



## **Wren Music at Northam Lodge Summary report March 2017**



## NORTHAM LODGE - working with SEN adults - summary of ongoing work



Wren Music is Devon's folk music and education charity.

Wren is currently in its 3rd year providing regular music sessions at Northam Lodge, Bideford.

Northam Lodge is a day and residential centre for adults with multiple and profound disabilities.

Wren's initial involvement began in 2013 as part of a joint project to run sessions and to train staff in music provision. At the end of the project, Wren were hired on a weekly basis by the centre, which pays directly for the sessions. This work is ongoing, nearly every week of the year.

This overview of the work is divided into several sections:

- What is Northam Lodge and what does it do?
- How does Wren fit in?
- What are the sessions for?
- What is a "typical" music session?
- What is new?
- Quotes from staff and participants
- Summary, conclusion, and what next?
- Appendix



## What is Northam Lodge and what does it do?

Northam Lodge is a day and residential centre for adults with multiple and profound disabilities. There are 2 main centres, one at Rose Hill, Heywood Road, Bideford, which is the day centre.



Clients here have a wide range of abilities; some are able to walk and speak and form full sentences and complex ideas. Others are wheelchair-bound and some have no speech at all. Many of these people are in supported living or at home with family, and attend daily from Monday to Friday.

The other centre is known as “the house” and is officially Northam Lodge, on Northam Road, Northam. Clients here exhibit more profound needs, are nearly all wheelchair-bound, and most live on-site 365 days per year.

Music sessions are run in both settings, one after the other. From now on, the organisation will be referred to as Northam Lodge or the centre, and Rose Hill and The House will be used to denote each setting.

## How does Wren fit in?

Wren was asked to provide music for Northam Lodge as part of a successful 2013 funding bid from G4A to introduce music to clients, and to train staff in assisting with, and providing some music sessions. This project was extremely successful, and a full project report can be found [HERE](#).

Northam Lodge had this to say about the original project:

***“At Northam Lodge, the people who use our services (our ‘clients’) all have learning disabilities and most also have physical disabilities as well. In the past, clients were in the audience – they’d sit and listen. But we wanted them to take part, to be creative and engaged. We gained a grant from Arts Council England to do a year long project with this in mind.***

***The project has been brilliant; it has made a massive difference and we’ve had great feedback. We’ve seen such a change in people because they can now take part in music, it is inclusive. It’s just wonderful, seeing their confidence grow. And it has also increased the confidence of staff, to know that they are able to help our clients to make music.”*** - Northam Lodge Music Project Manager

The legacy of the work is: an increased sense of confidence around music for both clients and staff; the ability of some staff to provide independent musical input in Wren’s absence; the continuation of a successful relationship, and employment for Wren staff at the centre.





***“What Wren have brought to the project is their musical expertise. They have helped us to deliver a structured programme which has enabled people to develop skills, and this can often be difficult because of their cognitive abilities. Because of the professional training they are getting from Wren, Northam Lodge staff are able to deliver music sessions that are moving people forward; more people are developing skills and confidence. For example, more people are learning to play the guitar or keyboard, so they are working towards something and achieving an outcome. It has been hugely successful.***

***The groups have been really vibrant, consistently well-attended and with an enormous amount of energy. Because of Wren coming in, staff are then able to give lessons and clients are more keen to give it a go. This project fits in completely with an exciting, person-centred service. I’ve seen this energy, you can feel and hear it, and it’s made us think about how we deliver our services.” - Northam Lodge Chief Executive***



Wren’s ongoing work is without brief from Northam Lodge, showing the trust placed in Wren to deliver high quality sessions to the clients. The sessions are a mix of singing, signing (Makaton and BSL) songwriting, instrument playing, conversation and dance.

### **What are the sessions for?**

The answers to this question are many and varied, and will depend upon who is asked, but here is an attempt to outline some of the justification, and outputs/outcomes.

- One of the main reasons for undertaking this work is to provide good fun and an increased quality of life for Northam Lodge clients
- There are some learning outcomes, from increased cognitive and speech function (singing and signing) through to ability in storytelling and constructing a narrative (songwriting, conversation), depending on the clients involved.
- There are some health outcomes; especially mental health, but also physical health as it relates to breathing (singing), movement (dancing) and fine motor skills (instrument playing)
- There are outcomes for Northam Lodge staff in terms of increased confidence both in music, and also in running and managing group sessions, as well as communication techniques (singing, signing, conversation)
- There are positive outcomes for Wren in building such a long-term relationship in a setting which does not prescribe particular content. New ideas can be tested and trialled over long periods that may well fall outside the remit of a traditionally funded project (more on these later)

### **What is a typical music session?**

Sessions are held every Thursday (except bank holidays) in both Rose Hill and the House. They are 1 hour each and run from 10 - 11 at Rose Hill and from 11.30 - 12.30 at the House. Usually there is one Wren staff member, and one Wren volunteer, with some Northam Lodge staff (numbers dependent on client numbers, but could be 2 clients to 1 staff) and some Northam Lodge volunteers (who help with the overall programme).

The morning begins with a bluesy “Hello” song written by Wren staff, which welcomes each client by name. This is important for the self-efficacy of clients, and is an extremely valued part of the session by some.

Each week, the song “Working Again” is featured second. This gives an opportunity for clients to talk about their week, or things that relate to the weekly theme (see below) and to have these ideas put into song.



Third comes a vocal and physical warm-up. This is a mixture of basic stretches, making sounds and breathing practise.

These 3 items start every session, as it is important to give a good familiar start so clients are aware that they are “doing music” and can focus on the songs and generating ideas for the rest of the session.

After this, the sessions may vary more, but would include another general song or two, perhaps some dance (either from traditional British dance forms, or even the Hokey-Cokey!) and some instrument playing.

Songs are chosen for their melodic and lyrical content: they must be easy to sing and remember, and the lyrics must have relevance to the clients, either through reflecting some aspect of their lives, or being “customisable” like Working Again. The focus is on reflecting the nature of individuals, but singing as a group.

The instrument section is a very important and unique part of Wren’s work:

Wren brings a collection of acoustic folk instruments from violins and guitars, to accordions and concertinas, as well as the more usual hand-percussion. Clients are encouraged to choose an instrument, either to play by themselves or with help from care staff.

The music leader plays a melody on their chosen instrument (e.g. violin, flute or accordion) and then clients (and playing staff) are invited to join in with solos or in small groups on their instruments. It is important for staff who are not actively “caring” to join in at this point, as it sets a positive example, as well as increasing their own facility to use music when Wren is not there.



When everyone has had a turn, the leader will encourage the whole group to play as a band. Stringed instruments are tuned to open tunings (e.g. Guitars to DADAAD) so no facility other than strumming is required to begin with. The level of difficulty can be increased as the weeks progress, or people can stay where they are, learning to have fun and also to develop motor skills and listening/starting/stopping skills.

Again, the emphasis is on developing as an individual, but playing as a group.





At the end of the session, a “Goodbye” song, modelled on the “Hello” song is often used to give a definitive end to the session and then we discuss seeing everyone next time, and what we’re looking forward to.

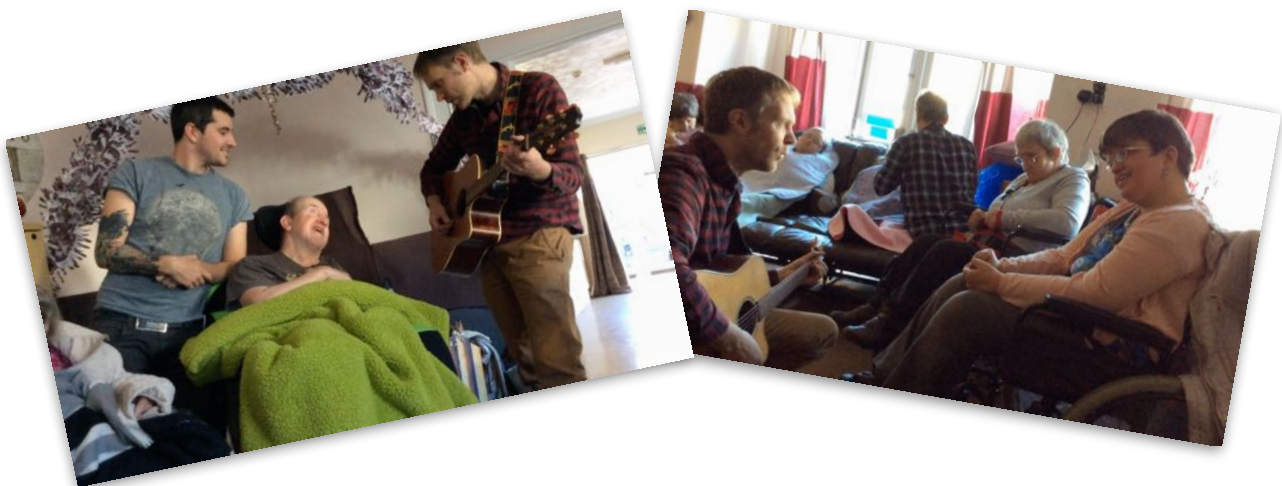
At the end of the 2013 project, Wren produced a songbook of the pieces used and created at Northam Lodge. If you would like more information, or to use any of the songs please [contact us...](#)



### What is new?

There are some new developments to the sessions, which have been worked on since the first project finished and the work continued under direct payment from Northam Lodge. These developments are guided and led by the music leaders and the clients rather than being prescribed by the setting. They include:

- Using 6-week “themes” for the music. Themes already covered include “Growing things”, “Sailing and the Sea” and “Getting a job”.
- The themes allow clients to build up some knowledge of a set of songs, but also to learn about activities (e.g. What was it like on a pirate ship?) to the point where they can begin to make their own confident suggestions about song content by the end of each theme. “I think I’ll scrub the deck!” Themes also help the music leaders to plan and stay fresh in their delivery in these very ongoing sessions (probably 48 weeks of the year)
- Signing. Increasingly we are trying to incorporate full communication techniques including signing into the sessions. When new songs are planned, music leaders can use Makaton or BSL online dictionaries to look up important words to bring to the group. Also, some clients and staff are skilled signers and can be called upon to demonstrate their special skill to the group. This further embeds the use of different communication techniques amongst Northam Lodge staff, and Wren staff. There are various ideas afoot about producing signed and sung videos for Youtube!



## Quotes from staff and participants

**“The sensory element is so important for our clients. It’s the feeling of the nylon strings, the ‘ringing-through’ feeling in the hands and the vibration of the percussion. Just to be able to use real instruments and to feel success is very uplifting.” - Training day participant**

**“The lessons make it easy for you to ‘get it’ quickly. It means I can now actually sit down with our clients in a 1-2-1 setting and help and support them. They’re getting to play instruments such as guitars, violins and dulcimers.” - Care worker**

**“Training has been good and we are both now on the weekly workshop sessions so we can join in and shadow the Wren musicians. We feel more confident now as time has gone on. We have a group of core songs that happen every week and this works for our group. Although it’s repetitive, the group know them really well now and that’s important.” - Northam Lodge support worker and project trainee**



**“It’s been really good to learn methods and techniques that not only sounds good but are also simple. It helps to get our sessions interactive so that people aren’t being played to, but are actually doing the playing.” - Northam Lodge care worker**

**“Being able to take part in music is hugely empowering and it gives our clients more confidence, not just with music but in life in general.” - Training day participant**

### **Summary, Conclusion, and what next?**

The Wren Music sessions at Northam Lodge are a great example of what can be done with ongoing funding and input. Music seems well embedded at the centre and staff are much more relaxed about joining in. There is an ethos that music is “OK”. Sometimes it’s hard to stop staff joining in enthusiastically!!

We look forward to developing our relationship with Northam Lodge and other SEN settings, through upcoming projects like “Make Music, Make a Change”, and to developing and sharing our resources and skills with other providers.

For more information, to book Wren Music, or to talk to us about new projects and ideas, please call 01837 53754, email [info@wrenmusic.co.uk](mailto:info@wrenmusic.co.uk) or visit [www.wrenmusic.co.uk](http://www.wrenmusic.co.uk)