

Musical care international network grant scheme 2024-2025

Summary report

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The musical care international network grants scheme

The Musical Care International Network ran its second round of its grants scheme in 2024-2025. Following the first round, which had focused on supporting events and research on musical care in general, the aim of the second round was to shine a light on musical care practices that tend to be hidden or less often discussed in policy and research. This round therefore focused on everyday musical care. Everyday musical care – a term we introduced to refer to such more hidden practices – concerns activities that can play vital roles in contexts of caring relationships but are not always visible or valued. Such activities include personal music listening, nurses or care staff using music as part of care in a care home or hospital, or parents singing with their babies. This round of the network grants scheme was supported through the UKRI's Policy Support Fund administered through the Royal College of Music and placed emphasis on identifying policy implications of the work.

The goals of the scheme were to support research and events about everyday musical care, explore how musical care is enacted in diverse communities, enable the exploration of the meaning of the term everyday musical care, test the usefulness and applicability of the term, and explore the potential to influence policy making.

Building on the first round which included grants at a maximum of £800, in this round two levels of grant were offered (small grants up to £1,500 and medium grants up to £3,000). Over 50 applications were received from over 6 countries. Five projects were supported and completed.

Project overviews

The five completed projects approached everyday musical care from a wide range of perspectives, geographies, and practices. Together, they spanned digital communities in Mexico and Colombia, senior citizens' karaoke clubs in India, Indigenous musical arts in cancer care in Zambia, women's vocal traditions in Kurdistan (Iran), and grief-focused collective music-making in the United Kingdom (UK). While differing in focus and method, all projects explored how music functions as a resource for well-being, cultural continuity, and community connection in everyday life.

1. Singing with Care (India)

Project leader:

Aditi Deo, Assistant Professor, School of Arts and Sciences, Ahmedabad University, India

This ethnographic study examined karaoke clubs for senior citizens in Ahmedabad through four months of fieldwork, participant observation, 30 semi-structured interviews, and a final karaoke event. The research identified two groups of participants: lifelong music-makers and those who came to singing later in life through social networks. Karaoke participation enhanced pleasure, socialization, and quality of life, but some women, especially single women, reported exclusion or discomfort, underscoring gendered differences in social dynamics. The clubs' collection of mid to late 20th-century Hindi film songs was central, acting as a shared memory and cultural glue. The project also created a valuable archive of interviews, field notes, photos, and videos, laying the

foundation for future publications. A closing event gathered about 50 seniors to share experiences and celebrate music's role in well-being.

2. Musical Care as a Balm for Grief (UK, Global Network)

Project leaders:

Co-founders of We Are Monster Global Network for Music Therapists of Colour:

Michaela de Cruz, Music Therapist in adult mental health, UK

Davina Vencatasamy, Associate Lecturer, University of Derby. PhD Candidate, Lesley University, UK

Jonathan Tang, PhD Candidate, University of Sheffield, UK

Led by the We Are Monster Global Network for Music Therapists of Colour, this project created a space for People of Colour (PoC) to process grief through collective musical care. The event, based in Leicester, UK, combined a screening of a documentary called "Our Grief – Black Women Speak" with improvisational music-making and discussions. The event was advertised through professional and community networks, though attendance was limited (10 participants) due to travel costs and the wider cost of living crisis. Feedback about the event and the possible roles for musical care in the context of grief emphasized the need for more culturally representative leadership and safe, contained spaces for engaging with grief. Although survey responses were low, qualitative feedback highlighted the importance of these spaces for addressing transgenerational trauma and unmet mental health needs in PoC communities. The project demonstrated the value of mixed media in musical care and informed future plans for larger, more inclusive events.

3. Indigenous Musical Arts in Cancer Care (Zambia)

Project leader:

Nsamu Urgent Moonga, Doctoral Candidate (Music Therapy), University of Pretoria, South Africa

At the Cancer Diseases Hospital in Lusaka, this community-based study explored the use of Zambian Indigenous musical arts as therapeutic innovations for cancer patients and their caregivers. Guided by Indigenous research methodologies, twelve sessions were conducted over eight weeks with 25 participants. Sessions combined conversation circles with ceremonies that incorporated traditional singing, drumming, new song creation, and storytelling as expressions of the Indigenous musical arts. Communal meals before every session fostered relationships. Outcomes included visible transformations, such as one participant's renewed vitality during chemotherapy, as well as the creation of an "ecology of care" rooted in the Ubuntu philosophy. The project revealed tensions and opportunities for integration between Indigenous and biomedical systems, and underscored the importance of material support (transport, food security) and cultural/linguistic sensitivity.

4. Vocal Tradition in Hawrāmān (Kurdistan, Iran) and Women's Engagement through Multiple Layers of Care

Project leader:

Serveh Naghshbandi, Teaching Associate and Independent researcher, Monash University, Australia

This project explored the vocal tradition in Hawrāmān, focusing on women's engagement to highlight how they contribute to sustaining the tradition through multiple layers of emotional, relational, cultural, ecological, and epistemological care, which maintain identity and

intergenerational ties. The grant supported fieldwork that enabled connections with women practitioners and cultural custodians, leading to collaborative partnerships. Early findings were presented at international conferences, and the work is developing into a jointly authored academic paper and a co-edited book. The project highlighted an underrepresented musical practice, fostered collaborative and decolonial research approaches, and strengthened the researcher's personal connection to her heritage, countering the isolation of independent research.

5. Digital Huapango Communities (Mexico and Colombia)

Project leader:

J.A. Strub, Assistant Editor, Latin American Music Review

This project investigated everyday musical care within online cultural and social communities - the digital huapango ecosystem of the YouTube channel GavBroadcast. Using a qualitative approach, twelve in-depth interviews were conducted both in-person and online with subscribers across Mexico and Colombia. The interviews were adapted to account for cultural nuances in terms like "support" and "benefit," ensuring participants' meanings were captured accurately. Findings highlighted huapangos as a therapeutic resource (for example, during chemotherapy), as a means of grief work, as ritual continuity through livestreams, and as cultural connection across distance. Outcomes included a rich body of qualitative data, valuable feedback to the channel ethnography with academic theorization of digital musical care.

Themes across the everyday musical care projects

The projects highlighted the following interconnected themes.

- Musical care's role in illness, grief, identity and belonging.
Music consistently emerged as a form of care that addressed illness, grief, identity, and belonging. From digital huapango to Hindi film songs, Indigenous Zambian practices, and collective improvisation in the UK, the projects shone a light on the possible roles that musical care can play while emphasising the importance of practices that align with cultural contexts.
- Community and social connection
The projects emphasized that everyday musical care thrives in communal settings. Through online subscriber networks, karaoke clubs, Indigenous gatherings, or grief-focused events, music created spaces of solidarity, resilience, and shared meaning. These collective experiences were central to supporting wellbeing, thus highlighting the importance of social and relational experiences.
- Cultural sensitivity and culturally responsive approaches
The importance of tailoring musical care to cultural contexts was repeatedly highlighted. This included adapting interview methodologies in the huapango project, recognizing the role of specific repertoires in karaoke clubs or Zambian clinics, and foregrounding culturally appropriate leadership in the "We Are Monster" event. Each project reinforced that culturally responsive approaches are essential for relevance, accessibility, and impact.
- Range of contexts in which everyday musical care can happen
These projects highlight the wide range of the kinds of contexts in which musical care can happen and the continuities between musical care in formal care contexts, leisure activities, community activities, and traditional settings.

- Methodological pluralism
The projects demonstrated the value of diverse methodologies for exploring the multifaceted everyday musical care. In-depth interviews, participant observation, Indigenous methodologies, and creative practices enabled nuanced accounts of lived experience and revealed dimensions of care that may have been overlooked.
- Challenges and opportunities
The projects drew attention to challenges such as logistical barriers, cultural and linguistic complexities, and the ethical responsibilities of working across communities. These challenges offered opportunities for innovation, collaboration, and policy engagement.

Implications and recommendations for research policy

Policy is often evidence based. However, projects like the ones supported in this scheme are rarely funded. Evidence used in policy making typically draws on research that has been driven by priorities that can be limited in, for example, their representation of research disciplines, methodologies, and cultures of care, with a priority given to global minority cultures and concentrated in the Global North. In order to fully understand the roles that musical care can play in supporting any aspect of people's developmental or health needs, funding models need to integrate possibilities to support this wider range of research and therefore evidence. Indeed, this Musical Care International Network grant scheme is an example of how to counter this imbalance by supporting projects that advance musical care research and practice in under-resourced areas.

Conclusion

The Musical Care International Network small and medium grants scheme has not only supported individual projects but also strengthened a growing international conversation about the role of everyday musical care. By providing support to diverse practitioners and researchers, the scheme created conditions in which overlooked practices were documented, valued, and shared. The projects demonstrated that small-scale, targeted investment can generate insights of global relevance, foster collaboration across borders, and amplify voices that are too often excluded from mainstream narratives of care. Bringing out this variety of practices and research connected with them, allows an increased breadth of our understanding of musical care, new questions to be asked, and learning across cultures about how musical care can play a role, and how research projects can explore these practices.

Looking ahead, the Network is well positioned to build on this momentum by nurturing connections between projects, supporting further dissemination of findings, and deepening engagement with communities, practitioners, and policymakers. The projects have illustrated that everyday musical care is not peripheral, but integral to the way people sustain health, identity, and relationships in daily life. Ensuring this work continues to be recognized and resourced will be vital for embedding musical care as a valued dimension of policy and practice in years to come.

Citation: Spiro, N., Shihadeh, A., Sanfilippo, K.R.M., McConnell, B. (2025) Musical care international network grant scheme 2024-2025: Summary report, <https://musicalcareresearch.com>