Soundabout Projects for 2026-27

Sounds Together

Face-to-face interactive music-making sessions for Learning Disabled people with complex support needs

Sounds Together projects enable profoundly Disabled people to make music with others in their local areas. Sessions in small groups, led by two specialist music practitioners working as a team: one leading the music and one leading interactions with individuals. Sessions are designed and evolve around the needs and interests of those taking part, using varied instruments and multi-sensory items engage them.

During 2026, we plan to run these projects as regular monthly sessions in Birmingham and Oxford, in response to family feedback, in addition to intensive projects over three months, which are developmental with each group choosing the musical outcomes they will work towards. These projects can include early years sessions and intergenerational activities, involving Learning Disabled musicians of all ages, creating opportunities to have their voices heard in a way that is accessible for them, and to share their stories with the wider community. We will involve Graduate Emerging Leaders in all Sounds Together projects.

Sounds Together helps to reduce isolation, improve self-esteem, build skills and support Disabled people to make choices and take control in a world where choices are mainly made for them. Our practitioners work individually with each person to incorporate their interests and choices, and ensure they can participate fully.

A short film on www.soundabout.org.uk/music/sounds-together shares some Sounds Together highlights. We have run successful projects in Oxfordshire, Warwickshire, Birmingham, Greater Manchester, Kent and Exeter. Our Sounds Together projects for early years children and families are run in partnership with local services: with Early Years Portage teams in Kent, Bristol and Birmingham project, as well as in Nuneaton, working with Barnardo's Early Years Special Educational Needs parents' group.

We are fundraising for future projects in these areas, also planning projects in Leeds, and to develop in other areas with additional practitioner training to develop the local workforce. Projects can vary in scale from a six-week project, including venue hire and overheads, at £6,000 to the monthly sessions throughout 2026 at a total cost of £9,800.

Soundabout Choirs

Soundabout Choirs welcome people of all ages and abilities. Our first Inclusive Choir started in Oxford and moved online throughout the Covid crisis. We now also have West Midlands, Wiltshire and Gloucestershire Choirs. They create opportunities for learning Disabled people with complex support needs of all ages to sing and make music regularly, alongside their local communities, building singing abilities and confidence, with significant social, physical and mental health benefits.

The Choirs are hybrid, meaning that they run online and in-person, removing some access barriers to those who cannot always leave the house. During hybrid sessions the online element is broadcast to the group in-person, increasing connections and building a sense of community. The Choirs enable people who would otherwise have limited musical opportunities to take part in performances, including at festivals and special events such as our festive celebrations. The Choirs also produce collaborative music videos throughout the year, available at www.soundaboutchoirs.org.uk/videos.

We have a partnership with the National Children's Choir of Great Britain across all Soundabout choirs, including Oxford and Beyond. We hold annual joint workshops in the Midlands, at the National Children's Choir Spring residential course. Soundabout are working strategically with the National Children's Choir to address access and inclusion in the choral sector.

The National Lottery Community Fund is supporting the growth of our Choirs over the next three years. We need to raise match funding to support the Choirs in Oxford (£6,135), Gloucestershire (£2,800), and the West Midlands (£2,810). We also have Choirs in Worcestershire, Birmingham, Leicester, Derbyshire and Lincolnshire supported through commissioning, and Associate Choirs in Solihull, Warrington, Oldham, the North East, Peterborough, Hampshire, and Berkshire.

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Sounds Wild

Soundabout's 'Sounds Wild' programme enables Learning Disabled children, young people and adults with complex support needs to access innovative music-making sessions in inspiring outdoor spaces.

These sessions combine music and nature to inspire and instil a sense of wonder and appreciation of the environment, encouraging interactive participation which focuses on raising self-esteem, engaging the senses and promoting self-expression and choice making.

Our practitioners are inspired by the Forest School approach to enable all participants to achieve, build their confidence and self-esteem through hands on learning in a natural environment. This approach featured in a blog for NHS Forest. We worked with Learning Disabled students at National Star College to co-develop new Sounds Wild themes and resources. They used the world of insects and bugs to create new resources, props, and songs and also explored the use of water and links to blue health research.

Each experience involves multisensory interactive music making, for example under the trees, sat around a fire, listening to the birds, or the rustle of the trees. Moments of stillness provide opportunities for Disabled children, young people and adults to listen to bird song and the natural sounds of the woodland and we ensure that their freedom to explore is an integral part of each Sounds Wild session.

During the summer of 2025, our Sounds Wild days enabled Disabled people of all ages to enjoy music-making in outdoor spaces including Grow Wilder in Bristol, RSPB Sandwell Valley, Brandon Marsh Nature Centre, Rowheath Pavilion in Birmingham, and National Star College. See Sounds Wild in action in the short video on www.soundabout.org.uk/music/sounds-wild

This parent beautifully described Sounds Wild at Grow Wilder: *"It was all very magical, in a beautiful setting and having space to spread out on the rug with other families was really lovely. It was very relaxed, without any pressure to 'perform', and just felt like it was all about enjoyment for everyone there."*

In 2026, we plan to run Sounds Wild sessions across the West Midlands, in Oxfordshire, Devon and Bristol. We need to raise £8,840 for each six-day Sounds Wild project.

Emerging Leaders

Emerging Leaders is an accredited one-year course supporting Learning Disabled people to become Music Leaders with strong understanding and skills in inclusive practice - building life skills, employability, and social cohesion. Young Learning Disabled adults participate in planning meetings, shadow choir leaders, undertake training and opportunities to arrange material, present to groups and lead sessions.

The project provides opportunities for these young Disabled adults to participate in inclusive music making activities, build skills, confidence and aspirations to lead choirs and other music activities, and gain accredited Arts Award qualifications.

We have some funding for Emerging Leaders and need to raise match funds of £10,000 to support the course in 2026. Soundabout will provide ongoing opportunities for the young Music Leaders to participate and take a lead role in choirs and other music projects for Learning Disabled people with complex support needs through our community programme. Youth Music is funding supported placement opportunities for our Graduate Emerging Leaders until March 2026 so we aim to raise £7,500 to create more opportunities.

Soundabout Projects for 2026-27

Soundabout Festivals

Our Festivals are a celebration of music in an environment that stimulates all the senses, designed for Learning Disabled children, young people and adults with complex support needs. The project supports them to explore multi-sensory music making in themed indoor spaces. Current themes include 'Under the Sea' and 'A Trip to the Bazaar' with lots of opportunities to explore the scents, sounds, and textures of the marketplace. We are developing 'Magic and Wonder' as an additional theme for 2026.

Soundabout practitioners use props, fabrics, smells, and sounds to transform spaces such as classrooms or community centres into magical worlds that excite the senses and enable greater engagement in music making. Our music practitioners use all the senses to support those with complex needs to explore new environments, develop greater self-expression and communication, and to make choices.

Each Festival day costs £1,350 and running multiple days in a row offers more local families and Disabled people the chance to access the opportunity. In 2026, we would love to run Festivals in the West Midlands, South West and Oxfordshire, and seeking funding to support these. We also run online Festivals, such as our Summer Festival inspired by favourite musicals chosen by the families. 'The Hills Are Alive … with Soundabouters!', a joyful day celebrating accessible, multi-sensory music-making, filled with singing, dancing, waving, wiggling, and pure joy. We need to raise £600 for each online Festival day.

Sounds Virtual

Virtual music-making sessions for Learning Disabled people with complex support needs

Soundabout's virtual music-making sessions enable Learning Disabled children and young people to enjoy music making with their families from home, hospices or hospitals, particularly important when isolated, but also enables families to access recordings whenever is most suitable for them. The programme includes:

- Weekly '**Soundabout Live!**' interactive music-making sessions on Facebook
- '**After School Clubs**', two times a week on Zoom for Disabled school children and young people
- '**Holiday Clubs**' on Zoom for Disabled school children and young people during school holidays
- Weekly '**Soundabout Families**' sessions for Disabled children, young people, adults, and groups from schools and day centres, based on our free Soundabout Life and Little Soundabout resource banks
- Weekly '**Sounds Sensory**' online sessions for Disabled children, young people, and adults exploring exciting themes such as under the sea, supporting parents/carers to learn multi-sensory techniques.

Ava loves taking part in sessions every week and her joy shines through in this photo. As her Mum, Liz, told us: *"Soundabout should be available on the NHS. They're the best medicine anyone has ever prescribed, and the only side effect is pure joy. Their impact in hospital settings is immeasurable."* Read more of their story here.

Our website enables families and participants to access our library to use at a time to suit them: over 225 'Soundabout Live!' interactive music sessions, over 580 'Hello', 'Goodnight' and routine songs, 200 'Little Soundabout' activities and 200 'Soundabout Life' activities. The resource library is added to each week with new sessions.

Soundabout needs to raise £2,650 per month to provide these sessions.