



MAKING RHYTHMS

A toolkit for running music sessions
with people with learning disabilities

By Emma Williams



INTRODUCTION

This toolkit is for activity co-ordinators and staff working with people with learning disabilities. It can be used as a guide by new or experienced staff. It will enable you to create an environment for running music based activities within care home settings. The techniques and workshop sessions in this toolkit could be adapted to suit many diverse groups and settings.

Prior to the toolkit, an audit was conducted by City Arts, working in partnership with Nottinghamshire County Council. This was followed by training sessions with care staff and new freelance artists, delivered by professional musician Emma Williams.

The initial audit was established in order to scope where current arts activities are being delivered in residential care homes for people with learning disabilities in particular areas such as Gedling and Rushcliffe. The training sessions have helped to inform and shape this toolkit.

Emma Williams is an independent musician who facilitates private tuition alongside extensive and specialist music based projects with many different groups in the region. Emma has broad knowledge in working with people with learning disabilities and also has delivered training programmes in enabling creativity.

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WHAT IS COVERED IN A MUSIC SESSION?

Music can be explored in many ways, by playing instruments; making sounds with the voice; playing objects and listening to sounds and recorded pieces of work. During a session you can include skills such as technique, expressing creativity such as making sounds yourself, finding sounds in your environment and also focusing on listening to other's sounds and then contributing to the overall sound.

Below are some of the things you could explore in your sessions with your group.

- **Ability to focus:** The development of an individual's or group attention spans and patience are important. How long can you keep the focus, can this be expanded each session? Giving others an opportunity to contribute and being aware of other participant's contributions
- **Watching:** Promote the use of eye contact with the conductor and other participants. Encourage opportunities for communication, following signals, copying techniques and watching and listening to each other
- **Listening:** *Passive listening* includes general listening skills by taking in many sounds at the same time i.e. room noises, birds, clocks etc..

Focused listening requires focusing the mind and the ability to ignore outside sounds and ignore our visual senses i.e. focusing in on the music listening experience and thinking of questions in the mind to answer

- **Technical skills and co-ordination:** Learning how to copy techniques from the workshop leader, being creative with ways of making sounds and exploring different sound worlds can lead to the production of some innovative work

Developing hand eye co-ordination, and time keeping can be explored through the voice by singing or by exploring different vocal sounds

Learning how to control a range of technical skills by stopping, starting, dynamics, tempo and following the leader can enhance skills of when to play and when not to play

- **Improvisation:** Creative play time is important in the development of ideas, being in the moment and total immersion in the activity. This approach can help shape further work through the development of more ideas and constantly adding and linking ideas together.

Some challenges may arise when the workshop leader needs to maintain the flow of the session when some participants are immersed in the activity whilst others may not be. It's a balancing act!

FACTORS OF CREATIVITY

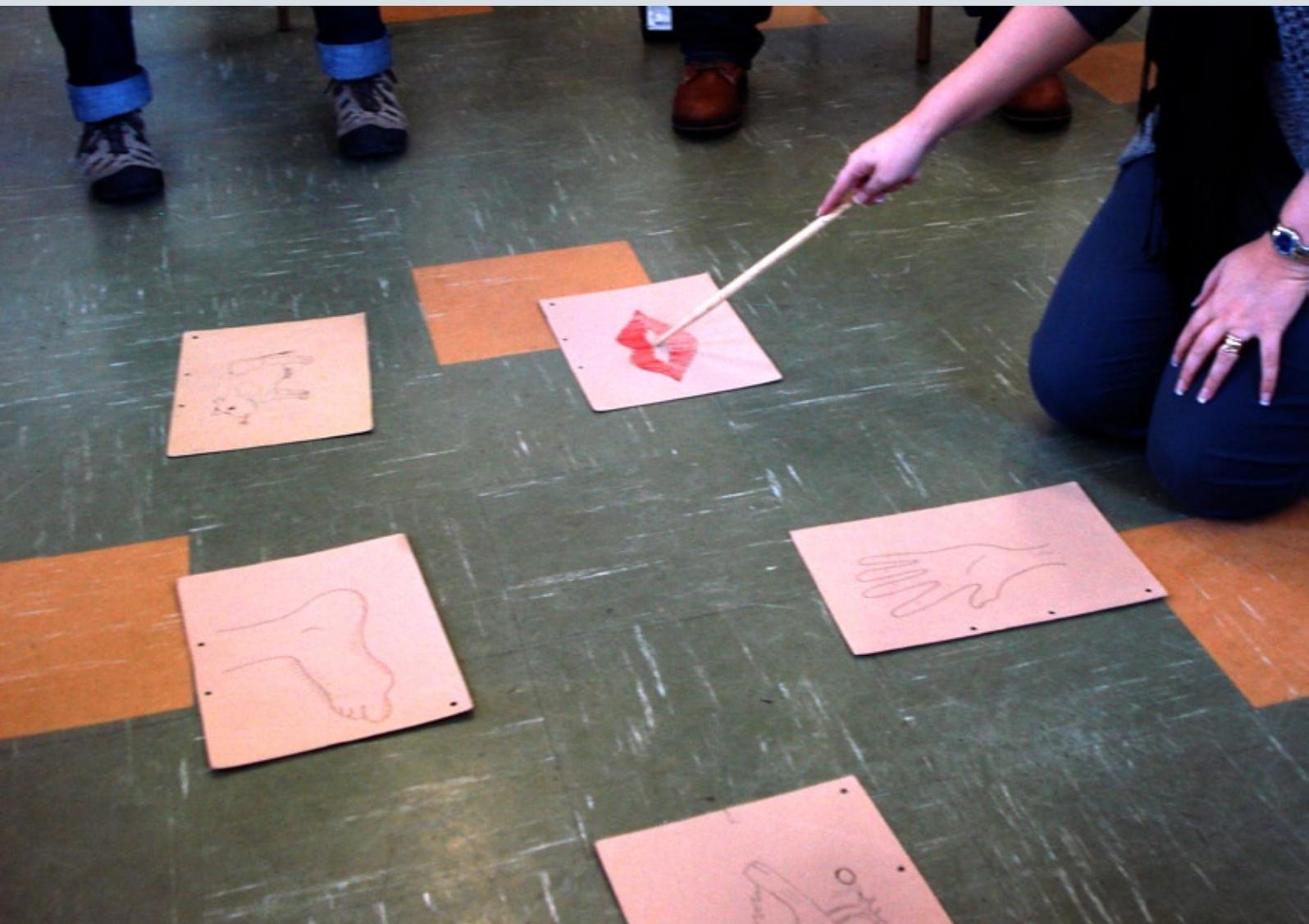
What is it that needs to be in place to allow participants, artists and care staff the opportunity to be creative during a session?

These factors can be categorised into the following sections:

1. BEFORE

2. DURING, AND

3. AFTER THE SESSION





BEFORE THE SESSION

Space to hold the session

- **A blank canvas – a space that is not visually distracting, a need to be able to focus in the space**
- **A quiet space for listening to each other's sounds and where recordings can take place**
- **An uninterrupted space without distractions**
- **A place to keep instruments safe (whilst having a break or lunch)**

Resources you need for the session

- **Equipment – instruments, interesting *found* sounds in the space**
- **Resources as a source for inspiration – i.e. visual images, colours, objects such as stones, ideas for rhythms and movement**
- **How are you going to present the musical equipment to the group/individual's you are working with?**
 - **are the instruments introduced to the group one at a time**
 - **are they hidden at first (covered)**
 - **are they passed around to explore**
 - **are they already being played whilst the group enter the space**
- **Keeping a record of the work through film (flips/digital cameras), photographs, progress/evaluation records.**

DURING THE SESSION

The process during the session

- **Begin with common ground and with approaches that the group feels comfortable with i.e. everyone having the same instrument, feeling equal**
- **Allow people to explore and be curious with the instruments and sounds**
- **Allow for flexibility within the process and do not feel that things have to run to a fixed schedule. The best ideas come out of chaos! However try to keep a consistent flow throughout the session**
- **Initiate problem solving in positive ways**
- **Support participants to be independent learners**
- **In order to reach all abilities you may have to layer ideas in order to stretch some people and allow others to be involved at their own level. For example this may mean layering difficult and easier rhythms**
- **Support participants to express themselves. This helps everyone to feel involved in the process and have ownership over the work produced**
- **Acknowledge everyone's ideas by not restricting the creativity and constantly giving positive feedback to build people's confidence.**

AFTER THE SESSION

Reflect on the process

- **Ask participants about the ideas i.e. what thoughts do they have, how did they feel during the session and did they enjoy it?**
- **How can the ideas from the session be developed?**
- **Finding the links between the ideas. Can one idea flow into another or be used simultaneously?**
- **Can ideas be turned upside down to find new ideas?**
- **Listen back to recordings. Can the group recognise themselves in the work? Can photos spark a memory or idea?**
- **What worked well and what could be improved**
- **Is there potential for the work created to be performed to friends, family, or other groups either in their own setting or externally.**

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

How an activity is introduced:

- **Choosing an instrument individually**
- **Being given an instrument or opportunity to join in**
- **Exploring instruments by passing them around participants in a circle**
- **Introducing a surprise element by keeping equipment covered**
- **Creating a space filled with sound as participants enter**

Control of the sound/focus:

- **Workshop leader providing clear instructions using verbal and non verbal language**
- **Participants following the conductor and listening to one another**
- **Following a score and cues from the score**
- **Focused listening tasks - eyes closed, keeping visual stimulus to a minimum**
- **Setting up a session in a circle ensures that a tight focus remains within the group**



The links between the activities:

- **Flowing without a stop – this provides a focus during the session**
- **Having a break before changing the activity**
- **Singing instructions to enable the focus to continue**
- **Ensure that connections are made between current and future activities**

Development:

- **Introduction of a new idea**
- **Gather ideas from the group to move the activity forward**
- **Can the idea be turned on its head? i.e. explore 'opposite' processes and sounds**
- **Can you accomplish the same idea with the voice as with instruments?**
- **Can the tempo/dynamic/sound world be changed?**

How the session finishes:

- **With a bang – dramatic ending**
- **Quiet musical ending, or fade out**
- **Meditation – bring back focus to the room, focussing on the here and now**
- **Gather feedback to inform the next session**

SESSION IDEAS: HOW TO DEVELOP RHYTHMS – WITH OR WITHOUT INSTRUMENTS

THE SHOE GAME!

- 1. Place the drums in the centre of the circle, supporting participants to pick up the drum that speaks to them**
- 2. Sitting in a circle, enable everyone to explore the sounds that the drum makes**
- 3. Pass a clap or drum hit around the circle. Start with the leader and continue around the circle until you have gone full circle. Try going the opposite way round. Can you increase the speed?**
- 4. Now make sure that everyone can see each other's shoes (sitting with or without drums)**
- 5. Place your feet flat on the floor in front of you. Starting with the leaders shoes, take turns around the circle doing a clap for each shoe**
- 6. Keep the claps in time to a pulse (like a ticking clock). If it helps to start with, have someone walking around the circle pointing at the shoes as you clap or play your drum. Be careful not to block anyone's view of the shoes – this is tricky!**
- 7. To make the rhythm more interesting we need to add more beats. If anyone has brown shoes do 2 claps or hits per shoe for that person and all the other shoes stay as one clap or hit. When you do 2 claps they need to be twice as fast as when you do 1 clap i.e. double speed**
- 8. Sometimes music has rests. This can be interpreted as no hits i.e. silence. The timing needs to be measured carefully so instead of doing a clap or hit you need to do a movement instead to mark the space of a clap or hit. For example punching the air, one punch for each shoe. (It needs to be a movement that does not make a sound therefore clicking your fingers is no good!)**
- 9. To change the rhythm again you can add more claps or hits per shoe. Or to keep it simpler you can change seats with another participant**

This will change the order of shoes and therefore change the rhythm!



SESSION IDEAS:

8 BEAT GAME!

- 1.** You can use an instrument to play this game or simply clap your hands. Sitting in a circle with your instrument everyone plays a steady pulse (a regular beat like a ticking clock). The leader can click the pulse or play it on an alternative instrument that is not already part of the group – i.e. a cowbell if everyone has a drum. The leader must also count out aloud (i.e. 1, 2, 3 etc up to 8) whilst playing the pulse
- 2.** The leader asks everyone to choose a number between 1 and 8. The leader then starts the pulse and counts out aloud. Participants have to play a beat (just one hit or clap) on the number they have chosen. This pulse keeps travelling around and the leader keeps counting aloud to establish where in the cycle they are
- 3.** The leader then stops counting the pulse out aloud. To help everyone the leader could perhaps just count out aloud beat 1. Eventually the leader stops counting altogether. The leader should ask questions to the group. Who plays on the same beat as you? Listen and watch this person to help you. Who plays just before you? Watch this person to help you play your beat correctly
- 4.** Eventually when the group is confident you could get them to close their eyes whilst playing to really concentrate on the cycle whilst counting the pulse still in their heads – this is tricky
- 5.** To make this game easier you could start with a 4 beat cycle, or to make it more difficult you could expand to longer beat cycles. Odd number cycles are also more difficult for example 7 or 9 beat cycles. Be adventurous and try a 16 beat cycle!

SESSION IDEAS:

PICTURE CARD CONDUCTING GAME!

How to develop awareness, watching and leading like a conductor - with or without instruments

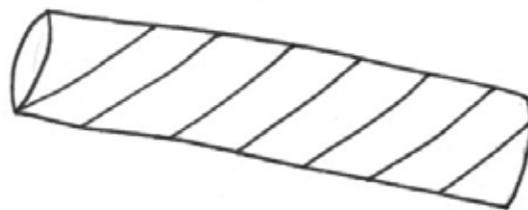
- 1. Sitting in a circle, place two A4 pieces of card on the floor in the middle of the circle so everyone in the group can see them. On the pieces of card are pictures. One is a picture of a hand and the other a foot**
- 2. Someone in the group has a stick and can either stand or sit in the centre of the circle, so they can point with the stick to the pictures. If they point to the picture of a hand, everyone else in the group has to make a sound using their hands i.e. clapping. If they point to the picture of the foot, everyone has to make a sound using their feet i.e. stamping**
- 3. To make the game more interesting if the conductor points to the floor itself, (i.e. not a picture card) then the group has to stop making any sounds at all**
- 4. You can then add more picture cards to the floor, for example, a picture of a mouth – the group has to make a sound using their mouth i.e. singing, whistling. You could add a picture of a cow – the group would have to make sounds that a cow makes, or perhaps add a picture of a chicken – the group would have to make chicken sounds**
- 5. To make this game more creative you could add a picture card with a picture of an alien. This is the 'creative card' and the group can make any sound that they wish. Get creative with your own pictures! Ask the group to make some picture cards!**
- 6. To make this game more musical you could have pictures of instruments on the picture cards, and split the group into sub groups. For example a group of drummers, a group of tambourines, a group of shakers, and the group can only play when the conductor points to the picture card with their instrument on it.**

HOW TO MAKE INSTRUMENTS

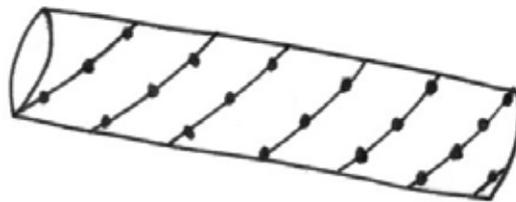
RAINMAKERS

You will need: cardboard tubes, nails (size depending on tubes, nails need to measure half the diameter of the tube), a hammer, gaffa tape, tissue paper, PVA glue, gravel/peas and rice, thin cardboard, pens and any other decorative things you may have.

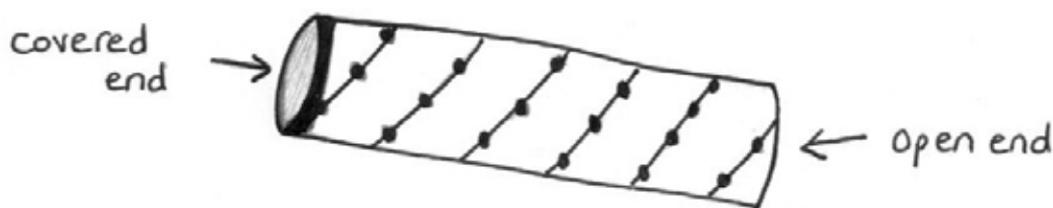
- 1. First of all choose a cardboard tube and trim the ends if necessary so they are even. Using a pen draw a spiral from one end of the tube to the other.**



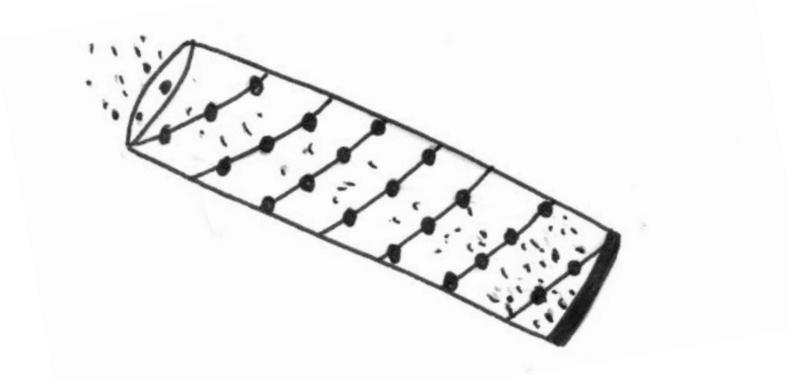
- 2. Find some nails (half the diameter of the tube) and hammer into the tube along the spiral line. Hammer in a nail every 2-3cms.**



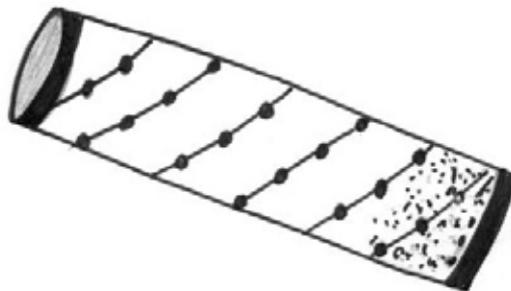
- 3. Once you have hammered in the nails along your spiral (the more nails you have the better your rainmaker will sound!), next cover one end of the tube using paper or thin cardboard and gaffa tape.**



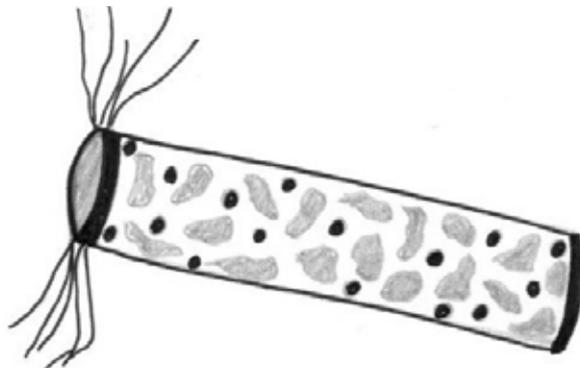
- 4.** Add one or two handfuls of gravel or peas and rice to your rainmaker. Cover the other end with your hand. Holding the end tightly try tilting your rainmaker, does it make a good sound? If not try adding more gravel or peas and rice



- 5.** When you are satisfied with your rainmaker, cover the open end with thin cardboard and tape to secure



- 6.** You can now decorate your rainmaker by covering it with colourful tissue paper and PVA glue. You can also add any other decorative things you may have.



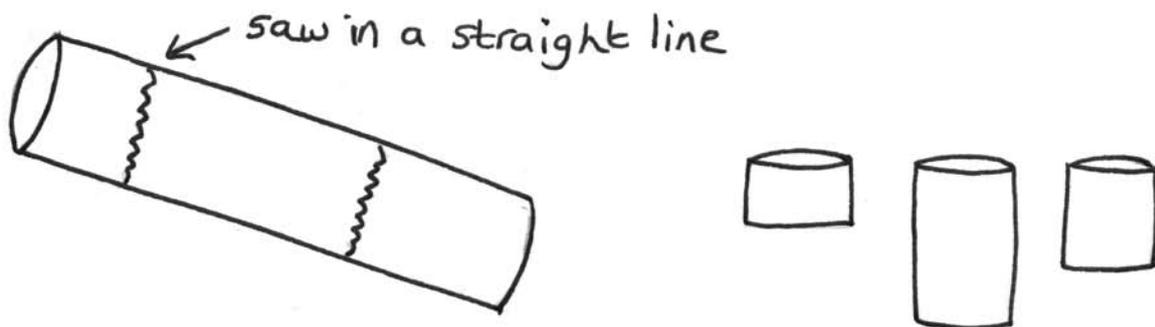
Tip – Why not try to make a 6ft rainmaker with your group. You will need a big carpet tube for this. Make sure you use big enough nails! You will need 2 adults to tilt your rainmaker to make a sound as it may be heavy.

HOW TO MAKE INSTRUMENTS

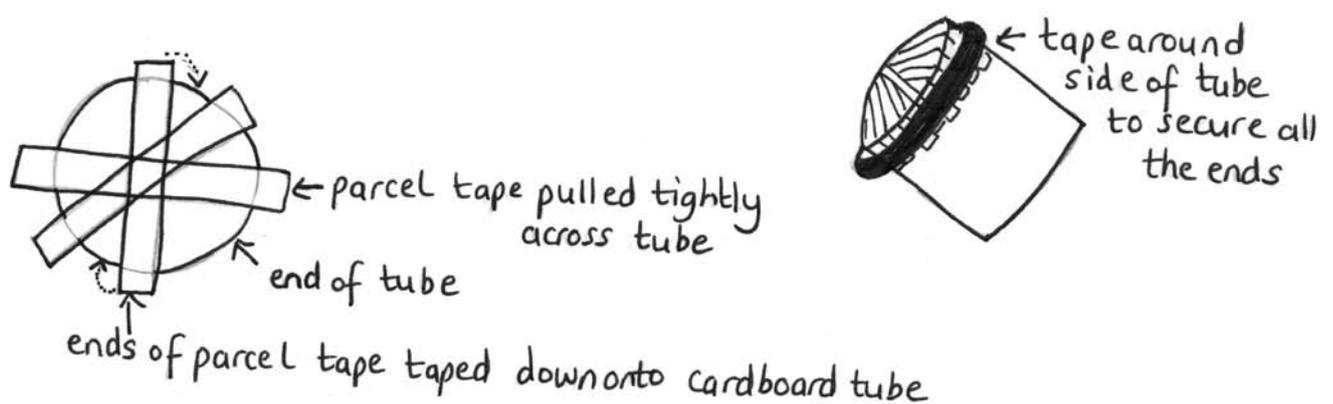
DRUMS

You will need: carpet tubes (made from thick cardboard), a hacksaw, parcel tape, tissue paper, PVA glue, pea sticks, gaffa tape, string, sellotape, and any other decorative things you may have.

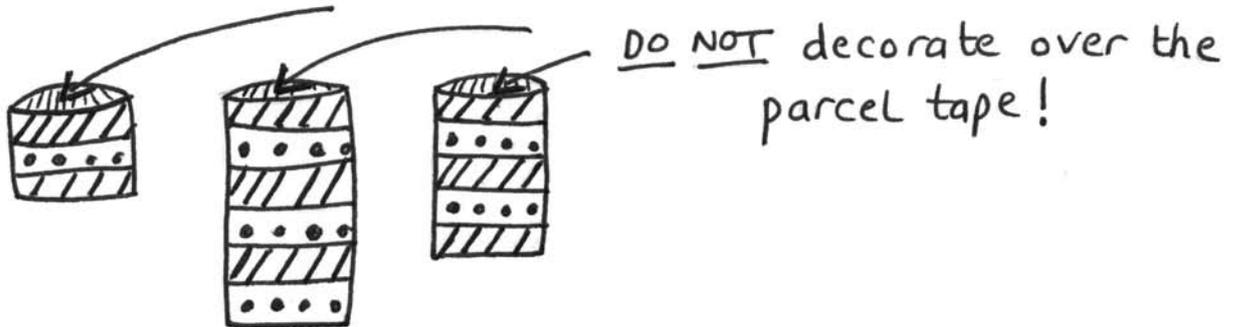
1. Using a hacksaw saw you tubes into 3 bits. They can be different sizes to make 3 different pitches in sound.



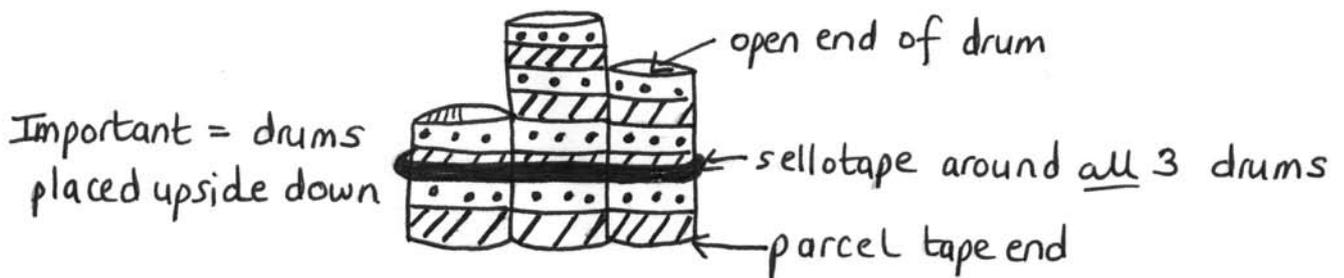
2. Using parcel tape cut into strips very tightly and pull both ends of the tape across the diameter of one end of the tube. Cover the end of the tube completely in parcel tape making sure you do not leave any gaps. The tape must be pulled very tight to make a good skin for your drum, ensuring it makes a good sound. Now tape around the side of the tube covering all the other ends of the parcel tape to secure it.



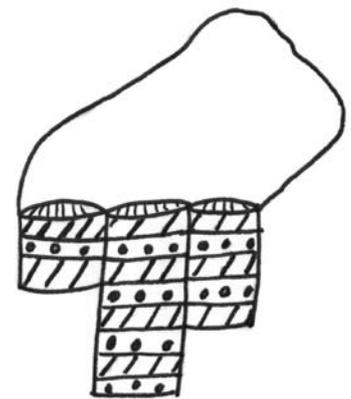
- 3.** Decorate your drums using tissue paper and PVA glue. It is very important that you do not decorate over the skin of your drum i.e. the parcel-taped end, as this is the end that you will need to hit to play your drums.



- 4.** Using sellotape tape your 3 drums together. Place your drums next to each other upside down (so that the skin of your drum is facing down). Now put tape around all the drums as they are placed together to hold them firm.



- 5.** Add string to the drums so that you can hang them around your neck to play them, leaving your hands free to hold the sticks! Make sure that the string is long enough, the drums need to hang at waist height to play them.



- 6.** To make sticks for your drums you will need 2 pea sticks and gaffa tape. Attach gaffa tape to one end of the stick and wind around it to make a beater head. You are now ready to play your drums!



WHERE TO GET RESOURCES

Ghana Goods

Sell Djembes; £24.00 for 6"x15", or £60.00 for 10"x21"

Balafons; (African xylophones) £90.00 for 8 note, or £110.00 for 10 note

Shakers from £1.50

www.ghanagoods.com

Knock on Wood

Sell African percussion packs from £41.69, or £134.61 (includes 1 small Balafon and 1 small Djembe)

Economy Djembe packs £181.00

Balafons £176.00 for 15 note

www.knockonwood.co.uk

Ebay

Try and get your group a bargain and bid for instruments on ebay! A tub of 40 egg shakers for £30.00

www.ebay.co.uk

Goldcoast Drums

Sell and hire drums and Balafons

www.goldcoastdrums.com

Soar Valley Music

Sell Djembes; £40.00 for 7"

Balafons; £99.00 for 8 note, or £199.00 for 12 note beaters £16.00

Shakers £5.99

www.soarvalleymusic.co.uk

Drumming Culture West Africa

Sell Large Djembes from £49.99, or small Djembes from £3.99-£19.99

www.african-drumming.co.uk



City Arts Nottingham aims to develop and inspire arts participation that brings people together, stimulates change and creates stronger, healthier communities.

This aim stems from our belief that participation in the arts can enrich and transform people's lives and we have been pioneering innovative and creative approaches for over 30 years.

City Arts has a community focused approach to the development of the arts and its staff. Commissioned artists have a wide range of skills to enable them to work with groups or individuals, including some who are marginalised, face particular barriers to inclusion, or have personal issues that can be supported through the arts.

To achieve our aims we:

- **Direct resources towards creative work with vulnerable and marginalised groups including at risk young people, exiled communities, people with enduring mental health issues and others with specific needs**
- **Develop outdoor arts that happen in accessible community spaces, raise the profile of the arts and encourage wide audience engagement**
- **Develop programmes and partnerships that enable participants to access wider cultural, learning, volunteering and employment opportunities**
- **Support artists with training and resources to achieve the highest quality artistic and social outcomes in our programmes**
- **Advocate for the benefits of participation in the arts through partnership work and by developing and disseminating research-based evidence**
- **Ensure sustainability is based on robust business models and the continuous building of new markets**

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This report is one of three practical handbooks that carers, activity co-ordinators, health professionals and support workers can use to develop creative activities with individuals and groups.



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