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MUSIC IN PRISONS INSTALLATION OPENS AT THE SAGE GATESHEAD

By Caroline Lewis

23/07/2007



© Lizzie Coombes

A project bringing music workshops into prisons has been transformed into an installation at [The Sage Centre](#) in Gateshead.

Artist and photographer Lizzie Coombes has brought together music and photography from the project, Music in Prisons, in an exhibition that will run until August 4 2007. Entitled 'Where I'm Coming From', it offers a glimpse behind the closed doors of HMP Frankland and HMPYOI Newton in County Durham, and the way in which community musicians have worked with inmates to inspire and involve them in positive opportunities.

"These projects are about using music to provide new opportunities for people who often come from very disadvantaged backgrounds," said ex-local lad and Dire Straits guitarist Mark Knopfler, a long-term patron of the project. "Music can cut across everything and heal in new ways."

Music in Prisons, run by the Irene Taylor Trust, trained two apprentices from The Sage and a local musician, who worked with inmates towards performances in the prisons and the public installation. The resulting installation is a powerful collection of music and images that tells the rarely-heard stories of these members of our community serving time in the North East, their aspirations and experiences.

© Lizzie Coombes



In writing and performing music, the aim was to build self-esteem, communication and team-working skills, giving the men and women the chance to leave prison with more than just the stigma of having been there.

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"Before I ended up in prison I had quite a normal life with your average family," said Paul, one of the men who took part.

"Being here has completely changed my life. I don't really see my family very much. My children are all growing up and I can't see them. I suppose you could say it's all gone pear-shaped."

"I have always been interested in music and here at the prison I have been taking keyboard lessons, but this project has really opened my eyes to what's involved in creating music. It has been very educational and I have really enjoyed just taking part and working in a group."

"Often in here, people are isolated and look out for themselves, but this week we have all had to work together and learn to support each other. I have really enjoyed it – it has been a change from the routine."



© Lizzie Coombes

Music in Prisons worked for five days with a group of ten men at HMP Frankland to compose six songs. The songs were performed to an audience of prison inmates, staff and outside guests including the Mayor and Mayoress of Durham.

The two Sage apprentices who worked on the project, Charlotte Strawbridge and Ed Alcroft, have developed skills as community musicians with the guidance of the Music in Prisons team, and were enthusiastic about how valuable music making is in prisons.

"It's the best thing I have done since I started work," said Ed. "It's amazing working in an environment that I wouldn't normally have the chance to go in to and working in a place where people have been written off by the outside. But we are giving them a voice. The enthusiasm they all have and the lyrics they have written have been very powerful."

Community musician Nev Clay, from the Sage's Learning and Participation programme, said working on the project was reigniting his belief in the transformative power of music and challenged his perceptions of prisoners.

The Sage Gateshead, St Mary's Square, Gateshead Quays, Gateshead, NE8 2JR. Tel: 0191 443 4666. Open 10am-8pm, Mon-Sat.



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