Amber’s music keeps going despite Covid-19 restrictions

At The Amber Trust we have worked hard over the last eight months to ensure our beneficiaries continue to be supported musically. All our music teachers, practitioners and therapists, along with all the families and schools we support, have been amazingly resourceful and creative working out how lessons can continue safely. We currently have between 60 and 65% of all music awards either being delivered face to face or online. Some sessions have even taken place outside in gardens and parks.

We have been delighted with how well the online lessons and sessions have worked and have received some fantastic feedback from families. It turns out that engaging musically online may not be ideal but it’s a brilliant way to stay in contact, continue learning, and have some fun when so many other services have been reduced or stopped altogether.

The online sessions for families were such a success that we also started up monthly groups for all Little Amber and AmberPlus families, and are running regular group sessions with the Cambridge sight loss charity CamSight and the UK-wide deafblind charity Sense, which have also been hugely successful.

We are also busy creating some interactive videos for our AmberPlus families who are unable to get online or for whom the online format simply doesn’t work. More information about those will be coming soon.
Amber’s 25th Anniversary Concert

On 27 September, Amber live-streamed its annual concert which had been postponed back in May due to Covid-19. We were a bit nervous about presenting a concert online while at the same time desperate to find a way we could still showcase the wonderful talents of our beneficiaries.

It turned out to be a resounding success and raised over £5,000. The recording on YouTube received over 2,700 views in just a week! If you missed it, head over to our YouTube channel where it’s still available to watch.

The highlight of the concert had to be Ethan Loch playing the beautiful piece we commissioned from him as part of our birthday celebrations: The Amber Trust 25th Anniversary Waltz. Thank you so much, Ethan.

Since March, Evan has had his Little Amber sessions online which have been a great success, partly due to the support of his siblings. They give him space and lots of encouragement, and really help him to overcome his shyness. Sarah really enjoys working with the whole family, saying, “I think it’s really something that brings them all together and it’s so lovely that Evan has brought that into their lives.”

When Evan’s Little Amber award finishes next year, the family will apply for an Amber Music Award, for one-to-one ukulele lessons. We look forward to supporting Evan as he takes the next steps on his exciting musical journey!

Evan’s story

Four-year-old Evan, from Manchester, started his Little Amber sessions with Sarah when he was just two. Sarah reported after their first session Evan was very shy and subdued, but that he loved quietly playing his ukulele and interacting through that instrument.

Fast forward two years, and Evan’s music sessions are now full of energy, with Evan happily playing, singing and demonstrating his ever-growing skills on his beloved ukulele. Sarah says that music is Evan’s ‘personal passion’. Through it, he shows the world what he is capable of.

Mum, Zowie says, “It is lovely to see how engaged he becomes in the sessions and the amount of enjoyment he gets from them. His confidence has improved to the point where he showed no hesitation in standing up and singing by himself in front of new class-mates and teachers only a couple of weeks after starting school.”

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Amber Supporters take on the 2.6 Challenge

On Sunday 26 April, when thousands of runners and spectators should have been turning up for the 40th London Marathon, people of all ages were running, cycling, hopping, skipping, cooking, cartwheeling, playing and singing, dressing up and having fun as part of the UK-wide 2.6 Challenge.

Amber decided to join in with the activities with our own 2.6 Challenge: play 2 melodies, pay £2.60 or more, nominate 6 people to do the same.

We were overwhelmed by the response – friends, colleagues and supporters of all ages and abilities joined in the fun and we raised an astonishing £6,000!

We were so touched by the stories we received about how Amber’s 2.6 Challenge brought relief to many of us during the difficult lockdown months.

It was a wonderful event that brought everyone together, supporting each other as well as Amber, and having fun!

Thank you to all who took part.

Amber Sound Touch is launched

Thanks to a generous grant from Julia and Hans Rausing, Amber has produced and launched a pioneering set of online training materials that will help teachers, other professionals and parents teach music to a blind child: Amber Sound Touch. They comprise a set of inspiring videos, showing good practice in lessons and musical activities with some of our beneficiaries. These films are freely available on the Amber Sound Touch website (www.ambertrust.app) and Amber’s YouTube channel.

We were very excited to partner with the Incorporated Society of Musicians (ISM) Trust for the launch of Amber Sound Touch. Amber founder and trustee, Professor Adam Ockelford, introduced the new website and was joined by 275 attendees, a record for us and the ISM Trust! We are also grateful to MariaMarina Foundation and The GC Gibson Charitable Trust for their generous support which helped to make this venture possible. The webinar is available to watch on our YouTube channel.

Rainbow of Hope Virtual Concert

Another fantastic event that resulted from the first Covid lockdown was organised by long-standing supporter and fundraiser Poppy McGhee.

Poppy arranged all the brilliant performers, including some of Amber’s beneficiaries, and introduced them all.

The result was a wonderful online concert that had over 200 people tuning in to watch it being live-streamed. The concert raised over £2,000 – huge thanks to Poppy and also Minou Mai who edited and streamed the film.
Amber launches new music service for children with neurodegenerative disease: With Music in Mind

Music in Mind is the latest music service to be launched by Amber and is specifically designed for families who have a visually impaired child with neurodegenerative disease, such as Batten disease. On 16 November, we launched this vital new service with a webinar, once again in partnership with the ISM Trust. Adam Ockelford presented some of the findings from the research project undertaken by the University of Roehampton and which underpin the design of the scheme.

“Research by the University of Roehampton shows that music can play a unique and vital role in the lives of children with juvenile dementia, and I am delighted that, with the generous support of The Linbury Trust and the GC Gibson Charitable Trust, we are able to offer a new, targeted service for families who are affected across the UK.” Adam Ockelford.

Families are now welcome to sign up for the scheme which is due to start in January 2021. Go to www.ambertrust.org/withmusicinmind for more information.

Achievements to celebrate

We are so proud of Lydia who got through to the Battle Rounds on The Voice Kids UK this year. Lydia stunned audiences with her magical performance of Elton John’s Your Song in the blind auditions and then went on to wow everyone with Somewhere Only We Know by Keane in the Battle Round. Amazing!

Huge well done to Lilly Kurata who was asked to play piano at the ACA J.M. Barrie Award Ceremony last November when Sir Philip Pullman received a Lifetime Achievement Award in children’s arts.

Congratulations to Eleanor who made her professional stage debut with a moving performance last Christmas at London’s The Old Vic as Tiny Tim in A Christmas Carol. Currently Eleanor is voicing a lead character in a forthcoming children’s animation series and is also rehearsing for A Christmas Carol again this December!

How to fundraise for The Amber Trust

Are you thinking of fundraising for Amber? Get in touch to see how we can help on 0300 323 9964 or email contact@ambertrust.org. We are registered with the fundraising platform Virgin Money Giving at www.virginmoneygiving.com so you can easily take donations for your event.

A really easy and free way to fundraise for Amber is to sign up to Give As You Live and shop online at over 4,000 stores, including M&S, John Lewis and Ebay. Amazon Smile and Easyfundraising are other great ways to shop and donate at the same time while not costing you a penny! Perhaps you have a birthday coming up – you could always set up a birthday fundraiser on Facebook. But whatever you’re doing, don’t forget to keep us posted – we’d love to share it with you!