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Liz and Ava

> My 14-year-old daughter Ava is a remarkable young lady. She was born with a complex brain injury and now lives with cerebral palsy and epilepsy. She's blind, uses a wheelchair and needs 24-hour care is nonverbal but that doesn't define who she is. She's an outgoing teenager who loves music from Britney Spears to Kylie Minogue.

During the first week of lockdown we couldn't believe our luck when we came across Soundabout who were offering free remote music sessions.

Having always endured long periods of very ill health and being isolated at home even before the Pandemic this seemed like the perfect pick me up for Ava. A safe place full of music where she could interact with others and join in from anywhere whatever her state of mind or health.

From the beginning Ava was instantly hooked. The sessions are utterly joyful, and it's magical to see kids like Ava with very different complex needs coming alive, especially when you see them Zooming in from their hospital beds!

Sessions are led by experienced professional musicians who respond to each young person's needs and interests. We explore sounds and music together using instruments and sensory items like fabrics or shiny objects. The Soundabout team are saying we hear you, be part of something special with us.

Ava's communication has developed dramatically since we've had daily access to Soundabout. The music enables her to express her emotions vocally through song and singing without words it's improved our relationship because I've been able to understand her so much more and she feels she has a voice.

Soundabout has been a lifeline for us during hospital admissions. We've been able to use Soundabout, to transform the atmosphere in the room. Hospitals are scary places for Ava.

People are always waiting to do something painful and it's an environment of complete sensory overload, which causes Ava to shut down, having a drastic effect on her clinical outcomes. Having Soundabout sessions to engage with, enables us to re-set Ava.

They distract her from pain and the fear of procedures, they take her away to a safe place where the bad people don't come and they make her feel like she has some control, in an environment where she's rarely in control and rarely has a choice. That is a very powerful gift and one we are truly grateful for.

The practitioners are so invested in her, they celebrate all she is, encourage and nurture her and see her as we do. They never stop pushing her to be the best that she can be. They've seen her at her absolute best and her absolute worst, which is an exceptionally unique relationship, that is unmatched by any statutory service and it's this level of engagement, that's made Soundabout so exceptional.

Soundabout offered Ava a life changing service.

Ava had never managed full time education due to her complex health needs but I never felt there was an alternative to option, I never believed I could manage homeschool as a long term option.

The quality of the online provision that Soundabout offered gave me the confidence to re-look at what education could look like for Ava. She now does a mixture of home school and traditional school placement, which offers her the best of both worlds and works so much better for her.

I now cannot imagine what our life would be like without our Soundabout family.

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