Since 1995, we have organised annual summer camps for children affected by the war in Bosnia- Herzegovina and the Balkan region. The camps are concerned with how music and creative arts may offer these children support in their social development and well-being.

The original function of the camps was to complement regular outreach and therapeutic work in Mostar carried out by organisations such as War Child, Educon and the music therapy initiative, Musers. The focus of the work was on the Los Rosales Centre for Children with Special Needs in Mostar, and fundraising, organisation and leadership of the camps was undertaken by the University of Edinburgh, Scotland, UK.

Now the focus has widened to more general issues of special needs in the region. The circle of collaboration has grown to include organisations such as the Youth Theatre, Leptir special needs centre and EMAUS in Srebrenica, and the Centre for Rehabilitation, Pula, Croatia. Collaborators from the world of creative arts include Ulysses Theatre, Istria, and Opera Circus UK and the Universities of Pula and Rijeka. In the summer of 2014, extra camps were organised to accommodate children who were victims of the floods in Eastern Bosnia.

The camps have been located in Obonjan, Brac, Puntizela, Zaostrog, Pula, Rovinj at the M.A.R.E Foundation, Brijuni ,Croatia at Boracko Jezero and Rakovica Bosnia and Sistiana Italy. They are organised with a light touch, with sports and swimming as well as creative music-theatre workshops. The children are cared for and mentored by a team of 20 volunteer animateurs, including creative arts practitioners, and qualified creative arts therapists, educationalists, psychologists and physiotherapists. The camps always conclude with a public performance of the children’s creative work. Normally 40 children are invited per camp. There are usually 2 or 3 camps per summer.
Daily timetable

8am  breakfast
9am  team meeting, children prepare for activities
10am physical activities, sport, swimming
12pm children prepare for lunch
1pm  lunch
2pm  siesta
3pm  creative workshops
6pm  prepare for dinner
7pm  dinner
8pm  sing song

Weekly schedule

Day 1  Day 2  Day 3  Day 4.  Day 5  Day 6  Day 7
arrival. daily daily daily morning rehearsals departure
evening timetable timetable timetable schedule performance
schedule
rehearsals
Hotel Ruza Mostar 1994

Puntizela 1999

Rakovica 2004
Rovinj, Villa Mare 2015
Brijuni 2000-2016
Methodology

The approach has been developed during the course of over 20 years of experience of supporting children who are victims of conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Georgia, Chechnya, Palestine, Syria, East Africa, South East Asia and India.

It uses music and creative arts to address educational, psychological and social challenges for children in areas of conflict and post-conflict. The method has also been proven to help children deal with some of the more personal challenges that often accompany stress (movement, breathing, emotions etc.). This approach is also relevant to many children with more general additional support needs.

Its starting point is in enjoyment, engagement and community. It addresses questions such as relaxation, joy, trust, empathy, intersubjectivity, individual creativity, motivation, self-expression, personal communication, self-belief, self-respect, socialisation, social communication, collective creativity, leadership, social identity and learning.

There is always a critical mass of experienced volunteers, so the camps offer a “soft landing” in this kind of work for new volunteers. The camps also provide an opportunity for those active in community building and therapeutic practice the region to share experiences.
MUSICAL TRANSFORMATION MODEL

PSYCHOLOGICAL
- concentration
- joy
- cognitive development
- creativity
- trust
- communication
- empathy
- psychobiological
- intersubjectivity
- processing of emotion
- regulation of breathing
- endocrine and autonomic regulation

SOCIAL
- self-belief
- self-confidence
- identity
- socialisation
- social communication
- social coordination
- synchronisation
- motivation
- spacial-temporal awareness
- fine and gross motor skills
- regulation of movement repertoires

BIOLICAL
- trust
- self-respect
- identity
- socialisation
- social communication
- social coordination
- synchronisation
- motivation
- spacial-temporal awareness
- fine and gross motor skills
- regulation of movement repertoires
PSYCHOLOGICAL

SOCIAL

CULTURAL

BIOLOGICAL

EDUCATIONAL

POLITICAL

ECONOMIC


SUMMER CAMPS REPORT

Camp 1 8th-15th July 2017 Rakovica

This camp was significantly smaller than usual - simply because of financial considerations. We were able to invite 20 guests and 10 animateurs. The camp took place at the Zemlja Mira i Prijateljstva Centre in the mountains above Rakovica - a clean and efficient centre with bright dormitories and bedrooms, excellent food and stunning views across the mountains to Mount Igman and the valley below.

The camp followed the normal daily and weekly timetable. For physical activities we organised horse riding, mountain walking and children’s games. For creative activities we worked on songwriting, drama and visual art. The theme for the creative work was “14th July”. There were two reasons for this: the date fell within the period of the camp, and the founder of the Centre at Rakovica, Jean-Claude Carreau, is a Frenchman by birth.

The children decided to celebrate 14th July by creating a music-theatre journey around France. Locations were chosen that were in some ways familiar to the children through similar towns and landscapes in Bosnia and Croatia - for example Mont St Michel (Rovinj), The Eiffel Tower (the Eiffel bridge in Sarajevo), Promenade des Anglais, Nice (Neum), La Montagne St Victoire (Velez).

The workshops took place in a large, covered but open-sided “barn”-like area. For the final performance the children created a large map of France on the floor. To their delight, we were able to drive a car into the space. So the car “drove around France” to each of the locations which were celebrated in song, dance and theatre created by the children in their group work.
2017 Report for The Balkan Music Camps
The Land of Friendship and Peace, Kakrinje, BiH

Long-serving volunteer Melissa Bradd reflects on her experiences of the Kakrinje camp, and draws comparisons with her last encounter with the same young people in 2005

This report is written as a reflective perspective from an individual who has attended the Balkan Music camps since being a student at Edinburgh University, first volunteering on the camps in 2005. I have experienced working alongside Nigel Osborne and a range of volunteers from around the world in many settings. Because of the needs of some of the young people it is not possible to take them all safely to certain locations. The Land of Friendship and Peace, Kakrinje offers a unique safe area which not only offers security, but has beautiful relaxing surroundings of trees, mountains and open skies. It has a main open barn area which is perfect for the music workshops because it offers an open-air space sheltered from the elements. There are other spaces groups can work in if needed. The cafe inside the main building makes a great meeting point for socialisation outwith the workshops. In other locations it has been challenging for the young people, their families, school staff and volunteers to work in the open air during summer, often seeking refuge under trees. The sleeping facilities are ideal because staff, parents and carers can comfortably sleep groups together based on their personal requirements. The camp has a structure to it including focused music workshops, horse-riding, games, football, arts and crafts. We all eat meals together which also contributes to strengthening relationships.

I worked with a group of four young men in 2005 along with another UK volunteer and a Bosnian translator. Working again with two of them in a group in 2017, it has been interesting to reflect back to when I first met them and observe their development and growth as human beings.

We initially found it a challenge to engage the young men during the first camp. The overall theme was based on the environment with groups being given specific elements to use as a focal point. Our group was given the theme of 'flowers and fruit'. At the time I initially thought the theme allocated would be a little tricky to engage the young men with. Perhaps they would more freely connect with a theme of 'mountains' or something less attached to 'feminine association'. They were reluctant to interact, not only with the song writing but in making basic eye-contact, shifting their focus to talk among themselves; and their body language overall presented a strong desire to not engage i.e., arms folded, legs crossed and turned away from the volunteers. Without speaking the local language we depended on a Bosnian translator whom despite their efforts
were not able to bridge bonding with immediate creativity. The first creative session is often a time for bonding however the second session was similar.

I suggested to the other volunteers we should spend some time without setting any expectations and set a scene with pens, pencils and paper to take the immediate focus away from producing anything within the initial framework. The translator suggested they draw some images that come to mind relating to flowers and fruit. They soon became quietly engaged and began to discuss their pictures with each other. Their engagement with each other alone was more open and they appeared to enjoy drawing. The volunteers also drew pictures and soon we shared among the group. From here they began to form lines to base their song on. Nigel joined our group to help them choose the chords and melody line. Speaking directly with them he is able to draw from them the inner creative elements so they can compose their own song and music with as little input or leading direction from volunteers. It is important they own their own creativity. It was a beautiful outcome. Based on the pictures they formed romantic gestures with the flowers for their girlfriends and their love for the Mostar Bridge. The group were soon smiling and sharing their creations together expressing with open body language and gestures, then forming music together. There are photographs attached.

Continuity is important for the camps and having a place that is familiar to the young people is as important as volunteers attending regularly. People who have experienced trauma can become frozen inside and can find it difficult to open up and connect with other people. It was for this reason I offered to work with the older group of men attending the camp this year. Establishing strong foundations with individuals by being present and finding ways to bond helps to strengthen trust and friendship. I found it much smoother this time having previously built a foundation with them. There was no hesitation to engage creatively.

This year, Nigel suggested we base the project on France due to Jean-Claude being of French nationality. Our group were given the Eiffel tower to base the songs on. The group were enthusiastic to sing about the Mostar Bridge making connection with the Eiffel tower. A second song was created about travel, with each of the men choosing a means of transport to get from the bridge to the tower. This was really fun because they could expand their imaginations. Nigel supported throughout this asking questions to open up possibilities for them to explore. One decided he would travel in his truck, another by airplane. We gathered daily as a larger group to learn each others songs and held regular volunteer meetings to discuss the creative process and how best to weave it all together. I felt the team was particularly strong this year due to most of them being committed over a number of years. It was a fabulous performance that began with the challenge of 'how many children can you fit in Tony's car?' which became the main movable thread for the show. We all sang a song together as he drove the car with one of the smaller children on his lap into and around the barn, which was decorated with
French flags. The barn was also decorated with origami fish and birds with each 'stop off' point representing a new location in France where each group would take their turn to present their song. We would all join the singing but they had their own particular dance and movement structure. Although there is an immediate barrier with language relying on translators this does not impact on the creative process and human bonding. Music can reach people in ways words cannot and rather than focus on problems and past conflicts provides a means to express and grow.

Having the camps based at the ranch offers a safe, secure and relaxing space for the young people to be. It offers a deeper level of experience and connection. Because of the environment it offers more opportunity to engage in more intimate ways, in smaller groups and as a large group all together. It can be overwhelming for some due to trauma experienced in the past, and at times it can be difficult for people to let love in. There are opportunities to play football, ball games and other recreational activities such as skipping! This plays an instrumental part in forming friendship and bonding.

The ranch has a cafe area where people can gather between workshops. This played an important role this year. The gentlemen I worked with, all in their late 20s-early 30s showed a growth in maturity. There is opportunity for rest during breaks but these times are key spots to be present to offer a space to interact. Instead of studying in private I chose to do this in the main barn. The three group members were intrigued and joined me. They chatted among themselves out of curiosity. I wrote out their names in Sanskrit to include them and to explain what I was doing. It evolved into exchanges of language and with the help of google translate, conversations began to flow. I was invited to join them for a cup of coffee at the cafe. This became a daily meeting and we would take turns to pay for coffee. Again we conversed as best we could. Regular phrases we collated and repeated. They would show me the Bosnian and I would show them the English. I tried to encourage them to speak the English but they were reluctant, although one does have a good general grasp. They were keen for me to visit them in Mostar which I intend to do next year.

Tony, one of the longest standing Bosnian volunteers brought his gong to this camp. I took this away from the main area to initially explore it during a break. The group came down to the tree and appeared amused laughing and joking with each other. They spent some time exploring the gong with each other. One holding while the other played. One of the men called Meme became very focused with the gong when it was later set up in the barn. He became extremely concentrated and many volunteers noted that they had never seen him so focused and engaged before. I joined his rhythm supporting with a shamanic frame drum and I could see although he was continuing to focus on what he was doing, he developed a strength by being joined by another person and instrument; and through this he appeared to become more relaxed and a confidence grew. Because he was taking the lead and in time supported with a gentle
under current, he perhaps felt affirmed in his own rhythm of creation. There is a video of this attached. Spontaneous music making is also more possible at this location. We had some lovely interactions singing well known Balkan songs and impromptu song writing. These were magical moments and was such a joy for all. Some of the younger children joined in too. The barn is a great space for instruments to be continually available for people to use. In the evenings we all joined together to sing songs from around the world. Nigel often invites suggestions from the group asking them to chose a country or suggestion of a song they know. At times one of the young people will take the lead singing or playing guitar, a shaker or drum. This vibe also presents opportunity for bonding through dancing. It has not always been possible to hold this in the evenings in other locations. I noted again how this helped our group to open up. A way to connect in a safe physical manner through movement and dance. Meme was a little resistant to dance initially but before long he was keen to dance and developed graceful sways. Initially he moved my arms up and down but we expanded on this introducing turns and more flow with the dance. Physical stiffness can occur from trauma and through movement can help release tension. The music is such a wonderful high vibration of energy you can’t help but move to it - even if it takes a little time and encouragement there are times when most if not all are joining in.

Another important factor of this ranch is the opportunity for young people to go horse riding. This has its own healing strength. I have witnessed many times how often they are scared to go on a horse let alone hold their arms out or stand on top of them. The pictures will speak for themselves.

There was a great unity this year. The French connection was a way of saying thank you to Jean-Claude for offering such a space to hire.

Melissa Bradd
December 2017
Camp 2 16th-23rd July 2017 Pula-Brijuni

The second camp was based at the Centre for Rehabilitation, Veruda, Pula. The children attend the Veruda campus as a day centre, so there are no accommodation costs for guests. The animateurs sleep at the Centre. Because there were few financial pressures we were able to invite 60 children and 15 volunteers.

The timetable for Pula is different from the residential camps. There are no physical activities. The full focus is on creative workshops which take place in the morning and early afternoon. The final performance however normally takes place in “Prospero’s Garden” at Ulysses Theatre on the island of Brijuni.

The theme of this year’s creative project was A Midsummer Night’s Dream, a subject related to a new production at Ulysses Theatre. The children chose to adapt the narrative to an ecological interpretation: a story of people leaving the noise, smoke and heartlessness of the city for the forest and being transformed by magic potions to loving and empathetic relationships.