



**THE
MUSIC
WORKS**

**Inspiring and transforming the
lives of young people through the
power of music**

**Forest Hub First Year
Impact Report: October 2025**



Journey To Opening

The Music Works' connection to the Forest of Dean runs deep. Starting as Forest of Dean Music Makers in 2004, the organisation has maintained a presence in the area for over two decades, working regularly with young people in schools and the community through its SoundSpace studio at Forest High School.



However, by 2022, it was clear that SoundSpace, while valued, was no longer fit for purpose. The facility was increasingly run down, located outside the town centre, and wasn't seen as a community resource.

Young people consistently reported barriers to engagement: **49%** cited rural isolation, **33%** said there was no local relevant offer, and **24%** identified cost as a prohibiting factor. In response, The Music Works embarked on an ambitious consultation process, speaking with over **100** young people across Cinderford and the Forest of Dean.

The findings were striking: **74%** said music was either 'quite important' or 'the most important' thing in their lives, yet only **31%** were actually making music – and half of those were doing so at home without any support.





The vision for a new Forest Hub was born from these conversations. Young people didn't just want better facilities; they wanted a space that was truly theirs – in the heart of Cinderford, co-created with them, and reflecting their musical interests in contemporary genres like rap, hip hop, grime, drill, and guitar-based rock and pop.

Following the successful launch of the Gloucester Hub in September 2021, The Music Works secured funding to create the Forest of Dean's first accessible, inclusive music space. Leased from by Cinderford Town Council as part of the Forest of Dean's £20m Levelling Up investment in community facilities, the building underwent a 12-month renovation and refurbishment. We transformed it into a vibrant hub, equipping it with state of the art music making and recording facilities for the benefit of young people in the area.



The facility opened its doors in September 2024 in Cinderford town centre, featuring two recording studios, two production rooms, a sensory music room, social spaces, and full accessibility including a Changing Places toilet and specialist equipment.



Critically, the hub was designed in partnership with the Forest of Dean Youth Advisory Group – 100% of whom come from under-represented demographics or live with challenging circumstances – ensuring every aspect reflected the needs and aspirations of local young people.



Growth

The impact in the first year exceeded all expectations. The Drop Forest programme – the hub's flagship open access offering – grew by an extraordinary **485%**, from just **27** participants the previous year to **158** young people. This wasn't just about numbers; it represented young people who had previously faced insurmountable barriers finally having a space where they felt welcome, supported, and able to explore their creativity.

Across all Forest Hub programmes, engagement reached impressive levels:

158

young people participated in The Drop Forest sessions

219

open access sessions delivered (an **18%** increase from the previous year across both hubs)

656

unique participants engaged in the Forest of Dean, making up

3,092

attendances

4738

contact hours delivered in the Forest Hub

25

young people engaged in the Youth Voice and Leadership programme

Meeting Critical Needs

The Forest Hub directly addressed the severe gaps in provision that had existed in the area. Parts of the Forest of Dean sit within the **20%** most deprived areas in the UK, with **22%** of children living in poverty and Cinderford specifically having one of the country's most deprived Lower Super Output Areas for Income Deprivation Affecting Children.

The hub's inclusive design meant it could support:

- Disabled young people through specialist equipment and IncDrop programme
- The **45%** of local school students who are EAL speakers, helping to support community cohesion during a period of demographic change
- Young people experiencing mental health challenges, NEETs, young carers, and those involved with youth justice
- Families unable to afford private music tuition through free and low-cost access





Building a Connected Community

From the outset, the Forest Hub positioned itself not as an isolated facility but as an anchor in Cinderford's developing cultural ecosystem. In its first year, the hub established partnerships with over 20 local organisations, including:

- Wesley Arts Centre (becoming a key performance and events partner)
- Local councils (Cinderford Town Council, Forest of Dean District Council)
- Schools across the Forest of Dean
- Youth organisations across the Forest of Dean
- Disability specialists, including Heart of the Forest School
- Community groups supporting mental health, youth justice, and young carers

The hub's presence was felt across the Forest of Dean through:

- Local partnerships with Coleford Music Festival and Cindyfest
- Regular showcases at the Wesley Arts Centre
- **51** Music Bus sessions reaching isolated rural communities
- Co-created programmes with specific partners rather than generic outreach
- Received a regional parliamentary award in recognition of impactful Health Equality Work



Youth Voice at the Heart

True to the organisation's commitment, young people weren't just participants – they were partners in shaping the hub's development. The Forest of Dean Youth Advisory Group met regularly throughout the year, co-producing programmes, making decisions about activities, and contributing to strategic direction. Quality and Innovation The Forest Hub maintained The Music Works' commitment to evidence-based practice and quality delivery:

- Monthly data evaluation by Forest and senior leadership teams
- Quarterly reporting to trustees
- Regular feedback loops with young people, families, and partners
- Case studies documenting individual journeys and outcomes
- Use of Upshot evaluation software to track wellbeing and social outcomes

The hub also pioneered new approaches to rural delivery, testing outreach solutions like co-produced delivery with partner organisations in isolated areas, producing multilingual marketing materials to reach the area's diverse foreign national communities, and establishing the Music Bus as a mobile hub bringing opportunities to those who couldn't travel to Cinderford.



Looking Forward

As the Forest Hub celebrates its first birthday in October 2025, it does so not just as a building but as a movement. The **485%** growth in Drop Forest participation tells only part of the story. Behind those numbers are young people who have found confidence, community, and creative expression – often for the first time.

Young people who had been isolated are now part of thriving musical communities. Those who had been written off by schools are discovering talents and pathways they never knew existed. Families struggling with the challenges of disability have found respite and support. A community that had experienced significant social tensions around demographic change has found common ground through shared creative endeavour.



The Forest Hub has proven that when you genuinely listen to young people, when you invest in quality provision that meets them where they are, and when you commit to true inclusivity, transformation is possible – even in areas facing significant disadvantage and rural isolation.

As we step into year two, the foundation is strong, our partnerships are growing, and the potential ahead is greater than ever. With continued investment, we can build on this progress – ensuring the Forest Hub continues to deliver high quality opportunities and lasting impact for young people across the Forest of Dean.

With thanks to the funders and supporters of this work:

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Forest of Dean District Council
Warner Chappel Music
Genelec
Arts Council England

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