



Babigloo Music for Babies

Evaluation Report 2024-25

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Evaluation commissioned by Babigloo

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Contents

About Babigloo Music for Babies	3
About the evaluation	4
Considering evidence for each evaluation question	6
To what extent have the intended outcomes been achieved?	6
What contextual factors have enabled, inhibited or influenced the achievement of outcomes?	19
Beyond the intended aims and outcomes, are there things about the project which are important or valuable to: families, partners and the project team?	19
What is the potential for this project to be scaled-up or developed?	20
What are the key points of learning?	20
Next steps	21
Appendices	22



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Graphics throughout Liv Handley (Participating Parent)

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Dorset Early Years
Octagon Music Hub
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Bridport Arts Centre
Shaftesbury Arts Centre
Dorpip

Swanage & Purbeck Development Trust Centre
BSharp ME (West)
The Arts Development Co.
Activate
Take Art Ltd
Soundwaves South West

And especially:



Thank you to all the families and freelancers who contributed information for evaluation.

Illustrations in this report are by Liv, a parent who took part in Babigloo groups.

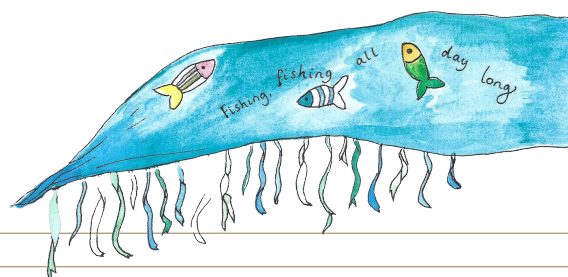
About Babigloo Music for Babies

Babigloo is a non-verbal approach to music making for babies and their parents/carers. Babigloo music leaders create a multi-sensory environment which encourages listening, communication and playfulness between babies and their parents/carers using live and recorded music, sound, movement, gesture, visual and tactile materials, babies' vocalisations and non-verbal communication. Babigloo music making sessions last around 45 minutes, balancing structured activities which build on babies' sensory perceptions, with spontaneous vocal and non-verbal interaction with the babies. Each session is led by two music leaders working together and some sessions also have a visiting musician to enhance families' experience of live music and instruments. Each Babigloo programme involves a series of weekly sessions (usually eight) for up to 10 babies and their parents/carers. The goal is to develop families' enjoyment of music making and enhance parent-child communication, thereby contributing to families' wellbeing.

Babigloo was established in 2016 by three artists (Jenny Gordon, Michele O'Brien and Colin Phillimore) who trained with Professor Paulo Lameiro (Musicalmente, Pousos, Portugal) in non-verbal approaches to music making with babies, drawing on the music learning theories of Professor Edwin E. Gordon. Babigloo registered as a Community Interest Company in 2017. Babigloo programmes almost always involve working in partnership with local organisations that support families with young children. Partners provide space for the sessions to take place, and in most cases, recruit families to take part and support them to attend.

Over the development of Babigloo's work they have received a number of grants from a range of sources, including significant funds from Youth Music. Having introduced and consolidated its work in Dorset throughout 2022-23, in 2023, a successful application to Youth Music's Catalyser Fund enabled two years of work to expand offering Babigloo groups across all of Dorset and scale up to work with more families. Previous work had focused on Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP) and East Dorset. The two-year programme of work from 2023 to 2025 involved offering Babigloo programmes in West Dorset (Bridport and Dorchester), North Dorset (Blandford and Shaftesbury), Purbeck (Swanage and Bovington) and Chesil (Weymouth and Portland).

In addition to expanding into new areas of Dorset, there were four other significant aspects of this two-year phase of work. Firstly, to develop a "Next Steps" programme for families with children aged 1 to 2 years. Babigloo's approach was created for the development of babies aged 0 to 12 months. By expanding to work with older children, Babigloo wished to retain the essential features of the approach whilst adapting to the needs of families with older children. The two-years of work trialled this expanded approach. Secondly, to influence the strategic development of Early Years music in Dorset through working with the Music Hub. Thirdly, to establish stronger organisational processes within Babigloo that would ensure sustainability, and fourthly, to recruit, train and work with new music leaders. This fourth aspect was essential to successfully delivering the programme of work across eight dispersed locations which could not be covered by the original three founding members alone. Four new music leaders joined Babigloo over the two-year programme and remain part of an expanded team.



About the evaluation

Evaluation design

Babigloo invited Nell Farrally (freelance evaluation consultant) to co-ordinate evaluation activities. Nell created an Evaluation Framework collaboratively with members of the Babigloo team that combined an outcomes approach to evaluation with an illuminative and developmental approach¹. A series of evaluation questions clarified what the evaluation would explore:

Evaluation questions

- 1) To what extent have the intended outcomes been achieved?
- 2) What contextual factors have enabled, inhibited or influenced the achievement of outcomes?
- 3) Beyond the intended aims and outcomes, are there things about the project which are important or valuable to: families, partners and the project team?
- 4) What is the potential for this project to be scaled up or developed?
- 5) What are the key points of learning?

The outcomes referred to in the first evaluation question were categorised into outcomes for families, for Babigloo, and for partners and Dorset's Early Years sector. The first three numbered outcomes feature in the Youth Music funding application therefore there is a requirement to report on them to Youth Music. The fourth and fifth outcomes are additional to those stated in the Youth Music application but are important aspects of Babigloo's work which they wish to be considered in the evaluation – therefore they are included in this report.

Outcomes

Outcomes for families

Outcome 1: To improve the mental health and wellbeing of families with young babies, through music making, in response to participants feedback providing continuation of musical learning from 0-3 years².

Outcome 2: To integrate music making into the life of families with young babies.

Organisational outcomes for Babigloo

Outcome 3: To develop Babigloo's establishment and management ensuring sustainability for the future.



¹ Combining three different theoretical approaches to evaluation enables broader exploration of a project than outcomes evaluation alone can provide. Outcomes evaluation is where judgements are made about whether intended changes have occurred, illuminative evaluation involves an open-ended inquiry into the effects of a project, and developmental evaluation focuses on creating insight that informs real-time adaptation and project development.

² On the advice of council activity workers, the age group was limited to up to 2 years to optimise the effects of the methods.

To increase the number of early years music leaders trained to deliver Babigloo's approach, to increase capacity and geographical reach, and enhance the professional development of all Babigloo practitioners.

Outcomes for partners / Dorset's Early Years sector

Supporting families' wellbeing through music is integral to Dorset's emerging Early Years Music strategy.

An Evaluation Framework identified methods of data collection and sources of evidence for each evaluation question and outcome.

Evaluation data and evidence

The data methods and evidence considered in this evaluation report are:

- Quantitative attendance data
- Parents' questionnaires (for 0 to 12 month groups and Next Steps groups)
- Unsolicited email feedback
- Music leader observation/reflection diary
- Case study interviews (with two parents and the leader of one partner organisation)
- Partners' questionnaire
- Trainee music leaders' and new music leaders' questionnaire
- Recruitment records of new/trainee music leaders
- Notes of reflective evaluation meetings



Reflecting on learning

In addition to the data and evidence gathered for analysis, the evaluation has included regular reflective practice, both for individual music leaders and group discussions amongst the team and evaluator, to consider learning during the programme and at the end of the funding period to determine the direction and focus of future work. Reflective practice is integral to Babigloo's usual way of working and ethos, and utilises Youth Music's *Do, Review, Improve* quality framework³ for continuous reflection.

Structure of this report

Following this section of the report that describes the scope of evaluation activities, the next section presents evidence relevant to each evaluation question followed by a section of recommendations for future development of Babigloo's work.

³ <https://www.youthmusic.org.uk/community/resource-hub/youth-music-quality-framework>

Considering evidence for each evaluation question

To what extent have the intended outcomes been achieved?

Outcomes for families

Outcome 1: To improve the mental health and wellbeing of families with young babies, through music making, in response to participants feedback providing continuation of musical learning from 0-3 years.

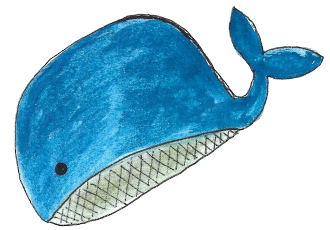
Outcome 2: To integrate music making into the life of families with young babies.

Evidence relevant to the outcomes for families came from feedback from parents through questionnaires for all, case study interviews for a small selection of parents and unsolicited feedback sent by email to the Babigloo team. Notes from reflective meetings amongst the Babigloo team were also relevant to developing Next Steps groups.

The questionnaires

There were two questionnaires parents were asked to complete. At the start of their participation in Babigloo, questions included:

- What do you hope to gain *for yourself* from coming to this group?
- What do you hope *your child* will gain from coming to this group?
- We hope this group will support you and your child's wellbeing. Is there anything concerning wellbeing which this group could particularly help you or your child with?



Many responses to this first question concerned parents' wish to enjoy spending time with their baby – relaxing, interacting, bonding, having fun. Another common reason for attending was social interaction with others – meeting other new parents, meeting people locally and making friends. For some, they hoped having a regular group to attend would help with challenges of being a new parent such as getting out of the house and developing a routine. A few parents wanted Babigloo to help them learn about parenting and child development, such as how to engage with their baby. Some wished to develop greater confidence at attending parent and baby groups. It was common for parents to want to learn more about music such as gaining ideas for making music at home, to experience a wider range of music, to enjoy live music, and to develop more confidence in music to be able to make music with their baby.

What parents hoped their child would gain fell into three categories – musical, developmental and wellbeing. Parents wanted their child to have opportunities for exploring music and sound and to develop an enjoyment of music. For some, they were explicit that they wanted their child to have musical experiences beyond what they could provide. Many parents wanted to support their child's development through attending Babigloo. They wanted opportunities for sensory engagement and stimulation, communication, interaction with other babies, developing confidence with new experiences and places, and learning routine through the sessions.

Some parents saw Babigloo as potentially adding to their baby's wellbeing such as enjoyment, emotional regulation and being calming for their baby who is often unsettled.

For this third question about families specifically needing support with wellbeing, one parent wrote that they had a hearing impairment. Another family had a baby with a hearing impairment. One parent shared that they "struggle with anxiety and meeting new people" and others felt a need to increase their confidence or had a need for relaxation.

The post-course questionnaire responses could similarly be themed as there were notable patterns amongst parents' views and experiences, which matched their hopes for the group: knowledge and experiences of music, social opportunities and contributing to wellbeing. Regarding knowledge and experiences of music, many parents wrote of enjoying music more, specifically enjoying classical music with their baby, and increasing their understanding how music contributes to babies' development. There were many comments that were relevant to the outcome of integrating music into families' lives. Parents had learnt new songs they were now singing at home, and they gave many examples of how they were making more music outside of Babigloo sessions:

Encourages me every day to sing with my baby and family.

Managing daily tasks while singing them, though my older boy thinks I'm mad. Also definitely enjoy it too cause they both join in with the crazy songs.

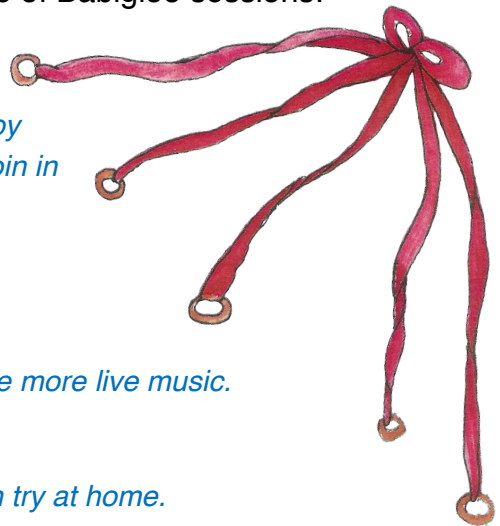
We use lots of different sounds and babbling at home.

Singing a lot more.

I will now make a huge effort to encourage my children to see more live music.

Inspired me to do similar activities at home.

We have learned a lot, so much about musical things we can try at home.



Social opportunities had enabled people to make "new friends" and "meet lovely groups of people" and one person was "less isolated". A sense of community was a phrase used by some to describe Babigloo.

Babigloo contributed to parents' wellbeing in several ways. Many parents felt that Babigloo was valuable as it focused their attention on their baby which helped with bonding. This came not only from spending time together, for example:

Time out of the day in life to be present with my baby – I'm trying to do more like this.

Precious time one-to-one with my baby.

Having dedicated time out from everyday life to enjoy time with my baby.

Protected and precious time to connect with my child in a peaceful environment.

But was also a result of the activities in the Babigloo sessions and the responses they promoted from babies and their evident enjoyment:

Loved watching his expressions and enjoyment.

Loved watching baby have fun.

The structure of Babigloo sessions intentionally aims to create an environment which is distinct from the usual pressures of daily life. At the beginning of each session, the music leaders sing the group rules which include no talking amongst the adults, and no use of mobile phones by parents during the sessions. This creates a space where everyone takes part in the same way – no one feels obligated to chat to people they do not know and everyone is focused on their baby’s experience and the activities taking place. Some parents commented that Babigloo affected their mood:

Happy the day of the session.

Lifted my mood.

I find it very wholesome and has made me calm and happy.

More confidence was reported by several parents. For some, it was the act of taking part in a group that built their confidence:

Confident getting on bus. Before I was anxious.

Feel more confident attending classes alone.

Made me feel more confident.

Some parents liked that having a regular activity to attend helped them to create a routine, and for some, they looked forwards to the sessions each week. A sense of calm was experienced by many parents during the Babigloo sessions. The welcoming environment the Babigloo team created was an aspect that was important to some parents:

Sense of being included.

Calm, welcoming space.

Music has helped me have a positive, calmer attitude.

The benefits of Babigloo for the babies which their parents reported were also concerning music, development and wellbeing. Parents wrote about how much their child enjoyed and engaged with the music, some particularly noting that their baby loved instruments:

Was impressed that he seemed to show an interest in music and singing at such an early age.

Some comments showed that babies were developing their musicality, for example, parents observed their child developing rhythm.

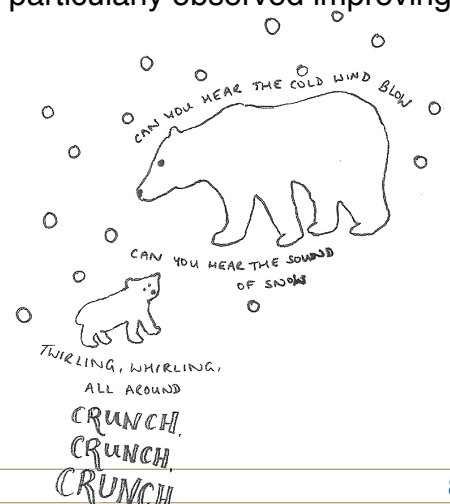
Many parents wrote about aspects of babies’ development that had benefited from Babigloo. The interaction babies had with other adults and other children was perceived as good for their confidence and communication. Aspects of communication parents particularly observed improving included listening and vocalising:

Encouraged visual and hearing development.

Listens carefully now.

Chatty and practicing speech and vocalising.

Started making more noise out of the group.



Increased confidence for babies concerned their confidence around other babies, but also with adults who were not their parents. For some families, Babigloo was a valued opportunity for babies to form relationships with adults other than their primary caregiver:

Be held by other adults – I'm a solo parent, so this is a rarity.

Curiosity amongst babies was noted by parents. One parent noted her baby's motor skills developing in the group:

Likes holding gripping activity props.

Helps development of rolling and sitting to navigate towards sound.

Others observed their child focusing their attention more or developing relationships with new people:

Taught her to sit still and watch and listen.

Sit and engages for longer periods.

Listens intently to the music and sounds.

There were many aspects of child development parents observed happening within the Babigloo sessions:

The routine of giving props back has been helpful.

Regarding babies' wellbeing, several parents felt that Babigloo affected their baby's mood:

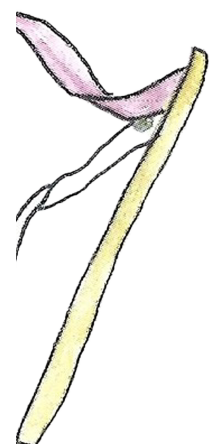
Chill a bit more.

Happiness – so many smiles and laughs.

Very calm in classes and watching YouTube at home – she loves it.

Comparison of feedback from parents in the 0 to 12 months groups and the Next Steps groups did not show any marked differences. In the pre-course questionnaires for Next Steps groups, it was evident that some responses came from families that had already experienced Babigloo – they knew Babigloo was different to other baby groups, and they knew it would be a relaxing experience. These expectations came from prior experience but that was the only difference in parents' feedback between the types of groups.

In summary, there is a wealth of evidence from the parent questionnaires that Babigloo enabled the outcomes for families – both improving wellbeing and integrating music into families' lives. Additionally, feedback from parents shows appreciation of how music and attending a group can support young children's learning and development.



Case study interviews

Case study interviews with parents delved deeper into the experiences of two families. There was information relevant to the outcomes in both these interviews.

Sam (a pseudonym) was very familiar with child development before her a baby was born as she'd worked in childcare for many years before becoming a parent. She described a great deal of music-making that took place at home, showing an existing appreciation of music being important to babies' development. Babigloo added songs and activities to those Sam had already created for herself. She described having a "milk song" that she sings to her baby to reinforce the routine that it's time for milk. Even with such a high regard for music within her daily routines, Sam gave several examples of how her knowledge of child development had expanded from the Babigloo sessions and her learning from Colin's explanations of the theory behind the Babigloo approach:

It reiterated everything – it highlighted the significance of music for us. And also with Colin, he's brilliant at the end of the sessions, explaining, like, why he's done what he done. Because at the beginning, I didn't really understand what he was doing. But then as time went on, he would talk us through it. He was explaining about the pauses, that the babies' brains would fill in those musical notes. And he was also talking to us about the importance of not ramming too much music at them, like song after song after song – mainly like repeating the song. So, whereas before, when I was doing his baby massage, I would sing different songs, but when he was saying, you know, it's not ideal to be talking and talking, singing to them song after song, we then just repeated the same song. (Sam's interview)

Sam spoke about aspects of Babigloo other parents noted in the questionnaires. She spoke of how much her baby enjoys Babigloo and its effectiveness at keeping children's attention and engagement:

He would just sit there and watch [the music leaders] and I was just amazed they could entertain these children for 45 minutes. These children would not take their eyes off them. And it was just it was mind blowing to see. (Sam's interview)

Babies developing relationships with other adults featured in Sam's interview:

His face says it all – like he loves Colin. So last week, Colin came over to me and asked how we were, and [baby's name] was obsessed with him. Soon as Colin spoke to him, and I gave him a little tickle, he was just smiling away. (...) soon as we go in that building, he knows what it means. Soon as you see Colin, he knows what's coming. And they'd just be like, sat there. (Sam's interview)

When asked if she thinks Babigloo contributes to family wellbeing, Sam spoke about how music helps with routines and calming her baby down before bedtime which helps with his sleep routine.

Even the group itself, it gives me a purpose to go out of the house. Because there's some days where, you know, you're exhausted and everything. But going there from 10 weeks old has made me go out, made me, you know, socialise and him socialise. So in those aspects as well, I would say it's definitely contributed. (Sam's interview)

Sarah (pseudonym) was the second parent interviewed. Both Sam and Sarah spoke about how Babigloo was different to other baby music groups she had attended, particularly that they were over-loading for children:

I don't see Moo Music as a music group. It's more of a high energy, burn off some steam by crawling around and playing with other children. They do a song at the beginning, at the end, and there's music playing with lights. For me, it's a bit over stimulating, to be honest. I wouldn't say it's a music session as such, despite the name. (Sam's interview)

Sarah had a similar view, and she gave an example of how Babigloo has greater understanding of children's development and learning regarding how babies are taught about endings, transitions and putting things away:

Other ones can be very sensory overloading for babies, and there's a lot of noise, there's parents talking, but it's also the teachings, of like, the children – when they have a prop, how it's taken away so they learn, but it's left. Also, sometimes props are given out too quickly and taken away too quickly with other groups, but it's the right length of time [at Babigloo] for a child to actually start playing with it. (Sarah's interview)

Speaking about wellbeing, Sarah noted that all families have needs or difficulties that need supporting when one has a young child. She spoke about her own situation of having been made homeless whilst pregnant and she highlighted that all families might have undergone challenges that affect them:

I know that someone else next to me was struggling – wasn't able to breastfeed and was devastated about that, and this [Babigloo] was something that she could offer her child, (...) so everyone's got something that Babigloo – they don't realise they're helping for. (Sarah's interview)

Both Sam and Sarah's positive experience of Babigloo adds to the feedback from parents in previous programmes and matches other parents' views. Both spoke about the care that the music leaders showed their families, which was really strong and could serve as an indicator that scaling up Babigloo has not diminished the positive experiences families have from the programme.

Unsolicited feedback

In addition to the intentional gathering of parents' views, sometimes people's positive experiences of Babigloo motivated them to email feedback to the team unprompted. This was stored and collated, providing further evidence of the high levels of satisfaction amongst parents. The quotation below evidences the outcome of integrating music into families' lives:

Hi Colin, India and team! Thank you for two fantastic Babigloo courses! [Baby's name] has absolutely loved it all, from the ya ba ba bas to the season sessions. We love it so much we have introduced it to our day-to-day life with the ne na nos when taking things away. Even our 8-year-old now does it! We've learnt so much about music, sounds and adding a sensory element in to make a fun experience for baby and parent! Please make more YouTube videos, these go down so well in our household when the sessions aren't on. Our older boy even joins in with the singing and we spend most mornings singing the hello song. Thank you so much for running these sessions, we cannot wait to come back again soon.

One mother created a hand-drawn card (the image on the title page of this report) to express her thoughts about Babigloo

Dear Colin, Thank you so much for running these amazing groups! [Baby's name] and I have absolutely loved Babigloo, it has truly been a treasured bonding time for the two of us, a space for calm, joy and such incredible learning – you can almost see their brains making new connections! I really hope you like the picture – the original is framed on our wall. I wanted to capture the experiences we shared and the beauty of the music with the incredible props. I very much hope we will get to join you again for another group, but either way, I want you to know just how special Babigloo is!

A grandparent who visited with their daughter and grandchild, was compelled to email by her delight and joy and the Babigloo experience. She described the learning for babies, the evident distinctiveness of Babigloo's approach, and she compared the experience favourably to other music groups for young children:

India, Halyna and the 2 wonderful musicians were so committed to engaging their very young charges with wonderful sounds, music, patterns, rhythms, stories, textures, colours and picnic basket secrets. Babies, parents, grandparents and older siblings were all welcomed individually and encouraged to take part as each theme gently developed. The babies were so engaged, smiling, laughing, listening, touching and responding intuitively with no pressure or expectation. India and Halyna responded to the sounds the babies made by echoing and developing into patterns simply, musically and physically. I have been to many very positive baby music sessions, but Babigloo is by far the most sensitive to the development of the very young. For babies under one to have access to live music, harp, keyboard, clarinet and saxophone alongside the usual bells and tambourines is very special.

Considered overall, the outcomes for families Babigloo were striving for, were achieved for many families.

Notes of reflective meetings

Expanding Babigloo into Next Steps groups that focused on children aged one to two years required significant appraisal and adaptation of Babigloo's approach. Throughout the two years of funding, the team discussed how to retain the essence of Babigloo when working with mostly ambulant children – which differed greatly from 0 to 12 month aged babies who might be crawling, but few would have started walking. Challenges of keeping children engaged when they are able to move much more freely were noted and discussed at each meeting. Additionally, there were safety considerations for children who could move more quickly and were eager to explore around the room and materials that were not the focus of the current group activity.

Having a larger proportion of children in the group who were ambulant essentially changed the nature a Babigloo session. The calm, relaxing atmosphere that is essential for achieving the outcomes parents described, was not so easily created. In the view of the music leaders, this impacted on the bonding experience that so many parents valued, which was less present for parents when their focus was not on observing their baby's response and engagement in the music, but on ensuring their baby's safety as they were more independent and moving around the room. Meeting notes documented these discussions and what actions music leaders subsequently planned to take to maximise ambulant children's engagement and ensure their safety. Additionally, the music leaders recorded voice notes after some sessions that captured their reflections of differences in Next Steps sessions that were invaluable to considering how well adapting the Babigloo approach worked. Discussion amongst the music leaders concluded that while a worthwhile experiment that created lots of learning, it was not possible to preserve the Babigloo approach enough within the Next Steps groups. In the summer of 2025, the Babigloo team made a decision that future work would resume to only work with families with babies aged 0 to 12 months.



Organisational outcomes for Babigloo

Outcome 3: To develop Babigloo's establishment and management ensuring sustainability for the future.

To increase the number of early years music leaders trained to deliver Babigloo's approach to increase capacity and geographical reach, and enhance the professional development of all Babigloo practitioners.

Sources of evidence for organisational outcomes included music leader observation/reflection diaries, trainee music leaders' and new music leaders' questionnaire, recruitment records of new/trainee music leaders, and notes of reflective evaluation meetings.

There were two aspects of sustainability that the evaluation considered – firstly, environmental impact, and secondly, the sustainability of Babigloo as an organisation due to expansion from a small team to a larger number of music leaders with additional management and administrative capacity.

Notes of reflective evaluation meetings captured actions Babigloo took during this phase of work to reduce their environmental impact which concerned travel and sharing of resources for sessions between the music leaders working in different locations. Working in a large rural county such as Dorset necessitates travel by car – additionally, Babigloo sessions involve transporting boxes of instruments and materials between different locations for morning and afternoon sessions. In previous phases of work, the Babigloo team were all based in Poole and travelled out to other locations in Dorset. By recruiting more music leaders who were based in different areas, this reduced travel, for example, Babigloo sessions in North Dorset were led by two music leaders who both lived in Shaftesbury – resulting in over 50 miles less car travel to deliver each session in North Dorset. One of the new music leaders working in West Dorset and Chesil was based in West Dorset. Due to the complexity of car sharing arrangements, it has not been possible to calculate with any accuracy how much travel or carbon emissions reduction occurred due to working with more widely dispersed music leaders, although there is certainty that travel has been less than if Babigloo had continued to operate with only Poole-based music leaders travelling across the county.

Another implication of scaling up Babigloo and working in four areas (eight locations as music leaders would lead groups in two locations in a day) was that more instruments and resources for sessions were needed. Each Babigloo session is created around a different theme – music, activities and sensory resources are selected to fit each theme; therefore, each session needs different and very specific instruments and sensory materials. Scaling up to have three different teams of music leaders meant complex logistics of sharing resources for different sessions. Hiring a storage unit intentionally reduced the need to travel to collect instruments and resources.

One indicator for organisational sustainability in the evaluation framework was to recruit music leaders who were younger than the existing team. Quantitative data showed that this was successfully achieved over the two years. The three founding members of Babigloo have a mean average age of 58 years. Considering the ages of the expanded team showed a new mean average age of 48 years due to three of the new music leaders being aged 28, 29 and 50⁴.

⁴ All calculations are based on music leaders' ages at the time of completing this report (November 2025).

This scaled up phase with an expanded team required a new approach to management and administration. Colin Phillimore took on the role of managing the project – the formalising of his managerial role and associated remuneration was enabled by the Youth Music funding. Establishing more capacity for admin took some time to achieve. The funding included fees for one-day-per-week of freelance admin support. The person initially identified for this role needed to focus on other commitments; therefore, the role was unfulfilled for some time, with Colin covering the admin tasks to fill the gap. From October 2024, one of the new music leaders, India, also took on the one-day-per-week admin role which worked well and enabled the expanded team to work in the way envisaged in the planning – with Colin’s work focusing on partnership relationships and management whilst also doing some music leading, supported by administration tasks done by another.

Professional development for the music leading team involved whole-day team days at the beginning of each term, where all the music leaders discussed practice. These days were crucial to developing Next Steps and understanding what aspects of Babigloo’s approach needed to be adapted for older children.

New music leaders and a trainee were trained in Babigloo’s approach through shadowing, mentoring and introduction to resources for each session on a specially created app. Having additional music leaders brought a wide range of new skills, knowledge and experience to the Babigloo team. India had studied drama at university and had trained as an early years childcare professional. Rob is a highly skilled multi-instrumentalist whose musical skills such as playing piano were utilised in many sessions. Halyna’s background is piano teaching in her native Ukraine and working with Babigloo enabled her to utilise her musical expertise within her new community in Dorset. Eleanor’s original encounter with Babigloo was as a participating parent with a young baby. She had years of experience running her own business teaching dance to children, therefore her movement skills and being embedded in the local community in Shaftesbury were an asset. Expanding the team was not a one-way exchange of Babigloo training others and offering work, but there were reciprocal benefits to Babigloo of widening the music leading team – bringing different perspectives and skills that enhanced Babigloo.

New music leaders and trainees were asked to complete an online questionnaire about their experiences of Babigloo and the training and support they’d received, which gained two responses, showing overall satisfaction with their experience. The motivations and goals of both music leaders for working with Babigloo were well met:

One of my main motivations for joining Babigloo was to adapt to a new environment after moving to the UK a few years ago. I wanted to improve my English, connect with the local community, and contribute something meaningful. I am a trained musician and used to teach piano in Ukraine, so continuing to work with music – even in a different form – was very important to me. Joining Babigloo gave me the opportunity to stay connected to music and to support young children through creative and sensory musical activities.

My goals have been met extremely well. Through Babigloo, I have gained confidence in communicating in English, learned new ways of using music with very young children, and felt more connected and integrated into the community. The work has allowed me to continue engaging with music, which is a big part of my identity and professional background.

(Halyna’s questionnaire)

India's motivations were to use her training, experience and qualifications in drama and early years education in a way that was purposeful and fulfilling, which she felt was achieved.

The quality of the training and support was good, with both music leaders feeling that their confidence in delivering early years music activities had increased a lot:

The quality of the training and support has been outstanding. The sessions were always clear, practical, and inspiring. The leaders were supportive, patient, and understanding of the fact that English is not my first language. I felt welcomed from the very beginning. The whole experience has helped me grow both professionally and personally, and it has been one of the most positive experiences since I started working in the UK. (Halyna's questionnaire)

The shadowing sessions I did to start were useful and eased me into it well. It's an unusual thing so needed a lot of time getting use to the concept, also dealing with vulnerable people and babies so first impressions and being confident for the families is vital.

(India's questionnaire)

Although an experienced music educator, Halyna had not worked with such young children before and the training she received enabled her to confidently fulfil her new role:

This programme has given me valuable new skills, helped me understand early years development, and taught me how to create a calm, safe atmosphere for sensory and musical play. I also feel more confident communicating with parents and adapting activities for children with different needs.

(Halyna's questionnaire)

Neither music leader had any wish for training to be done differently for future new music leaders – they were content with what Babigloo provided:

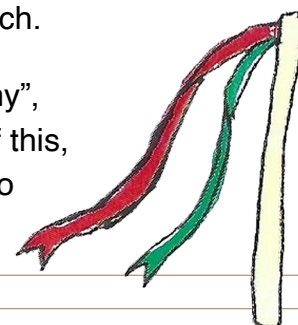
Honestly, I feel that the process for new trainees is already very supportive and well-organised. I always felt welcomed, included, and guided at every step. The team created a warm and encouraging atmosphere, which made it easy to learn and grow. I don't feel that anything needs to be changed – the approach works very well as it is.

(Halyna's questionnaire)

Both wish to continue working with Babigloo whilst also developing their skills further. India particularly identified that she'd like to expand working with babies and young children, including "SEN families/sick babies in hospice and newborns in NICU or hospital".

Notes of reflective meetings captured information about other discussions relevant to the outcomes of increasing reach and ensuring sustainability. Consideration of the financial resources needed to provide Babigloo programmes explored if offering Babigloo on a commercial basis where families pay to attend was viable. Notwithstanding the impossibility of affordable parental contributions meeting the costs of fees for two music leaders and visiting musicians which is core to Babigloo's approach, members of the Babigloo team reflected that charging families to attend introduces a transactional relationship between music leaders and families, which fundamentally changes Babigloo's approach and the unconditional care from the music leaders that families value so much.

As music leader Rob put it, "Babigloo exists outside of the capitalist economy", as the value to families could never be aligned to money. The implication of this, is that Babigloo will always require significant funding to offer programmes to families – which has implications for sustainability of the organisation.



Outcomes for partners / Dorset's Early Years sector

Supporting families' wellbeing through music is integral to Dorset's emerging Early Years Music strategy.

Evidence relevant to outcomes for partners and the early years sector came from an interview with one partner, online questionnaire responses from other partners, reflective meeting notes and an email discussion with Dorset Music Service's Project Manager (Schools and Settings) who has responsibility for early years work.

An early years music strategy for Dorset has not progressed as anticipated, therefore the intended outcome that *supporting family wellbeing through music is integral to a Dorset Early Years Music strategy* has not been achieved in the way originally planned. The reasons for this are not a failure of Babigloo to contribute and influence the strategy content, but more that the strategy, spearheaded by Dorset Music Service, has not progressed due to the priorities and capacity of the Music Service during this period, in part due to the restructuring of Music Hubs for Arts Council England's Hub reinvestment process⁵. Despite Babigloo not achieving the specific outcome of influencing a written *strategy*, it is still the intention for the Octagon Hub to develop early years music in the Hub area. Most recent SMART targets in the hub's planning include developing early years music provision, signposting the early years community to increase skills, and increasing partnership working and supporting named partners to grow their projects – including Babigloo. There remains ongoing dialogue and collaboration between Babigloo and the Hub to progress music in the early years.

Where there has been significant success for Babigloo in having a strategic influence is the partnerships with the burgeoning Dorset Family Hubs. The policy of developing a network of Family Hubs across the county has gathered pace during the two-year timeframe, with Babigloo working with 12 Family Hubs in the Family Hub Network in 23 different venues (see Appendix 1). These have been particularly successful partnerships, with hub staff recruiting and supporting families to participate. How Babigloo envisaged having a strategic influence has changed from initial plans and has adapted to local conditions, working with the opportunities presented by changing policy. Babigloo have identified that their work supports several of Dorset Council's strategies: *Best Start in Life*, *Best Place to Live* and *Homes for Ukraine Scheme*, in addition to the DfE's new *Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life* strategy (2026-2029), therefore are poised to continue championing music in the early years within these policy developments and strategies.

Selected partners were asked to give their views on Babigloo's support for family wellbeing through an online questionnaire, with two responses received. The Creative Health Lead for Dorset's Arts Development Company had not directly observed Babigloo working with families or spoken to parents about their experience, therefore she did not have a view on whether Babigloo improved family wellbeing. However, through her strategic work to support Creative Health work in the county, she was certainly aware of Babigloo's work and aims, perceiving the work to be of a high standard with "a clear theoretical, and practice-based approach underpinning their work".

She felt Babigloo did impact on the sector through the training, support and advocacy they offered, and their visibility and reputation contributed to her view that Babigloo "are producing excellent work, committed and passionate to supporting families and babies through music and creative expression".

⁵ Prior to September 2024, Dorset Music Service was the lead organisation for Dorset Music Hub. Due to changes instigating by the hub reinvestment process and the requirements for hubs to follow "prescribed geographies", the new Octagon Music Hub covers both Dorset and Somerset from September 2024.

The second partner questionnaire response came from an activity worker who recruited and supported families to attend and was present during many sessions. She felt that the outcomes for families were achieved for all families who took part, with observable differences between the start of each programme and the end:

All parents and babies changed from start to finish – very quiet to start. Parents discovering how babies love music, and recognise the repetition of the songs. (Dorset Council Parent and Activity Worker)

Having worked alongside Dorset Council's services for families for several years now, Babigloo was valued by the activity worker for its unique approach that is accessible to families and complements other groups, introducing musical experiences families would not otherwise have. The activity worker had received feedback from families that they wished to do Babigloo over and over.

The CEO of Swanage and Purbeck Development Trust (SPDT), Ali Tuckey, took part in an interview for evaluation. SPDT's charitable objectives concern relief from poverty and disadvantage, health, arts and culture, and also protecting and enhancing the physical and natural environment. They support around 15 small local community groups, most of whom have an emphasis on health and wellbeing or cultural activities. SPDT are not a provider of services, but offer management support for community groups and bring together community-led support with professional services. SPDT also has the role of Family Hub for the Purbeck area. SPDT provided space in the buildings they manage for Babigloo sessions and Ali has received feedback from parents about Babigloo. Babigloo aligns well with SPDT's charitable objectives and contributes to the remit of a Family Hub:

Part of what we're trying to do is pack out these buildings with as many different services as we can, not just because they can deliver that particular service, but also because they're then a way into other services. One of the very nice things about Babigloo is, it's a way of connecting people who perhaps haven't accessed other services in the past, getting them into these buildings, getting them to meet other people who can then signpost them on or refer to other services as well. (SPDT CEO)

The value of Babigloo to Ali is it educates parents about child development and the importance of interactions in parental relationships, but it is also fun and experiential learning that focuses on building relationships. This exactly fits the ethos of SPDT and Babigloo works really well within a broad offer of activities to support wellbeing:

Some of those families then, hopefully will then be more aware of what we're offering here as a Family Hub, more aware that this is a place you can go to for help and feel more confident accessing it because they had a really great experience here, which hopefully gives them the confidence to go and try something else. It's not for people, necessarily, who are particularly struggling. It's open for anyone and everyone who wants to participate. You can come in because maybe you need a social network and you haven't got one. Maybe you come in because you like music or you like art. Maybe you come along because you want some help learning to communicate better with your baby. There's lots of different ways in, so it hasn't got that stigma (...) Dorset Council keep plugging away at parenting courses, and it's always really hard to recruit to it, because I think everyone immediately goes, well, hang on, why do I need a course? I'm a perfectly good parent. So, I think that's something lovely about Babigloo – it does help you with your parenting skills, but, you know, it's not got that stigma. (SPDT CEO)

There are 21 different service areas Family Hubs should potentially cover, although which areas a hub chooses to focus on will depend on community needs.

As a Family Hub, SPDT has to report back to Dorset Council on family health outcomes – several aspects of which Babigloo contributes to. Ali includes Babigloo as supporting “parent child communication” which is one outcome, but he says Babigloo ticks other boxes and could be reported on as “family mental health”. In summary, working in partnership with SPDT has enabled Babigloo to support families’ wellbeing in a way that is aligned to local policy and priorities. Utilising community-led services like Babigloo to meet Family Hub goals is a development that has taken place in local policy during the timeframe of the project. Babigloo’s demonstration of its ability to achieve outcomes for families that fulfil the Family Hub remit has enabled the team to be involved in strategic conversations and influence what provision is offered in the areas where programmes have taken place.

One of the partners not amongst those who responded to the questionnaire sent positive feedback in an email, which shows their satisfaction with Babigloo and their enthusiasm as an organisational partner, although does not provide specific evidence relevant to the intended outcomes.

Dear Babigloos

It has been an absolute pleasure to welcome you to The Drop In Portland Satellite Family Hub. We have enjoyed hosting you and seeing the families you work with. The work you do is absolutely wonderful and having had the opportunity to watch your sessions I would recommend your sessions to all parents/carers and their babies. I wish you so much luck with your future funding and would be very happy to write an endorsement of your work from The Drop In. We very much look forward to welcoming you again to The Drop In#2.

(Email from Youth Service Manager at The Drop In Portland)

Although Babigloo’s influence on early years music making has not happened in the specific way planned, work to meet this outcome has adapted to the local context and has been fruitful at developing relationships with key organisations that support families. This work is ongoing, with Babigloo part of a newly-formed Octagon Music Hub Special Interest Group.

What contextual factors have enabled, inhibited or influenced the achievement of outcomes?

Both parents and partners noted the non-verbal aspect of Babigloo as important for achieving parents’ sense of acceptance as they do not feel obligated to undertake social interaction in particular ways:

I work closely with Babigloo in a work capacity. Some of the families I have referred, knowing they will benefit from the 'Babigloo journey' – for example, you don't talk in the group sessions so parents don't have to say anything or feeling they are not going to be 'put under pressure to speak'. The Babigloo musicians take an active interest in all the families, even though it's a 'quiet group' and always stay after the group to chat and let the babies play the instruments. Families feel they belong.

(Dorset Council Parent and Activity Worker)

This “active interest” is noted by partners, but it is also noted by parents. Both parent interviews highlighted their babies’ relationship with the music leaders as something that was important to them and enhanced babies’ engagement.

They appreciated the ethos of care that music leaders have for the families, and how they celebrate individual children's achievements such as developmental milestones like crawling. It is worth noting that parents recognise this, as it is not incidental – it is clear during the reflective conversations amongst the team that it is intentional and a significant element of the Babigloo approach.

Beyond the intended aims and outcomes, are there things about the project which are important or valuable to: families, partners and the project team?

A few parents wrote in their questionnaires that they appreciated Babigloo being free to attend as money was tight whilst on maternity leave or raising young children.

There is an ethos of reflective practice within the Babigloo team. During the team days and evaluation meetings, an example of an unforeseen incident that had remarkable impact on the music leaders was recounted many times. One particular day coincided with major flooding and a fatal road accident that closed all main arteries East to West across Dorset. Another music leader and a visiting musician safely arrived at the venue but then had to respond to the families who were present without any of the instruments and resources for the planned activities. The musicians played music live to the families with the babies mesmerised for 45 minutes. This experience had great impact as the team reflected on the essence of how babies respond to live music and instruments.

For Family Hub and Music Hub partners, they play a central role in co-ordinating providers such as Babigloo to reach the people for whom services are designed. The Family Hub Network describe providers as the “spokes” of the wheel – this metaphor highlights the crucial nature of organisations like Babigloo to the very existence of the wheel. Hubs cannot fulfil their function without providers working directly with families.

What is the potential for this project to be scaled up or developed?

The structure of Babigloo during the phase of funding described in this report has successfully scaled up the work. The expanded music leading team are enabling Babigloo to have a wider geographical reach and work with more families. Attendance data shows that in this 2023-25 phase of funding, 335 families (406 adults and 335 children) benefitted from Babigloo, compared to 94 families (103 adults and 95 children) in the previous phase of grant funding in 2022-23.

One part of the scaling up has been expanding to provide groups for older children and adapt the Babigloo approach. One reason for trailing Next Steps was past feedback from parents that they would love to continue Babigloo beyond their initial 8-week programme. Whilst feedback from parents about their experiences of Next Steps groups did not show any marked differences and was equally positive to the feedback about 0 to 12 month groups, reflections of the Babigloo team are that the additional mobility of older children cannot be accommodated whilst also retaining the core features of Babigloo's approach. At the July 2025 team day, a decision was taken to continue only working with families with 0 to 12 month babies rather than older children, as the Babigloo approach focuses on child development in a baby's first year.

Parent feedback about using the YouTube videos at home has led Babigloo to consider how they can maximise digital resources to enhance families' Babigloo experience. The team have already initiated seeking funding specifically to develop Babigloo's digital offer in response to this feedback.

What are the key points of learning?

One key aspect of what Babigloo has learnt during this phase of work is about developing practice – learning about what works and what is the value of the work. Babigloo had the confidence in the practice to experiment and trial extending to work with older children, but they also have the confidence to state that growing in a way that requires changing the practice is not the right path to take. The process of this phase of work has enabled this realisation.

There will always be a need for funding to support Babigloo programmes as a commercial model would never be viable. Having a confidence that the value of Babigloo to families cannot be aligned to money is an important statement to make.

When trying to align practice to local needs and shifting policy, flexibility is vitally important for organisations such as Babigloo who are perceived as a provider of services for families. Colin recalls that as Babigloo was preparing to embark on this phase of work in February 2024, there was no mention of the Family Hub Network at that point. There are now 12 hubs covering all of Dorset who have been key partners in enabling Babigloo to connect with families. It's essential that the Babigloo team are aware of strategic policy changes and are at the table when partnerships to implement policy are forming if Babigloo is to be supported by these strategic partners. However, resources to support members of the Babigloo team to undertake this kind of work are only ever likely to come from grant funding.

Feedback from families is hugely validating for the Babigloo team and shows that outcomes for family wellbeing are being achieved. Partners such as Family Hubs and the Music Hub also view Babigloo's work as good practice which should be shared and celebrated.

Next steps

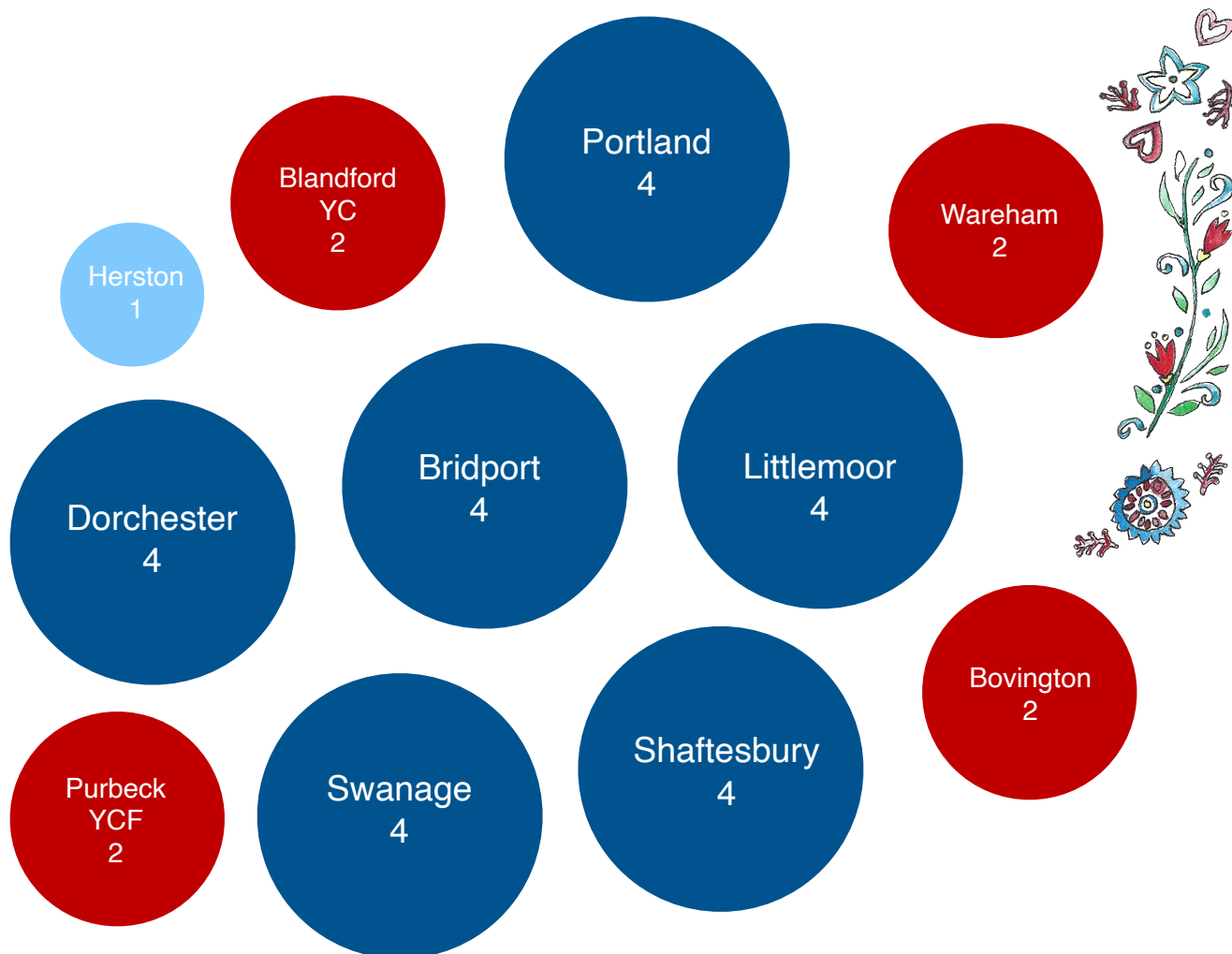
The path Babigloo has taken to scale up and reach a greater number of families has been taken in a sustainable way. It has added capacity, but the associated admin and management have been manageable. Growing too quickly is a risk for any organisation, but the evidence presented in this report suggests that Babigloo have expanded successfully and retained the important essence of the approach.

There is a challenge to overcome in securing funding for further work but work towards this by the Babigloo team is ongoing. This evaluation adds to the already significant amount of evaluation evidence from previous programmes about the value Babigloo has for families. Intended outcomes have been achieved and learning which develops the practice has occurred.



Appendix 1

Key Attendance Insights: Babigloo Youth Music Catalyzer Fund 2024-25



Venue	Number of programmes delivered
Littlemoor	4
Portland	4
Bridport	4
Dorchester	4
Purbeck YCF	2
Swanage	4
Bovington	2
Wareham	2
Shaftesbury	4
Blandford YC	2
Herston	1