

darts



Case Study

Shauna and Harley's Tuneful Chatter Story

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Tuneful Chatter

Tuneful Chatter is a joyful, vibrant programme of movement, music and song for Doncaster 0-5-year-olds and their parents/carers, designed to develop the social, emotional and communication skills that provide the foundation for children to learn, grow and thrive in and beyond school.

When the Covid-19 pandemic arrived, very young children were the hardest hit, missing out on crucial opportunities to socialise, learn and grow up within a community. In February 2022, we undertook a survey with Doncaster Early Years practitioners to determine the impact of Covid-19 and found that, for a cohort of babies and under-fives born in and living through the pandemic, there have been worrying repercussions personal, social and emotional development (PSED). With 32.4% of children in Doncaster living in poverty, and high levels of deprivation the city, the local impact is severe. We deliver Tuneful Chatter in 14 settings across Doncaster including schools, nurseries and family hubs, in areas where there is greatest need.

More information on Tuneful Chatter and programme delivery can be found on our [website](https://wearedarts.org.uk).

Shauna and Harley's Tuneful Chatter Story

When Harley was one, Shauna, his Nan, became his legal guardian, after a long and drawn out process through the family courts. Now an energetic and creative two and a half year old, Harley has been coming to Tuneful Chatter at the Stainforth Family Hub since it started in 2023.

Harley is an energetic and creative two-and-a-half year old, who first came to Tuneful Chatter at Stainforth Family Hub with Shauna around a year ago. After a long and tiring process with family courts, Harley's Nan, Shauna, became his legal guardian just before he turned one, and began taking him to Tuneful Chatter as soon as sessions began.

"I think he's still impacted by what's happened... it has affected him in certain ways. He doesn't sleep in the night."

Shauna said that for Harley, being able to come to Tuneful Chatter sessions and be free to play, create and explore under the gentle guidance of darts' artists was incredibly important. Shauna felt that with Harley facing so many challenges at such a young age, the opportunity to be carefree and join in with other children was a key part of growing up and living the life she wanted for him.

"He can take off his trainers, take off his socks and run around – just be a normal two year old."

As a guardian

At Tuneful Chatter parents/guardians are encouraged to play an active role in the session, engaging creatively with their child and learning skills and activities to replicate at home. Shauna told us that for her and Harley, this family-based approach was key: becoming the guardian of a toddler long after she had had her own children, Shauna felt she was having to learn how to raise a child all over again.

"I've got four kids myself and I know that these days everything is done different. For me, it's also teaching me new nursery rhymes and things like that...I'm still doing the learning process because everything is different to me now."

Whilst Shauna has arthritis and is unable to run around after Harley like many parents/guardians would with children his age, they are able to connect and be together through creativity. Shauna said that the darts artists delivering sessions really understood this, and they could take part together in a way that suited her and supported Harley: ***"With me, I can't do much with my legs because I have real bad arthritis... And they understand that here – I can normally sit at a wall and let them go chase him around, knowing I can't do very much."***

Building connections

"I've just got full guardianship over him, and the first thing I wanted to do was get him into Tuneful so he could interact with other kids."

Shauna told us that, with Harley being the only child under her care, it was vital for him to come to group sessions like Tuneful Chatter, where he could learn to interact, communicate, and socialise with children his own age. Before coming into Shauna's care, Harley had never been to a family activity session or been able to spend time with many other children. Yet, as Harley continued to come to Tuneful Chatter sessions, Shauna noticed that his confidence and social skills began to increase.

“He seems to be growing in more ways than one – he’s interacting more, his speech... he’s not quite verbal yet but his speech is coming on. He’s just a joy to be around.”

Creating together

darts artists design and deliver creative sessions that enable children to take part on an individual and collective level. Activity themes vary week to week – from a magical forest to a winter wonderland – children can express themselves and communicate through creativity, which Harley seems to love.

“He’s interacting a lot more... we got the umbrellas out and he loved it. We got the big cushions out and he decided to bury me in them!”

Shauna told us that not only did Tuneful Chatter sessions help Harley to explore his creative side, but also helped Shauna unlock hers. Being naturally artistic, Shauna found it a joy that Harley was too, and that they could use sessions as an opportunity to be creative together. With ‘messy time’ now a firm favourite in their household, Shauna said she and Harley love coming to Tuneful Chatter and picking up new activities that they could replicate at home, and that she has even become known for her creativity amongst the group of parents and guardians at Stainforth.

“He’s a very artistic little boy and I think he takes after me...so we like to have messy time and stuff like that at home... When they had the spaghetti out, I made him a headband and I actually asked if I could take it home so I could show his mama and dada, which was quite nice. So we took it home, and the other people in the group normally ask me now, if they want something creative doing”

Local solutions

darts delivers Tuneful Chatter in 14 settings across Doncaster, specifically in communities that are underserved. Many areas of delivery, like Stainforth and Balby, fall into the 20% most deprived areas in the UK, and opportunities for accessible, high-quality activity are scarce. Shauna told us that having an activity that she could access locally was incredibly important to her, and essential to the local community.

“Stainforth doesn’t have a lot as it is, it’s all mostly takeaways and what have you – I’m so grateful Tuneful Chatter is here... that I can just walk up here, it’s ideal for us.”

Some final words

“He absolutely loves it. All the kids that come here love it. He’s benefitted from it a lot, as well as the other children. Because I have contact with him all the time, I’ve seen the changes.”