

Umbilical Chords

Summary Report

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University of Essex, ABSS Programme Evaluation

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1. Project overview

This document is a summary of findings from the formative evaluation undertaken by the research and evaluation team at the University of Essex. The report presents thematised findings from four rounds of evaluation reports. It covers the time period from the 1st of October 2021 to the 31st of March 2024. The purpose of this summary report is to provide a snapshot view of the project's journey through key qualitative and quantitative insights and its impact on beneficiaries' lives. This report integrates analysis of Key Performance Indicators (KPI), interview and survey data across all previous reports and including the final evaluation period (up to 31st March 2024).

The Umbilical Chords project began delivery in January 2021. It is delivered by Southend YMCA and is aimed at families in ABSS wards with a child(ren) aged 0 to 2. The project delivers a six-week early years music group for children and their parents, with the overarching aim of encouraging communication skills, musical development, and socialisation. These sessions provide children and their parents with the opportunity to sing songs and make music together.

Music sessions aim to:

- Support and enhance children's communication and language development, through the use of rhyme and song.
- Encourage musical development and the love of music from an early age.
- Enable parents to continue communication and language development within the home (providing parents with a musical resource they can use at home).
- Support the auditory discrimination, phonological awareness, vocabulary development and auditory memory for children.
- Encourage volunteering and parental involvement.
- Reduce isolation for new parents and promote friendship.

The project seeks to achieve its aims by:

- Linking language to physical and practical experiences while helping babies to recognise sounds around them.
- Instilling a good sense of pulse and pitch which helps with phonics later.
- Using a wide variety of simple songs which helps babies to understand new words and ideas.
- Using repetition regularly as well as introducing new material gradually.
- Interacting with babies, giving them a chance to express themselves effectively.
- Using simple rhymes and corresponding facial expressions to help with speech and emotional development.
- Using and developing ideas from parents or babies during the class.
- Encouraging communication and interaction between parents and child(ren) during the session.
- Encouraging exploration together between parent and child and teacher and child through using a wide variety of props and musical instruments.

The sessions also seek to support social and emotional development through:

- Providing the opportunity for parent and child to spend quality time together.

- Helping babies to manage their feelings and behaviour by having a group structure that is the same each week so that they become more confident knowing what to expect.
- Supporting the relationship between parent and child, assisting them to sing with each other and listen to one another.

The project adopts a theory of change and logic model chain to explain how change will be understood. The logic model suggests the following:

- By delivering Umbilical Chords, parents will explore with their child a wide variety of props, musical instruments, and music. This will lead to communication and language and social and emotional development for the whole family.

Targeted project outcomes

The project outcomes contribute to the overarching ABSS programme and population level outcomes framework. For Umbilical Chords, which sits within the communication and language workstream, the following project outcomes are defined:

- A development of children's communication and language skills. (Changes in children's communication and language skills will be observed, linking the progress of individuals to The British Associations for Early Childhood Education's Musical Development Framework).
- Parents report there is an increase in their child's musical attentiveness
- Parents report there is an increase in their child emotionally responding to music
- Increase in parent's knowledge of how important singing with their child at home or using songs during their daily routine is
- Increase in parent's confidence in singing with their child at home or using songs during their daily routine is
- Increase in the access their child/ren have to music and instruments at home
- Promote the workstreams and core values of A Better Start Southend (e.g., The Big Little Moments campaign) as well as general awareness of the programme
- Engaging and providing volunteering opportunities to parents

2. Project impact snapshot

Quantitative and qualitative evaluation data about the performance of Umbilical Chords demonstrate a range of positive impacts for the children and parents it has supported over the course of the evaluation period. Findings from our analysis indicate that participating parents repeatedly report an increase in their child's interest in music and song, enhanced vocabulary, socialisation and confidence. Moreover, the sessions have provided an important opportunity for bonding between parents and their children, and our findings highlight that this has been an aspect of the sessions which parents have been able to re-create in their own homes outside of the weekly groups.

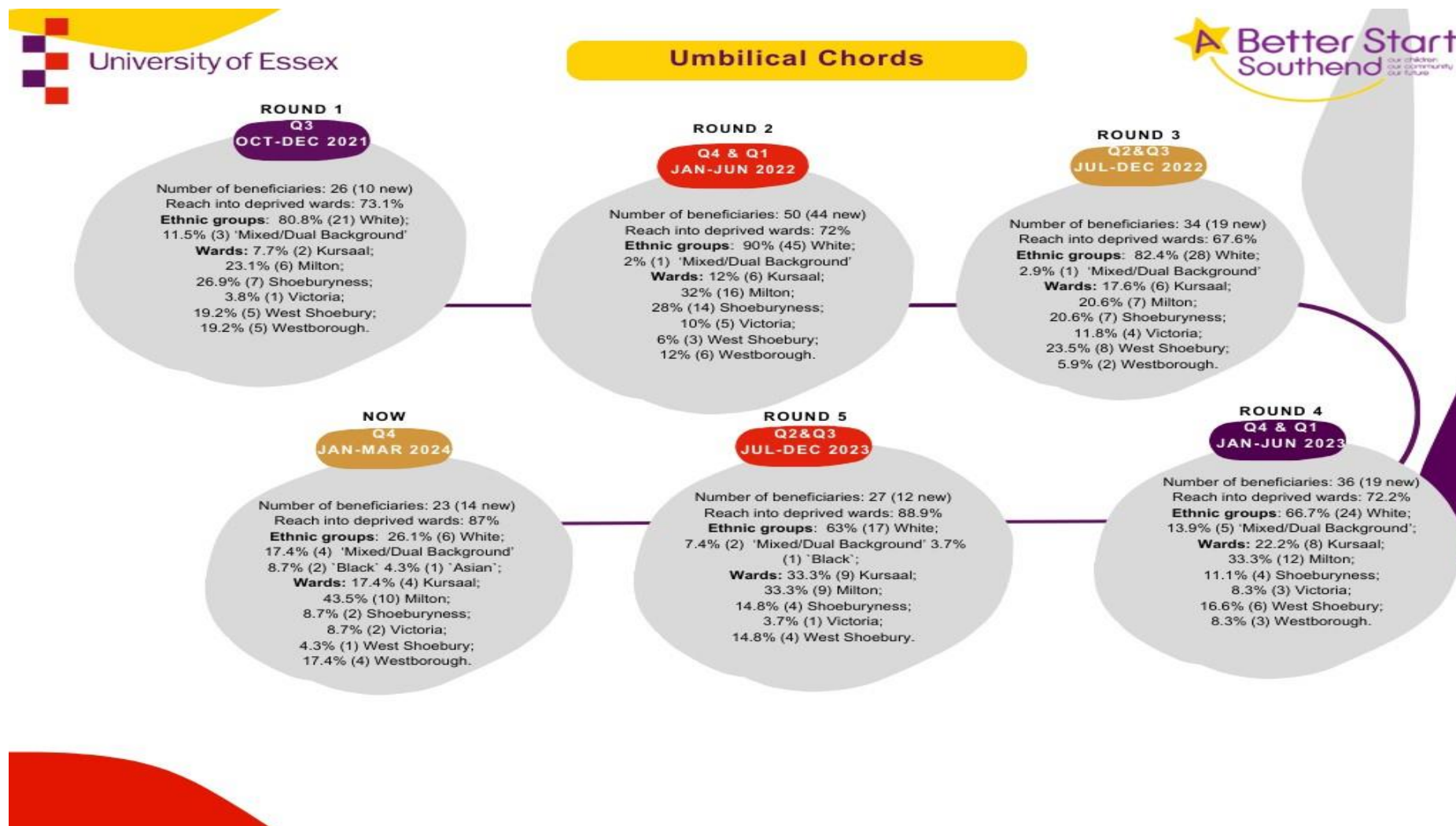
The graphics overleaf provide a high-level visual overview of the journey of Umbilical Chords over the period of their inclusion within our evaluation across three key areas:

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- **Figure 1: Beneficiary¹ engagement and reach**, comprising total number of beneficiaries, beneficiary ethnicity, and reach of the project into wards of higher deprivation. This figure visualises the change over time by tracing each of these data points across each of the project reporting periods.
 - **Figure 2: Performance against target outcomes**, comprising percentage achievement against established targets for the project, within and across each of the reporting periods of the project's inclusion in our evaluation.
 - **Figure 3: Qualitative interview data**, comprising representative accounts from qualitative interviews with beneficiaries undertaken over the period of evaluation, linked with the project outcomes areas established for all ABSS Southend projects.

A deeper analysis of each of these elements is included within this report, however, these graphics capture key details which illustrate the journey of the project across the period of their involvement in our evaluation.

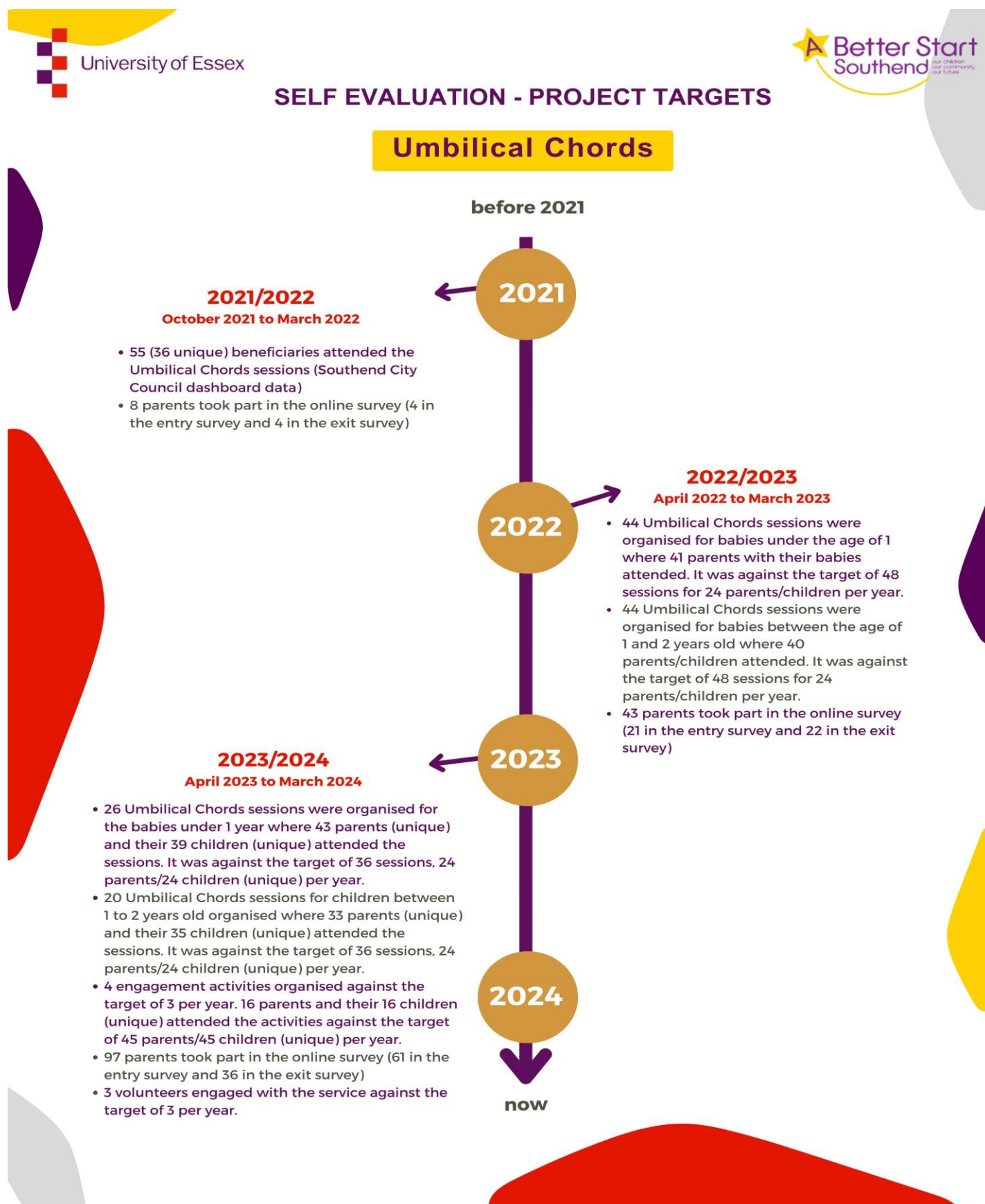
¹ A beneficiary is defined as a child under the age of four or a pregnant woman.

Figure 1. Summary of number of beneficiaries, project's reach into deprived wards, beneficiaries' ethnic groups² and wards – 1st October 2021 to 31st March 2024 - data downloaded from Southend City Council data dashboard on the 30th May 2024.



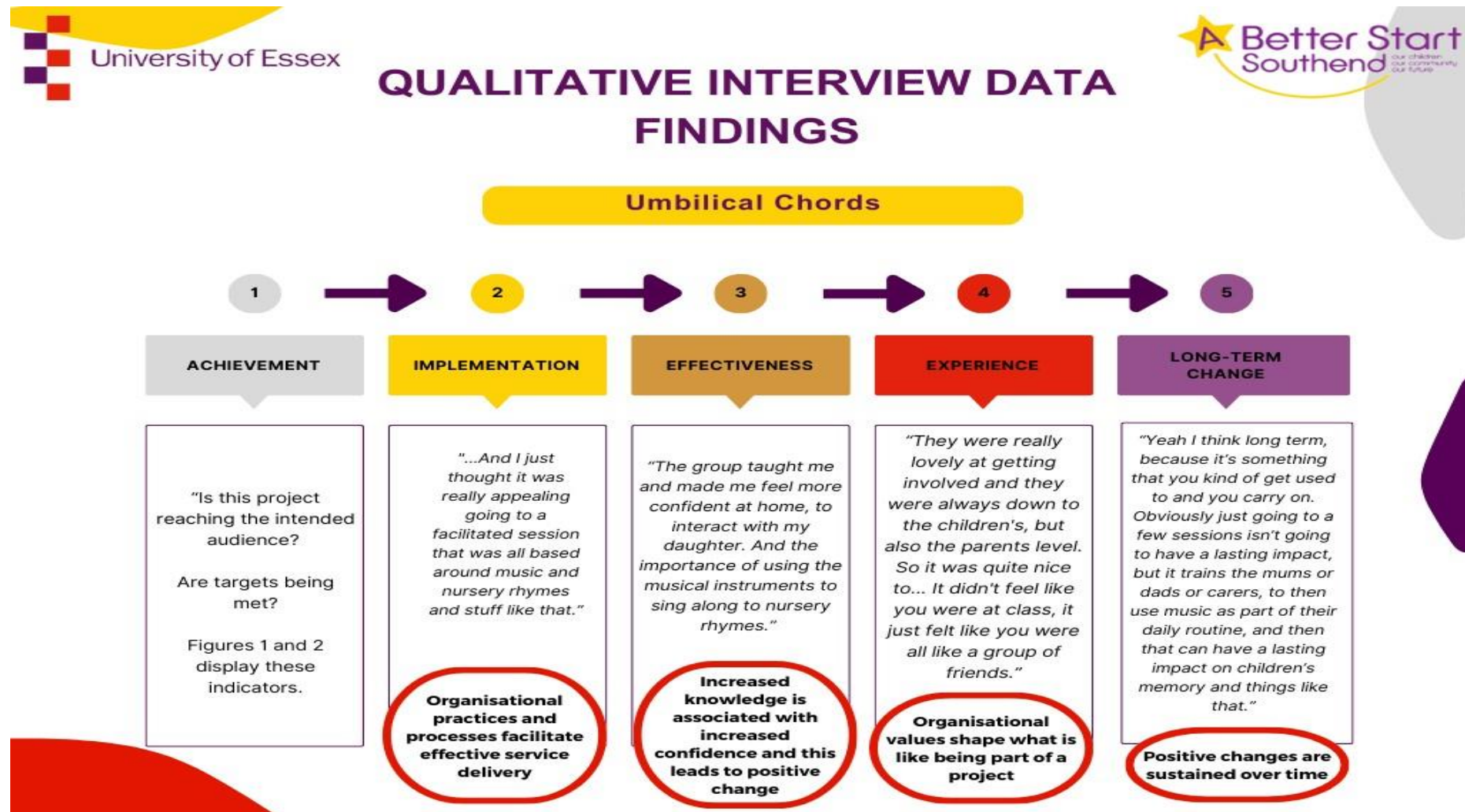
² Ethnicity data reported above *excludes* the percentage of participants for whom no ethnicity data is recorded (16.31%) and thus these figures should be interpreted with caution.

Figure 2³. Summary of project targets and actual performance – 1st October 2021 to 31st March 2024.



³ A Beneficiary is defined as a child under the age of four or a pregnant woman. Self Monitoring data for 2021-2022 was not made available.

Figure 3. Summary of semi-structured interview findings – 1st October 2021 to 31st March 2024.



3. Project impacts (1st of October 2021 to 31st of March 2024)

The remainder of this summary report provides an overview of project impact, drawing from KPI, online survey and interview data. Analysis of findings is reported on in relation to the five aspects of ABSS services (outlined in figure three above).

Section 3.1 of the report draws on service data obtained via Southend City Council's Project Activity Dashboard indicating that the project reached a total of 141 unique beneficiaries over the evaluation period. This section also includes a selection of responses from 151 surveys collected over the course of the evaluation period, as they pertain to the six project targets.

Section 3.2 onwards presents a thematised overview of data collected by the University of Essex evaluation team in the form of 151 surveys and 14 one-to-one semi-structured qualitative interviews with parents between October 2021 and March 2024.

3.1 Summary of secondary data findings (1st of October 2021 to 31st of March 2024 (data downloaded on 11th June 2024)

3.1.1 Achievement: Is the Project reaching the intended audience? Are targets being met?

Across the course of the evaluation period, the project engaged with 141 primary beneficiaries⁴, equating to approximately 5 beneficiaries each month. This was above the target to reach 120 primary beneficiaries within the same time period⁵. It should be noted that there is a significant discrepancy of 69 between the beneficiary count provided via the Southend City Council Data Dashboard (141, as available from 1st October 2021) and that calculated via the project self-monitoring packs (210, as available from 2022 onwards). While this is immaterial in terms of target achievement (both data points are above the target of 120 beneficiaries), it is a limitation of the data most likely linked with differences in how a 'beneficiary' is defined and counted in these two datasets.

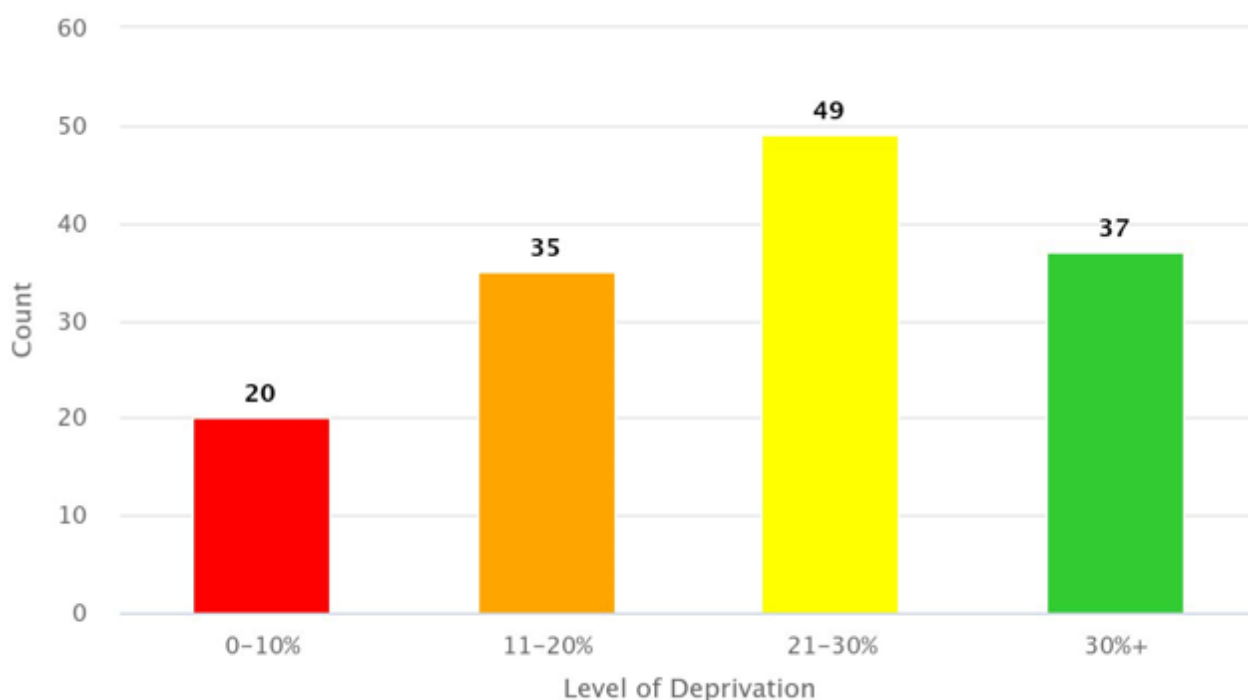
The reach of the project into the more deprived wards of Southend was broadly consistent across the reporting period at 73.8%, and slightly lower than target of 80.3% of beneficiaries living within more deprived wards. Figure four and table one below show beneficiary reach by indices of multiple

⁴ This figure is based on Southend City Council Dashboard data covering the period of 1st October 2021 to 31st March 2024. This figure comes to a total of 210 beneficiaries if we add the dashboard data for 2021/22 and Self-Monitoring data for 2022/23 and 2023/24, which is 55 beneficiaries for October 2021 to March 2022, 81 beneficiaries for April 2022 to March 2023 and 74 beneficiaries for April 2023 to March 2024.

⁵ This figure is drawn from the total of 24 beneficiaries (12 each for 0-1 year and 1-2 year children) for six months (between October 2021 and March 2022) and 48 beneficiaries each for two years (between April and March 2022/23 and 2023/24).

deprivation⁶ and as a percentage by wards. Figure four shows that 14.18% of beneficiaries or 20 of 141 live in an ABSS ward that falls within the 10% most deprived areas of England.⁷

Figure 4. Primary beneficiaries by deprivation – 1st October 2021 to 31st March 2024



Source: Southend City Council Data Dashboard

⁶ The Index of Multiple Deprivation (<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019>), commonly known as the IMD, is the official measure of relative deprivation for small areas in England. It is the most widely used of the Indices of Deprivation. The Index of Multiple Deprivation ranks every small area called super output area, in England from 1 (most deprived area) to 32,844 (least deprived area). The English Index of multiple deprivation measures deprivation by scoring seven “domains of deprivation”- namely income, employment, education, health, crime, barriers to housing and services and living environment.

⁷ [https://democracy.southend.gov.uk/Data/Cabinet/200410121400/Agenda/\\$att5431.doc.pdf](https://democracy.southend.gov.uk/Data/Cabinet/200410121400/Agenda/$att5431.doc.pdf)

Table 1. Primary beneficiaries by Ward – 1st October 2021 to 31st March 2024

Ward	Count of Direct Beneficiaries	Count of beneficiaries as a %
Victoria	10	7.9%
Milton	40	28.3%
Kursaal	23	16.3%
Westborough	17	12.1%
Shoeburyness	33	23.4
West Shoebury	18	12.8
Total:	141	100.00%

Source: Southend City Council Data Dashboard

Over the course of the evaluation period, the project has reached a small number of beneficiaries from minoritised ethnic groups. Table two, below, indicates that the majority of primary beneficiaries (74.46% or 105 out of a total of 141 beneficiaries) identified as ‘*White*’, 7.09 (10) mixed/dual background, 0.07% (1) Asian or Asian British, and 1.41% (2) Black or Black British. Notably, 16.31% (23) of beneficiaries did not provide information about their ethnic identity, therefore a note of interpretive caution is needed in considering this ethnicity data as an indicator of the project reach in this area.

Table 2. Number of primary beneficiaries by ethnicity - 1st October 2021 to 31st March 2024

Ethnic group	Count of Direct Beneficiaries	Count of beneficiaries as a % of information provided
Asian or Asian British	1	0.70%
Black or Black British	2	1.41%
Information Not Yet Obtained	23	16.31%
Mixed/Dual Background	10	7.09%
White	105	74.46%
Total number providing information	141	100%

Source: Southend City Council Data Dashboard

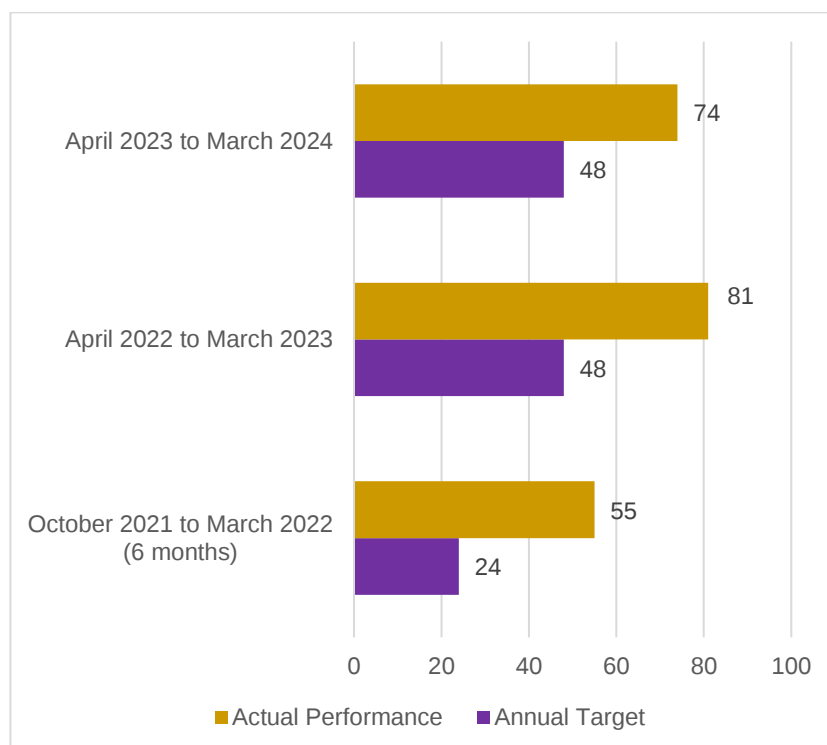
The project's self-monitoring and online survey data show the performance of the project against a series of delivery targets established at the commencement of the project as described below. Parents and carers were surveyed at two time points. First, forming the baseline data on outcome measures, parents are surveyed immediately prior to their participation in Umbilical Chords sessions. Secondly, following the conclusion of a six-week block of sessions, parents are surveyed again on these baseline measures. Across the evaluation period, 86 responses were received for the entry survey, and 65 for the exit survey, resulting in a total of 151 responses. An overview of the survey findings as they relate to the six project targets is provided below.

Target one: To reach a total of 120 beneficiaries between October 2021 and March 2024.

Across the evaluation period, a total of 210 beneficiaries have been supported by the project.⁸ This figure exceeds the target of 120 beneficiaries and can be broken down as follows (figure seven below shows a graphical visualisation of performance against target):

- October 2021 to March 2022 – 55⁹ beneficiaries, exceeding target of 24
- April 2022 to March 2023 – 81¹⁰ beneficiaries, exceeding target of 48
- April 2023 to March 2024 – 74¹¹ beneficiaries, exceeding target of 48

Figure 6. Annual target and actual performance on number of beneficiaries – 1st October 2021 to 31st March 2024



⁸ This figure is based on the sum of the number of beneficiaries for six month of 2021/22 (October 2021 to March 2022) reported in Dashboard data and the rest from the Project's Self Monitoring data.

⁹ Based on Southend City Council Dashboard data as Self Monitoring data is not available for this time period

¹⁰ Based on the Project's Self-Monitoring data

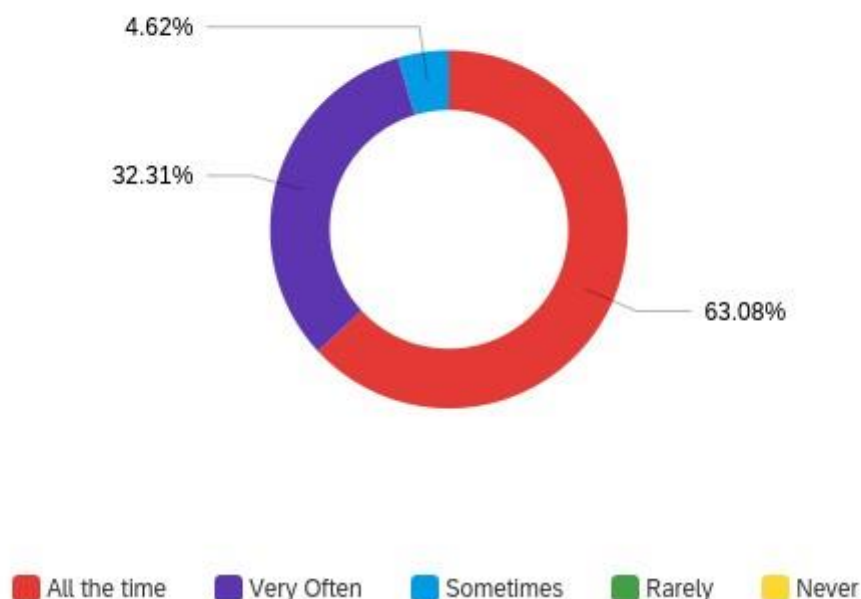
¹¹ Based on the Project's Self-Monitoring data

Source: 2021/22 data from Southend City Council Data Dashboard; 2022/23 and 2023/24 data from Umbilical Chords Self-Monitoring report

Target two: ‘As a result of attending the Umbilical Chords sessions, parents report that there is an increase in their child's musical attentiveness’.

Performance against this target is measured via responses to two linked survey statements. The first gauges the level of ‘interest’ - ‘*my child shows interest when they are played sound or music. For example, turning towards sound, smiling and movement*’. As illustrated in Figure eight below, a significant majority of respondents reported that their child(ren) showed interest ‘all the time’ (63.08%), or very often (32.31%), with a minority of respondents indicating this interest was shown ‘sometimes’ (4.62%).¹²

Figure 7. Child shows interest when they are played sound or music – 1st October 2021 to 31st March 2024

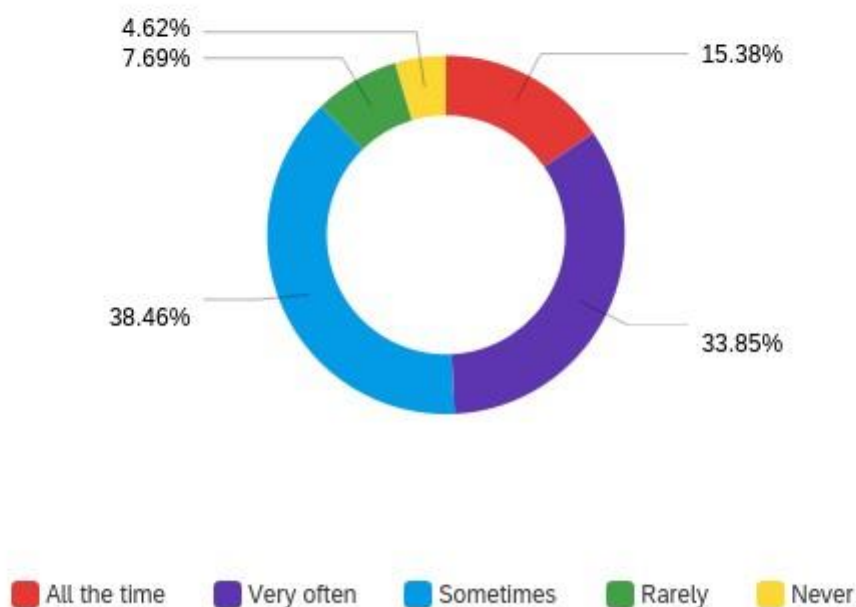


Source: University of Essex online evaluation

The second statement captures the involvement of children in aspects of musical activity - ‘*my child vocalises along with songs or whilst playing instruments. For example, singing, humming and making sounds*’. Similar to the first statement linked with this target, the responses were positive overall. A total of 15.38% of respondents reported vocalisation and involvement ‘all the time’, while ‘very often’ (33.85%) and sometimes (38.46%) were both significantly greater than ‘never’ (4.62%) or ‘rarely’ (7.69%).

¹² Outcome measured via responses received at the exit survey to end of Umbilical Chords sessions.

Figure 8. Child vocalises along with songs or whilst playing instruments – 1st October 2021 to 31st March 2024

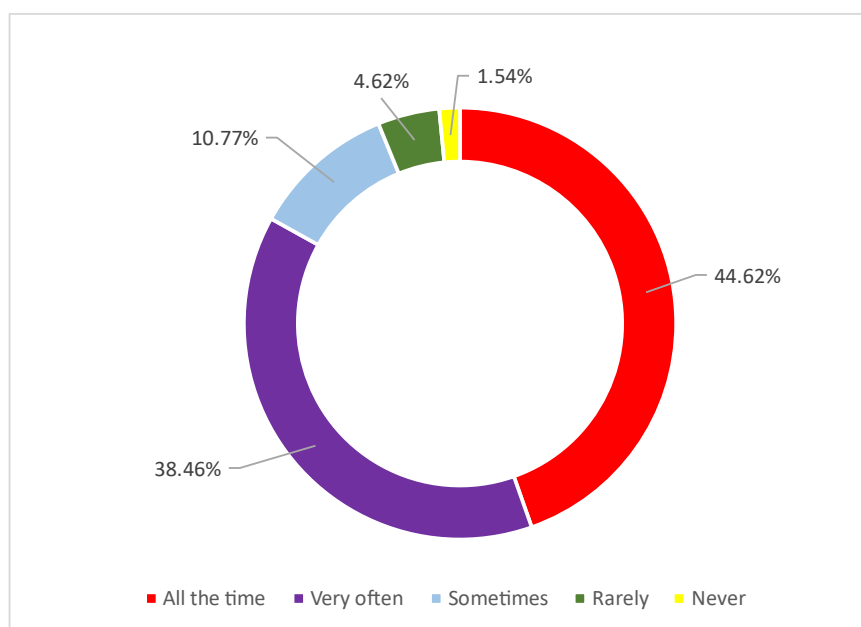


Source: University of Essex online evaluation

Target three: ‘As a result of attending the Umbilical Chords sessions, parents report there is an increase in their child emotionally responding to music’.

Performance against this outcome suggests that Umbilical Chords sessions supported the development of children’s emotional interaction with, and response to, music. Figure ten overleaf demonstrates the project’s success and shows how a significant majority of parents report their child had an increased response to music ‘all the time’ (44.62%), very often (38.46%) or sometimes (10.77%). Only 6.16% of the parents reported their child either respond rarely (4.62%) or never (1.54%) to the music (figure 10 below reports frequency rates for parents’ report on their child’s emotional response to music).

Figure 9. Child's emotional response to music – 1st October 2021 to 31st March 2024

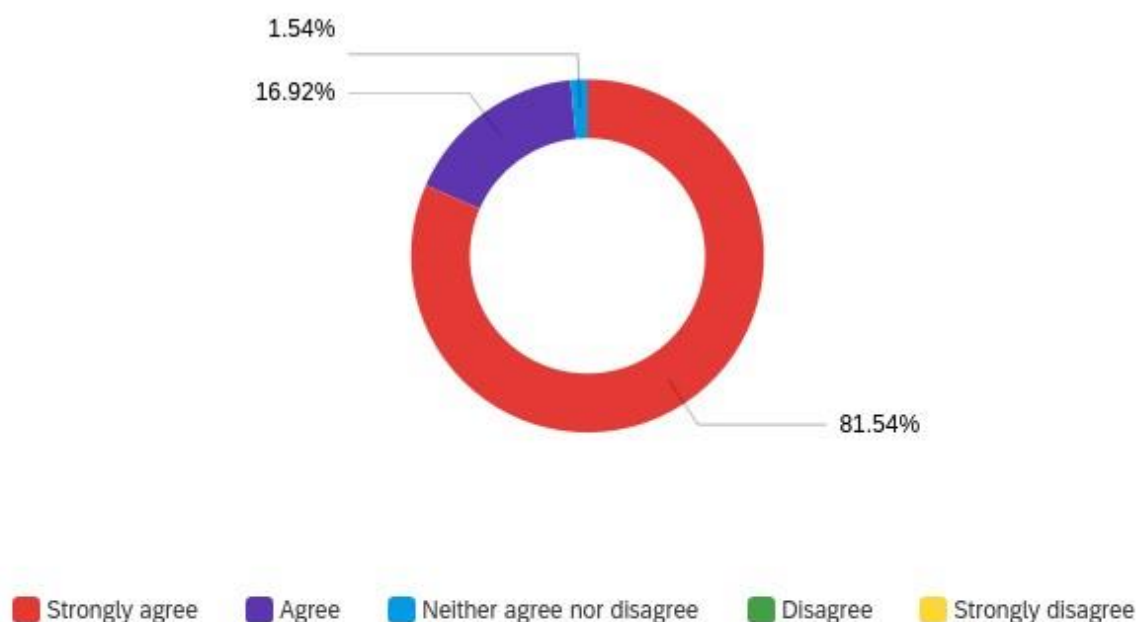


Source: University of Essex online evaluation

Target four: ‘As a result of attending the Umbilical Chords sessions, parents report there is an increase in their knowledge of how important singing with their child at home or using songs during their daily routine is’.

Performance against this outcome suggests that almost all parents increased their knowledge of the importance of singing with their child at home or using songs during their daily routine following the Umbilical Chords sessions compared with their response before attending the sessions. Figure 11 below demonstrates the project's success and shows almost all the parents agree that their knowledge on the importance of music has increased at strongly agree (81.55%) or agree (16.90%) level.

Figure 10. Parent's increased knowledge on importance of singing with their child – 1st October 2021 to 31st March 2024

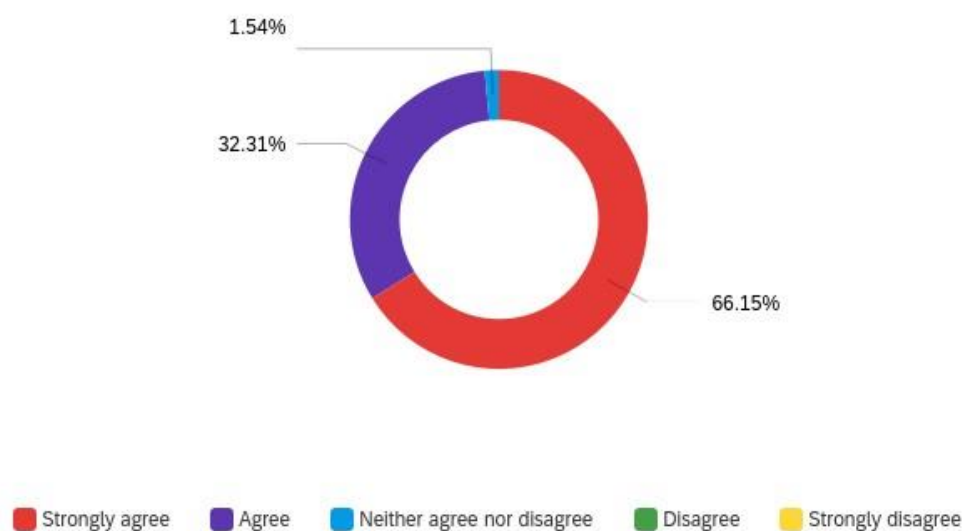


Source: University of Essex online evaluation

Target five: 'As a result of attending the Umbilical Chords sessions, parents report there is an increase in their confidence in singing with their child at home or using songs during their daily routine.'

Performance against target five was particularly strong, with a significant majority of respondents reporting that the Umbilical Chords sessions led to an increase in confidence singing with their children at home, or incorporating songs within their daily lives. As illustrated by Figure 11 overleaf, in response to the statement '*I am confident that I have the knowledge/skills to be able to engage in musical activity with my child at home*' almost all respondents (98.46%) either strongly agree (66.15%) or agree (32.31%).

Figure 11. Parent's confidence to engage in musical activities with their child at home – 1st October 2021 to 31st March 2024

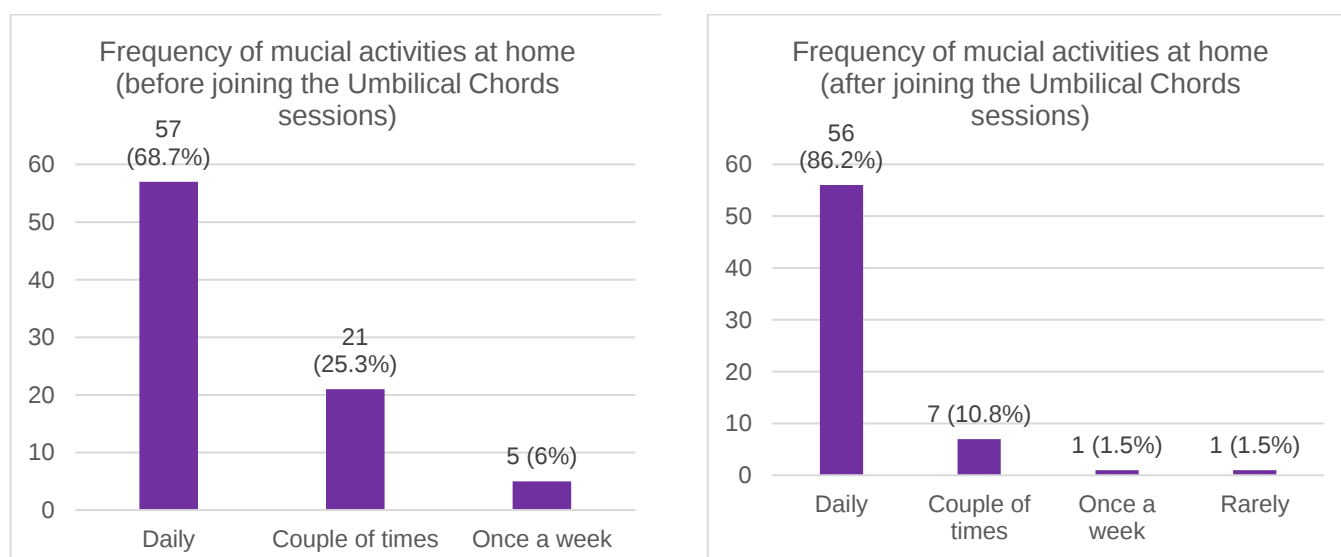


Source: University of Essex online evaluation

Target six: 'As a result of attending the Umbilical Chords sessions, parents report there is an increase in the access their child/ren have to music and instruments at home'.

Comparison between the entry survey (survey before the participation in the sessions) and the exit survey (survey after the sessions) shows some increase in frequency of engaging in singing, music and playing instruments at home. Figures 12 and 13 below show how 'Daily' musical activities increased approximately 18% from 68.7% prior to the Umbilical Chords sessions, to 86.2% at the exit point.

Figure 12 & 13. Frequency of engaging to music and instruments at home (before and after the participation in the Umbilical Chords sessions) – 1st October 2021 to 31st March 2024



4. Interview insights

The second way in which impact is measured is via the University of Essex formative evaluation. This consists of two elements: The first is online surveys as reported above that sought to capture the performance of the project against key performance indicators (KPI) targets. Additionally, the surveys seek to capture parent/carer experiences of the service to understand the extent to which it meets their needs and expectations of quality and effectiveness. Secondly, qualitative semi-structured interviews were undertaken with 14 parents over the course of the evaluation.

4.1 Implementation: How and why do parents access the project?

Exit survey responses highlight word of mouth (friends, neighbours and colleagues), ABSS (website, leaflets, staff, other projects) and social media (Facebook, Instagram) as the main communication channels through which parents/carers first heard about the project. From 65 responses, 23 (35.38%) mentioned ABSS materials, 22 (33.84%) social media, 18 (27.69%) via word of mouth and 2 (3.07%) from other organisations and volunteers. The routes into Umbilical Chords provide a good example of the cross-fertilisation of ABSS projects, and the ways in which the strength and experience of individual projects supported a generally increased level of knowledge and interest around similar projects that might support parents. For example, several participants noted specific ABSS projects through which they heard about Umbilical Chords:

"I follow A Better Start and things like the local children's centres and HENRY on Facebook. I think one of those other services must have advertised it [...] actually I think it was Bump to Breast, they promoted it quite a lot [...] so I think I got in touch with them when it first started [...]"

"Yeah I contacted them through an email address on the website. I knew about Better Start through the breastfeeding support. They said there's other support out there as well, so I thought I'd have a look on the website, and I saw that. So, we love music as a family, so I thought we'll have a look at it."

Interviews and surveys also provided an opportunity to understand the motivations for parents/carers accessing Umbilical Chords. An opportunity to support their child's enjoyment of music, and a recognition of the value of music as a means of learning and bonding with children were common motivations, alongside an opportunity for socialising with others in a fun musical environment

"[...] my daughter loves anything musical; she's constantly singing. She loves nursery rhymes, music, so anything music related I would just be drawn to anyway [...] but also because I'm at home with her, we like to keep busy [...] but I do think these things are only as funded as well as they're used. So, I always try to tap into stuff because if the take up isn't very good, then the funding goes, and things aren't continued."

“...and remembering how much my first daughter loved music and playing musical instruments. And I just thought it was really appealing going to a facilitated session that was all based around music and nursery rhymes and stuff like that.”

“Yeah I didn’t really know what to expect. I just knew that it was a music group and I wanted to get out and meet other mums and get out [of] the house, and we like music and I think my son loves music all the time, so I thought I’d have a look and see what it was like.”

Opportunities for parents to ‘get out of the house’ and build their own confidence with music and singing in a shared and more structured environment was also noted by several participants as key motivations:

“...being a first-time mum and wife, I wanted to try and get out the house and try and feel confident to do things by myself and in an environment that was safe, if that makes sense. And I also liked music myself, but I found a bit silly at home singing to her so I wasn’t doing it very often and I felt like I was doing her service. And then myself as well [while] singing, I thought I kept getting it wrong. So, I just wanted a bit of a boost to get out and to know what I should be doing and what I should be looking for.”

“The main reason I took part is I like to take my son to as many different experiences as possible. When we go to playgroup, obviously it’s just playing with toys, it’s there for them to play with, you have to encourage them, no one runs the class. So, I was interested in going to a structured hour where someone would help encourage the children to do things or teach them new things.”

“..., just a new experience for him. Also, it’s nice for me as a mum, when you’re just with your baby all day, to go out and speak to other parents, learn different ways of teaching children, and stuff like that. So, they were my main reasons.”

4.2 Quality and Experience: What is it like being part of the programme?

Parents were routinely positive about their experience with the Umbilical Chords sessions, with the environment noted as particularly welcoming and comfortable, and staff both approachable and highly interactive with children and families alike. The venue was noted as ‘modern/comfortable and lots of space’ and this was enhanced by staff who created a friendly and welcoming atmosphere, however, parking was an issue noted by some participants as detracting from the ‘physical’ experience of the project.

As for the sessions themselves, parents commented positively on the diverse range and high quality of the activities involved and noted how the smaller group size enabled more attentive facilitation from staff, and positive social interactions between parents/carers:

"This was the friendliest, most welcoming group I have attended. I would like to do the course again the in future if possible."

"We just sat around and played songs, interacted with a lot of songs. I thought it was very good. It was very interacting and very nice."

"Because before the start of the session then, you were then asked if you wanted a cup of tea, if you wanted this or juice or whatever, which was always really lovely. And what else was nice is if you needed to feed your child, you could, no one judged you there. It was like a nice knit of people. So yeah, no, I couldn't fault them for that."

"But everyone was on the same wavelength, so when we were doing the nursery rhymes there wasn't just you doing it, everyone was doing it together and they were all very encouraging of the children. I felt like everyone that was doing the course was in the same mindset, so it was quite easy to talk to those people. I'm quite outgoing as it is anyway, so I don't struggle too much to have conversations with people either, so it was quite easy for me, but I felt everyone was very open and very easy to talk to. It wasn't awkward or anything like that. It was very enjoyable."

"I think five or so parents and five children, so everyone gets to know each other and it's like a nice little group and everyone gets to know what kind of the children are like and everything, so it is nice."

"We've done that and we are on waiting this again, because we want to do it again. And I have actually reached out to [name of service staff] to potentially attend the sessions again. They were very good."

Parents shared their positive experiences with the staff who were running the music sessions, noting that the staff were friendly and approachable and highly interactive:

"Yeah, they seem very nice. They both interact with children, lovely and it's nice easy environment!"

"[Name of the service staff], he's very friendly. He's very down to earth. He's very approachable. He's quick responding on emails if we have any problems. He's a very friendly bloke. When we went to the group, he was very welcoming. Yeah, he was very good... you know good with the children, good to talk to. Such a kind and friendly bloke."

"Oh, they were very good because they were very positive with the children, very wide approach. They had these booklets to do songs so they asked the older kids what song would you like? and got involved with everyone. [They] went around the room and got involved with all the children so they were putting up."

"You could tell, as well, from the way that he [staff member] plays the guitar and the other instruments that he obviously knows what he's talking about, and from the tone. When someone knows music, it's natural for them to do it. You could tell that he knew everything and was trying to pass that knowledge on to the kids as well."

"And [name of the service staff] as well was just so calming. And actually, took the time to get to know the children, which made me feel confident and calm myself and made me want to go back each week."

"Yeah, they're lovely. It really took time to like refer to the children by names and he knew a lot of the families and knew a lot their older children that may have been to the class so really personable and, you know, [they] remembered a lot about all the people joining and would make reference to what they were doing last week, this week and how they interacted with the class and stuff like that. They were really useful, really engaged with the children. As I said, [they] really knew the families well, and felt really a more close relationship with a lot of families."

"Yeah they're really friendly, really nice. "[name of the service staff] had always asked for any suggestions of songs, if we had any, and very relaxed. Sometimes when we needed feeding or changing, in the middle of it, they were very relaxed and just said do what you need to do."

4.3 Effectiveness: How is participation impacting beneficiaries?

Themes of friendship, connection and increased confidence are reported by interviewees as key benefits of attending Umbilical Chords sessions. While sharing the benefits, the parents/carers were able to reflect on the immediate, mid-term and longer-term benefits of attending the Umbilical Chords music sessions. For children, these included improved confidence in their child/ren, an increased interest in musical instruments and music more generally, while parents/carers reported that the sessions provided them with an opportunity to build relationships and networks of support with other mothers. They anticipated that the participation in the sessions as well as connection with the group of children from a similar age group would help their child's vocabulary skills, and support their speech and language development:

"He loves music, and he loves singing and he loves dancing, but it's very rare that catch him [...] he's just really come out of his shell [...] they'd ask him what song he wants, and he would shout out the song he wants like Twinkle Twinkle Little Star. It really helped him."

"She absolutely loved them. She really enjoyed it. I would say she's slow to warm up anyway, her natural personality [...] so the first one she was a bit more cautious [...] by the second and third she was making suggestions as to what songs, getting up and dancing, getting stuck in. She really took to a ukulele [...] so we actually bought one for her birthday because she loved it and she talks about Umbilical Chords all the time [...] so it's become quite important to her, something that she discusses."

"Yeah. After going to a few of the sessions, obviously she's asked for quite a few of the instruments. So it's quite nice though because like her hand-eye coordination's really good and she knows that has to play certain things. Don't get me wrong, she's not like a pianist or anything, but she can play certain instruments and quite well, like, she remembers songs."
"So obviously it was a once a week class, she'd still sing to the song. So her memory from learning quite a few of that and obviously it then incorporating in certain songs, she then remembers different songs. So she'd be singing it and then we'd have to then teach it to our certain family members and things like that. And they're, "Oh, where she heard this?" And it was then always talking about that music group and the amount of people."

"Yeah, definitely. Lots of the songs we learned we've carried on at home. Lots of nursery rhymes, and it's made me think about some different instruments to help at home as well."

"Yeah. Absolutely. As I say, I've taken a lot from the sessions. And I've, as I say, been able to use a lot of that at home. And you know, confidence with nursery rhymes, singing, and how it has helped my daughter in her development also. And her skills. Connecting with the music and nursery rhymes. And actually, I didn't know until the sessions how important music and rhymes and instruments were in my children's development."

"Definitely. For Christmas I bought my daughter some more musical instruments like a ukulele and things like that that I wouldn't have necessarily thought to buy her. Because she really enjoyed it when we were at the sessions, I bought it for Christmas for her. She loves playing on it."

"I think she connects with nursery rhymes better now. I'm much more confident singing to her to, you know, to now her to sleep. And walking along on the street when she's in her buggy, I will just sing nursery rhymes to her. And I feel like we connect. Nursery rhymes now prevent her from crying. She starts to get upset; I sing nursery rhymes to her. It has been emotional connecting for me and [name of child] massively. Which I wouldn't have had the confidence to do previous to attending the session."

"We have the radio on nearly every day, and he will use his instruments and he'll sort of tap to a beat, and I think that's because we've sort of done music from such a young age with him, through like umbilical cords, so I think a good rhythm. He has got good motor skills from picking up instruments, and he just gets an enjoyment out of it as well. He likes to make sounds as well, when we're singing, so I think it helps his speech as well."

"Yeah I think long term, because it's something that you kind of get used to and you carry on. Obviously just going to a few sessions isn't going to have a lasting impact, but it trains the mums or dads or carers, to then use music as part of their daily routine, and then that can have a lasting impact on children's memory and things like that. So yeah I think we use songs for everything at the moment, so I think that has an impact because it's given us the confidence to do that."

The parent/carers also discussed on the social benefits of attending the sessions. They mentioned that the sessions helped them socialise and reduce their anxieties, especially in the post-COVID

period. The interviewees also discussed the benefits of meeting, interacting and networking with other parents.

"I feel like I've made some mum friends." "I found it really interesting because you could ask, 'how old's your little one?' It's good to look ahead and see what a seventh month old might look like[...]"

"Lockdown created separation anxieties and these sessions helped overcome it."

"Yes. Attending the group, it allows you to meet other parents, other mums that potentially you would never have met before. You can become very friendly with parents. [name of child], she can play with the other children. It gets us out of the house. We're not just stuck indoors. We're out with other mums, other babies. Yeah, it's very good socially for the children. It means we're not just stuck indoors. [name of the child] has again grown more confident around other people. She suffers from separation anxiety. To get [name of the child] to interact with other parents and children, it's really important."

"Not only have I gained a lot of knowledge to continue using at home. Some of the parents that I met at the group I've met at other groups and since and I've been able to connect with them and become more confident in approaching them. That's been very good. For myself as well, I suffer a little bit with like anxiety. Approaching new people and attending events that I've never attended before; it can be very overwhelming. But what I also like is that it's not just a one-off event. You can see those people more than once and potentially become good friends with those mums."

4.3.1 Did you get all you were expecting Umbilical Chordst?

Interviewees reported that they had no preconceived ideas of what the Umbilical Chords sessions would be like and very much attended with an open mind. All reported that they were pleasantly surprised with the quality and length of the sessions. Some interviewees would have liked the sessions to run for longer, some reported that it would be good to have a broader range of instruments available for the babies and children to experience, example of toys from 'around the world'. Some of the interviewees discussed the possibility of introducing sessions on developing their own music instruments from resources available at home. Other participants asked about possibility to reconsider the timing of the session, such as changing sessions to an time to avoid children being asleep or to avoid rushing to pick up older children from school. One suggested to introduce themed session each week, while others suggested replicating the service beyond ABSS wards and the next participant suggested organising age specific sessions.

"I knew that it would be a lovely group, just because I know typically whatever ABSS put together is always really nice. I think what worked really well [...] so usually when you take a little one to a group it's usually a female who is a similar age to, more often than not, the children's mothers, and who's often quite softly spoken and got a very similar way about her regardless of the group you attend. But actually, because it was male and [name of worker] had his full-sized guitar and he spoke to the children like they were adults [...] my daughter, she really appreciated that and actually took to him because she felt quite heard and respected when she made suggestions of songs, he always acknowledged that she had spoken [...]"

“I think if it ran for eight weeks that would be great. So, for my type of child, she took a few weeks to warm up and I think by the end of the six weeks [...] she was really coming out of herself, she was singing and getting up and actually for her she would’ve loved it to have gone on.”

Summary of key findings, improvements and recommendations:

Evidence presented in this summary report indicates that the Umbilical Chords service is achieving its primary aims to enhance children’s communication and language development through music sessions and enable parents to continue practicing their learnings within the home. What is less evident from the data is the extent to which the project has been successful in engaging and providing volunteering opportunities to parents.

Key to the project’s success appears to be the person-centred approach of the service. At the heart of this approach is the ability of staff to build rapport, relationships and individual attention to each child in making them engaged in the sessions, increase their interest and confidence, as well as enhance the parents’ skills and confidence in continuing the same at home.

Whilst a majority of parents wished the sessions to run for more than six weeks and participated more than one time, if resource permitted, the project could look to offer more weeks of sessions and consider the expansion of the program to other ‘sites’ within the area. An often cited strength of the Umbilical Chords service is the flexibility and responsiveness of the delivery, with parents finding staff (and the project more broadly) to be ‘low pressure’ and accommodating to their needs. This was particularly valued in the immediate post-COVID context when many families had experienced significant isolation, and were tentative about re-engaging with others.

While the experience and perception of the project was overwhelmingly positive, there were some logistical issues highlighted in terms of parking and session times. Moving forward, the project might consider offering a broader range of times, and, as noted above, more accessible (or additional) sites around the Southend area to ensure the service is accessible to all. From an evaluation perspective, the project might consider an additional ‘post’ survey, such as 3 or 6 months following the Umbilical Chords session to better understand whether the changes have been sustained once involvement in the project concludes.