they can use music to help children to regulate their behaviour and calm their emotions; prepare to start or finish a particular activity; or coordinate a collective effort to achieve a task more efficiently. This can result in more productive use of time, improved focus, and increased learning.

Musical experiences are shaped by all those who participate, and those taking part jointly experience the actions, expressions, and emotions of all those involved. As a result, children and adults alike gain a greater understanding of themselves and each other every time they take part. This experience generates particular benefits for children's social and interpersonal skills. Researchers have found that simply tapping in time with someone else can lead us to feel more connected with that person.¹⁰ Children who participate in long-term musical programmes have been found to show higher empathy than similar children who do not participate,¹¹ and children who take part in tasks involving music have been found to show more spontaneous helping behaviour subsequently than those taking part in similar tasks but without music.¹²

The current state of music education

Despite the unique and important role that music activity plays in children's education and development, music's place in the curriculum has deteriorated, music makes up just a few hours of Initial Teacher Training, and relevant Continuing Professional Development and Learning (CPDL) is hard to come by.

Although there is a National Curriculum in place for music, academies and free schools are not statutorily required to follow it. As a result, 46.8% of pupils receiving state-funded education in England attend schools where there is no requirement to provide music education. Even in statutory contexts, the National Curriculum is extremely limited in scope and the new Model Music Curriculum provides non-statutory guidance only. National assessment influences curriculum design and teaching, and accountability measures for maths and English results have placed pressure on other areas of the curriculum, leading many primary schools to deprioritise music education or fall short of delivering their planned music provision. In a recent survey carried out by the Incorporated Society of Musicians, more than 50% of primary schools who have music as part of the curriculum reported not meeting their curriculum obligations to Year 6, citing the pressure of statutory tests as a significant reason.¹³ Children experiencing disadvantage, and particularly those with literacy and numeracy challenges, can be even more acutely affected as they are often withdrawn from the music provision that does exist for additional practice in 'core' curriculum areas.

Music is also not prioritised in teacher training. At the time of writing, a Manchester Metropolitan University student receives four hours of music education as part of a one-year Postgraduate Certificate of Education (PGCE), and a mere six hours throughout a three-year undergraduate degree leading to Qualified Teacher Status. Students on the University of Sussex's primary PGCE course receive only two hours.¹⁴ Disappointingly, music has not been included in the Department for Education's Initial Teacher Training funding for the 2021/22 academic year, which is likely to further exacerbate the problem.

Poor access to music-related resources, training and professional development opportunities mean that teachers also do not receive adequate support to deliver music activities once in post. Despite successive Ofsted reports indicating a correlation between a lack of CPDL and poor classroom practice, more than nine in ten teachers report facing barriers that prevent them from accessing CPDL.¹⁵ This is bad news for pupils, as quality teachers are a critical determinant of student achievement.¹⁶ Whilst the problem exists across the board, for music, it is made more acute by the lack of initial training that teachers receive.

For those attending schools facing additional challenges or with fewer resources, the problem is magnified. The quality and reach of schools-based music education is unacceptably variable and inconsistent, and it is overwhelmingly children from poorer backgrounds who miss out.¹⁷

Summary statements

To be clear on the problems that Voices Foundation seeks to address and set the groundwork for creating our Theory of Change, we summarised the challenges outlined above into two concise statements, detailed below. As a charity, we exist to address these two problems.

Societal Level Problem

Despite a wide variety of research demonstrating that participation in music is highly beneficial for children, the current generation of children are being starved of a meaningful, quality music education. The value of music activity and learning is poorly recognised in the education system in England, and as a result, music is not a priority in curriculum delivery.

School Level Problem

Teachers are not given the initial training or ongoing learning opportunities needed to equip them with the skills and confidence to deliver high-quality music education. Consequently, children do not have equal access to an area of education that is fundamental to their learning and development. This disproportionately affects children from disadvantaged backgrounds attending schools facing additional challenges or with fewer resources.



3. Our Theory of Change

Background, methodology and terminology

Voices Foundation believes that every child should have access to a high-quality music education, and we are committed to transforming music education so that every child can find their voice. To better understand and articulate how we plan to achieve this aim and address the two problems outlined above, Voices Foundation – including Board members, staff, and key stakeholders – worked together over a series of months to create a Theory of Change. Our Theory of Change describes how we believe our activities will lead to the outcomes and impacts that we want to achieve.

To create our Theory of Change, we followed New Philanthropy Capital’s (NPC) [ten-step process](#).¹⁸ We were supported by David Waterfall (third sector specialist and NPC Impact Champion), who facilitated four workshops across January and February 2021, where we progressed our approach and discussed our thinking. As a team, we engaged in reflection together alongside these sessions. David also held side sessions to discuss specific areas of interest and offered rolling mentoring to the whole team.

Before we present our Theory of Change, there are a few key terms that we use to describe the components and stages of our theory. These are:

Impact – The long-term difference that we want to achieve as a result of our work.

Outcomes – The shorter-term change that we think our participants and audiences will need to achieve before our intended impact can be achieved.

Activities – The programmes or products that we will deliver to bring about our intended outcomes.

Mechanisms – The experiences and sensations we think participants will need to undergo when taking part in our activities to achieve our intended outcomes.

Qualities – The key features of our work that we think will help to ensure that participants experience our activities in the way that we want them to.

Voices Foundation’s Theory of Change

To achieve long-lasting and sustainable change for children, we focus on working with the people that most influence children’s lives – senior school leaders, teachers, parents, and policy makers. Given that children in disadvantaged contexts are at particular risk of poor access to music education, we prioritise our resources to supporting participants working and interacting with these children. By equipping participants with the learning and skills to improve children’s access to high-quality music education and to share that knowledge with others, we dramatically increase our impact for children, today and in the future. Training one primary school teacher to deliver high-quality music activities in their classroom, for example, could benefit up to 900 children over the course of that teacher’s career. Once confident to share their learning with other educators, this impact is further multiplied.

The tables on the next two pages indicate how we think we will create change for each of the groups that we work with. We present not just the activities that we will deliver and the outcomes and impacts that we want to achieve, but also the qualities of those activities and the mechanisms that will lead to our intended outcomes and impacts. Being specific about the qualities of our work and the change mechanisms involved makes our Theory of Change more robust; it sets a standard for our activities and prevents assumptions about the success of our work from going unchecked.

Through creating a Theory of Change, we recognised that there are additional activities, beyond our current offer, that we will need to deliver to reach our goals. To distinguish between our current activities and intended future activities, these new areas of development are indicated in italics.

School senior leaders				
Activities	Qualities	Mechanisms	Outcomes	Impact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long-term strategic Continuing Professional Development and Learning (CPDL) partnerships with schools, leading to whole-school musical development • Collaborative and responsive training for senior leaders • <i>Sharing of expert music education advice and guidance through written and digital resources, such as online briefing papers</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear communication about how embedding high-quality music in school life can help accelerate development for pupils and staff, and how senior leaders can do more to support in-school music learning • Tailored to school leaders' needs and school development goals • Highest quality of deliverability, led by a skilled workforce • Progress indicators and opportunities for co-reflection are embedded in practice to enable evidence-informed learning in real time as well as summative outcome evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School leaders and Voices Foundation co-learn about how to embed music into daily life at the whole-school level, and see the value that this brings to pupils • School leaders feel equipped and empowered with knowledge and skills to advocate for music education 	School leaders have: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased understanding about the value of music to their school, including for disadvantaged learners • Increased knowledge of, and investment in, the role that they can play in supporting music in their school • Desire and self-efficacy to defend budget allocations for music and support staff to deliver music activity • Skills to develop clear frameworks for effective in-school music education going forwards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A culture change for music – school leaders understand the importance of music, believe that every child should have access to a high-quality music education, and create the resource necessary to enable all school staff to prioritise music education
<p>Example journey: A school senior leader takes part in a strategic in-school CPDL partnership with Voices Foundation. By learning with Voices Foundation about how to embed music into daily school life, seeing visible improvements in pupils' skills and wellbeing as a result, and feeling empowered and equipped through mentoring with our practitioners, they gain an increased understanding of the benefits of music and the desire to defend budget allocations for music education. As a result, music education is valued in their school and resourced as a priority.</p>				

Teachers				
Activities	Qualities	Mechanisms	Outcomes	Impact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long-term strategic CPDL partnerships with schools, leading to whole school music development • Tailored teacher training and development courses to meet specific needs • Resources to support self-guided music learning • <i>Sharing of expert music education</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear communication about how teachers can support in-school music learning • Tailored to fit around teachers' starting points, aspirations for their pupils, capacity and schedule, putting teachers (and their CPDL) at the core • Highest quality of deliverability, led by a skilled workforce • Progress indicators and opportunities for co-reflection are embedded in practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers have the capacity to actively participate and feel secure and open to learning, supported by expert practitioners in a collaborative environment that allows for mistakes • They feel autonomy in their learning, and by learning through doing, 	Teachers have: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased understanding of the benefits of music activity for pupils, including disadvantaged learners • Increased desire to provide pupils with access to music education in their classroom • Improved confidence to lead music and singing activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All teachers recognise the benefits of music; prioritise its delivery; have the skills and confidence to deliver high-quality music education to all pupils; and share their learning with others.

advice and guidance through written and digital resources, such as online briefing papers	to enable evidence-informed learning in real time as well as summative outcome evaluation	they see their own progress <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers and Voices Foundation co-learn about how to embed music in daily school life, and the value this brings to pupils 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased knowledge and skills to teach music effectively 	
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Example journey: A teacher takes part in a strategic in-school CPDL partnership with Voices Foundation. Because the programme is high-quality, clear, consistent, and tailored to their needs, they feel confident to have a go and are open to learning. As the programme progresses, they see pupils developing new skills, increasing social connections, and responding more quickly to instructions when music is used. At the same time, they feel equipped with music skills and empowered to lead musical activity. They continue to use music regularly in their classrooms when the programme ends.

Parents and guardians

Activities	Qualities	Mechanisms	Outcomes	Impact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invitations to school performances/celebrations throughout the year Resources to support self-guided at-home learning, including video content Parents and guardians are engaged in our in-school activity from the offset and enabled to support their child's musical learning at home 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clear and consistent messaging about music and its benefits High-quality resources that are easy to use and accessible Resources are tailored to parents/guardians and encourage fun family time as well as educational benefits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents and guardians feel clear about the benefits of music for their child They trust Voices Foundation practitioners as experts and feel confident and able to use our resources They have fun with music and as a family They see the positive impact of music activity on their child 	Parents and guardians have: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased awareness of music activity taking place in school Increased understanding of the importance of musical learning for their child's development Increased desire to engage in music with their child Confidence to engage in musical activities with their child 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents understand the importance of music to their child's lifelong development, have the resources to encourage their child to participate, and champion music widely

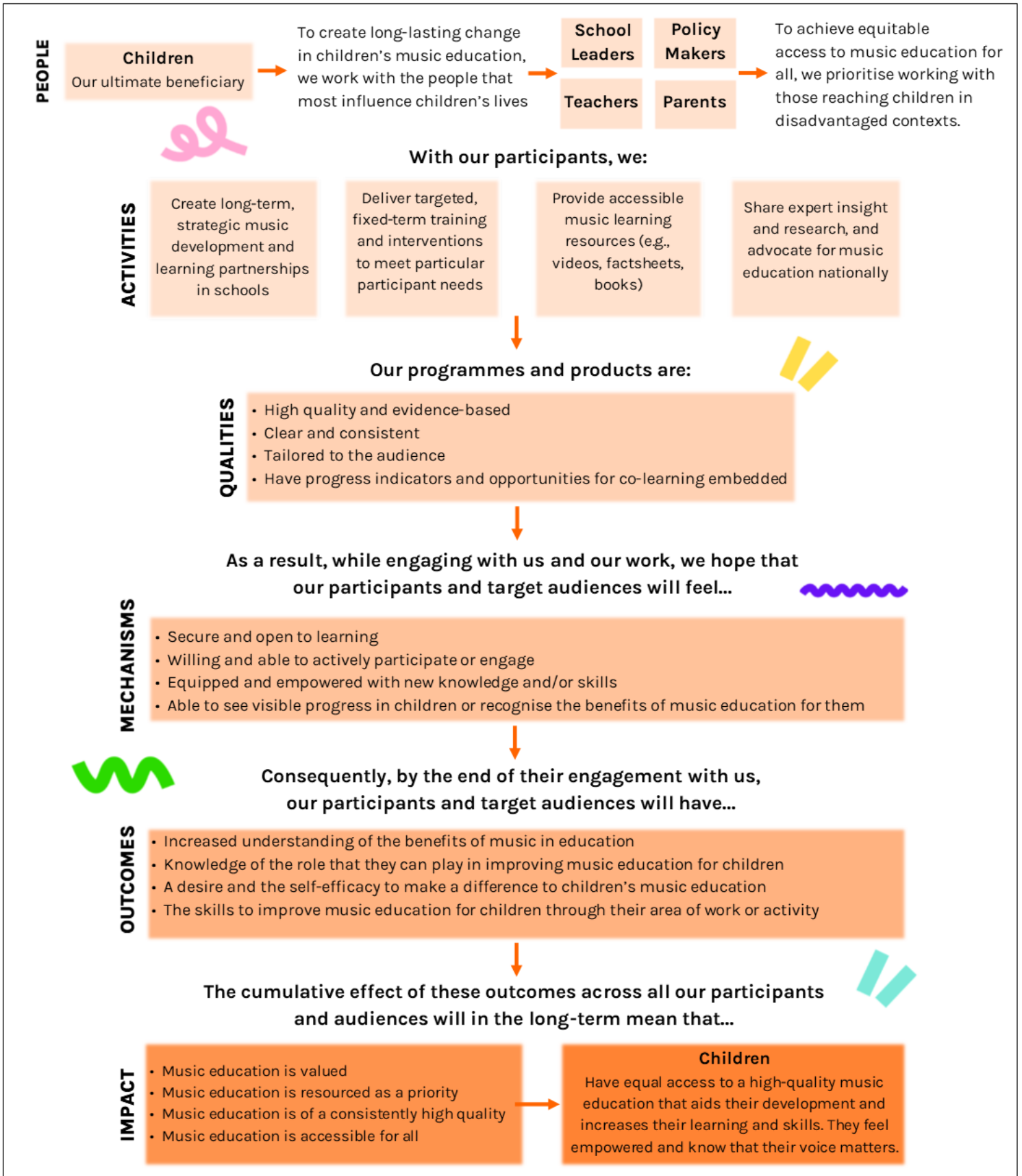
Example journey: A parent or guardian engages with our YouTube video content, which provides short and engaging bursts of musical activity and learning. They find the resource high quality and easy to use. Whilst taking part, they see their child having fun, building their social and emotional skills, and learning more about music. They also enjoy participating themselves and feel connected with their child. As a result, they recognise the benefits of music for children and support their child's engagement in further music activities, both at home and at school.

Policy makers and influencers				
Activities	Qualities	Mechanisms	Outcomes	Impacts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Voices Foundation staff speak at conferences, on panels, and host learning events Sharing of expert music education advice and guidance through written and digital resources, such as online briefing papers Advocacy work to call for changes to national music education guidance Partnerships with similar sector organisations to create a movement to transform music education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clear and consistent communication about music and its benefits Tailored content that understands and meets policy makers where they are, working with them to realise change High-quality resources and content, informed by rigorous research and evaluation Progress indicators and opportunities for co-reflection are embedded to enable evidence-informed learning in real time, including about the benefits of music activity for disadvantaged learners, as well as summative outcome evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy makers and sector influencers trust Voices Foundation's resources and are therefore secure and open to learning They are able to recognise the benefits of music education for children They feel equipped with knowledge about the value of music education and understand the need for change 	Policy makers and sector influences have: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased understanding of the benefits of music and recognition of the essential need for music in education in England Increased awareness of the role that they can play in changing views of music education Desire to improve music education for children Skills and knowledge to advocate for music education in their activities or work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The education curriculum reflects the value of music learning The education system supports and funds high-quality music education, including providing comprehensive music training in Initial Teacher Training to ensure that all schools in England provide a high-quality music education as standard
<p>Example journey: A policy maker reads a briefing paper on the value of music education in schools. The paper is clear, consistent, and based on rigorous evidence. As a result, the policy maker feels open to learning and able to trust the findings that are reported. Consequently, they recognise the essential need for music in education, and support curriculum and assessment changes that reflect this need.</p>				

Whilst the activities for each of the groups that we work with vary, the change that we want to see, and the process by which we think this change will be achieved, is similar across all groups. By the end of their engagement with us, we aim for all our participants and audiences to have an understanding of the benefits of music in education and the desire and skill to improve children's music education through their work or activities. We think that the cumulative impact of these individual outcomes across all the people that we work with will be systemic change to children's music education in England:

Our beneficiaries: Children in England	
Cumulative effect of Voices Foundation's work	Ultimate impact for children
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Senior school leaders, teachers, parents, and policy makers understand the benefits of music in education; know how they can improve children's music education; and have the desire, self-efficacy, and skills to improve music education through their work or activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All children in England have equal access to a high-quality music education that aids their development; supports their learning; and increases their musical skills, personal skills, and wellbeing. Children feel empowered and know that their voice matters.

Theory of Change Summary Diagram



Implementation

Our Theory of Change will inform future decisions at all levels and areas of our organisation, forming the foundations of our programme, communications, evaluation, and organisational strategy. Our Theory of Change will:

- Guide our programme and product decisions, enabling us to ensure that all our activity contributes to achieving our intended outcomes.
- Guide our branding and messaging in external communications, ensuring that our organisation's purpose is clear to stakeholders.
- Serve as the foundation for a rigorous evaluation framework that enables us to assess whether we are achieving our intended outcomes and impact. Through evaluation, we will explore whether the change that we aim to create is being achieved and learn how to improve our progress. We are currently refining our evaluation framework in collaboration with the Centre for Use of Research and Evidence in Education (CUREE).
- Guide decisions about organisational strategy and budgeting, enabling us to best position our resources to meet our intended outcomes.

Summary

Creating Voices Foundation's Theory of Change has been an energising process. Going forward, our Theory of Change provides us with a clear roadmap for transforming music education for children in England, and it empowers us to direct all our energies towards achieving that mission.

Notes

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¹⁴ Savage, J., & Barnard, D. (2019). *The state of play: A review of music education in England 2019*. Brighton, UK: University of Sussex.

¹⁵ Department for Education. (2018). *The School Snapshot Survey: Summer 2018*. London: DfE.

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