



How does In Harmony Liverpool promote resilience amongst its families?

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RESEARCH TEAM

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Resilience has been highlighted as a key objective of the In Harmony Liverpool (IHL) programme and a key outcome in several local and national longitudinal evaluation studies. To our knowledge, there is a lack of in-depth qualitative research from the perspective of the families of children participating in IHL, examining if and how IHL promotes resilience through intrinsic and extrinsic resources. We therefore set out to address the following three research questions:

1. What does resilience mean to IHL families?
2. Using an ecological approach, what intrinsic and extrinsic resources does IHL provide to its families?
3. What more can IHL do to promote resilience in its families?

Our evidence synthesis found that musical learning is an important resource for children and young people's **social, emotional, and intellectual development**. Music-based activities, as part of the formal school curricular or through extracurricular provision, offer valuable opportunities for children to develop creatively and to practise skills such as **problem solving, perseverance, and working and communicating with others**. Families from lower income backgrounds are less likely to participate in extracurricular activities. Unequal access to educational opportunities puts children and young people from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds at a disadvantage. The evidence suggests that increasing access and involvement has the potential to positively impact wellbeing and support the development of resilience.

We conducted semi-structured interviews between December 2021 and February 2022 with 22 parents/carers of children taking part in IHL. The average age of participants was 41 and there were 17 mothers, four fathers, and one grandparent. 11 of our respondents had one child, nine had two children, and two had three children taking part in IHL. The average age of children when they first started IHL was five and the average duration of involvement was five years. The interviews were split into three sections asking the participants to reflect on their own and their child(ren)'s lives before, during and, where relevant, since participation in the IHL programme. Each interview ended by asking participants what resilience meant to them and whether they considered themselves to be resilient and why. Data was analysed using a directed qualitative content analysis whereby a pre-defined coding framework was developed from the ecological resilience framework (Windle & Bennett, 2011).

Our findings revealed that parents/carers defined theirs and their children's resilience in terms of **perseverance and adaptability**. Perseverance was characterised as determination, not giving up, and passing through problems and keeping going. Adaptability was characterised as the ability to overcome obstacles. We found that IHL **promotes resilience in its children and families** via the promotion of intrinsic (e.g. confidence - skills, competence, self-knowledge; and self-efficacy - perceived ability to face challenge, music as a creative outlet) and extrinsic resources (e.g. social factors - family relationships, IHL community, including fellow families, and IHL staff). Whilst feedback on the IHL programme was overwhelmingly positive, some participants made useful suggestions which serve as useful implications for IHL moving forward. These included maintaining relationships with programme alumni through regular follow-ups and attempting to reach children and families in other areas of Liverpool. Our findings highlight the potential to

enhance the resilience of IHL families by empowering them through opportunities to develop new skills and make decisions, and by engaging them in a family-like community to strengthen the sense of connection and belonging. Taken together, our findings show that whilst IHL cannot remove hardship or inequalities, it can and **does provide families and children with life skills** and resources that they can use to manage and adapt to stress both in and outside the programme, now and in the future.

2. INTRODUCTION

Launched in 2009, [In Harmony Liverpool](#) (IHL) uses orchestral music making to improve young people's life chances by increasing confidence, wellbeing, skills and resilience. IHL's vision is a healthier, higher achieving future for North Liverpool. IHL is targeted at children with the greatest need— over 40% of In Harmony children are classed as living in poverty. Music making takes place at a range of school and community-based settings across Liverpool. Since its inception, the IHL programme has benefited over 3,000 children and families and over 300 musicians, artists, schoolteachers and staff.

Liverpool Philharmonic and the University of Liverpool are working in partnership to foster a programme of research in music and its role in health, employment and community development, providing solutions to significant issues facing the performing arts and public policy in Liverpool City Region, the UK, and internationally. Both organisations share ambitions to support the city region's cultural and civic growth and to shape the future of long-term, creative community programmes and music industry practices.

The aim of this partnership is to develop in-depth, longitudinal studies using research sites from Liverpool Philharmonic's long-term community programmes, In Harmony Liverpool and Music & Health, as well as the University's sector-leading work in Musicians Performance Science and heritage and wellbeing research. We aim to build upon Liverpool Philharmonic's existing evidence base that has measured the impact of its programmes for over ten years.

A key area of focus for the research partnership is the role of In Harmony Liverpool in young people and their families' musical, social and community development. To establish the research relationship, and building on recent research evaluations, Dr Warren Donnellan, Dr Laura Soulsby and three Research Assistants began working with Liverpool Philharmonic in 2021 to conduct an in-depth qualitative study examining if and how IHL promotes resilience from the perspective of its families.

What is resilience and why is it important?

For decades, developmental psychopathologists have attempted to explain why young people who experience equivalent stressors do not all experience equivalent negative outcomes (Garmezy, 1985). Why do some children fail while others thrive, and what drives these effects?

Historically, resilience was viewed simply as the process of overcoming stress or adversity (Luthar et al., 2000). Since then, resilience has been conceptualised as the ability to function positively and recover from setbacks more quickly than others with equivalent exposure to stress (Rutter, 2012). More recently, researchers have argued that resilience may go beyond resistance or recovery and may involve growth and reconfiguration, whereby key aspects of the individual change as a result of traumatic experiences (Lepore & Revenson, 2006). In a comprehensive concept analysis capturing multiple perspectives and disciplines, Windle (2011) defined resilience as:

“The process of negotiating, managing, and adapting to significant sources of stress or trauma. Assets and resources within the individual, their life, and environment facilitate this capacity for adaptation and ‘bouncing back’ in the face of adversity” (p. 163).

Integral to Windle’s definition is resource-use on intrinsic and extrinsic levels. This suggests that people do not exist in isolation; they interact with their social and environmental contexts.

This has led researchers to consider the social ecology of resilience. An ecological approach generally assumes that resilience is a result of the dynamic interplay between intrinsic resources, such as psychological, biological, financial, health, and extrinsic resources, such as support from private, public, and voluntary services (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Windle and Bennett (2011) developed a theoretical framework of ecological resilience, originally applied to informal, unpaid carers. The framework posits that individuals draw on individual (intrinsic) assets, but also on community and societal (extrinsic) resources which interact to facilitate or hinder resilience. Figure 1 shows that individual assets include demographic characteristics and psychological, biological, material resources and health behaviour. Community resources include family relations, social support, social participation, social cohesion and housing factors. Finally, societal resources include social policy, employment, neighbourhood and economic factors, and health and social care services. Windle and Bennett’s (2011) framework is theoretical and has not yet been examined in the context of young people and their families.

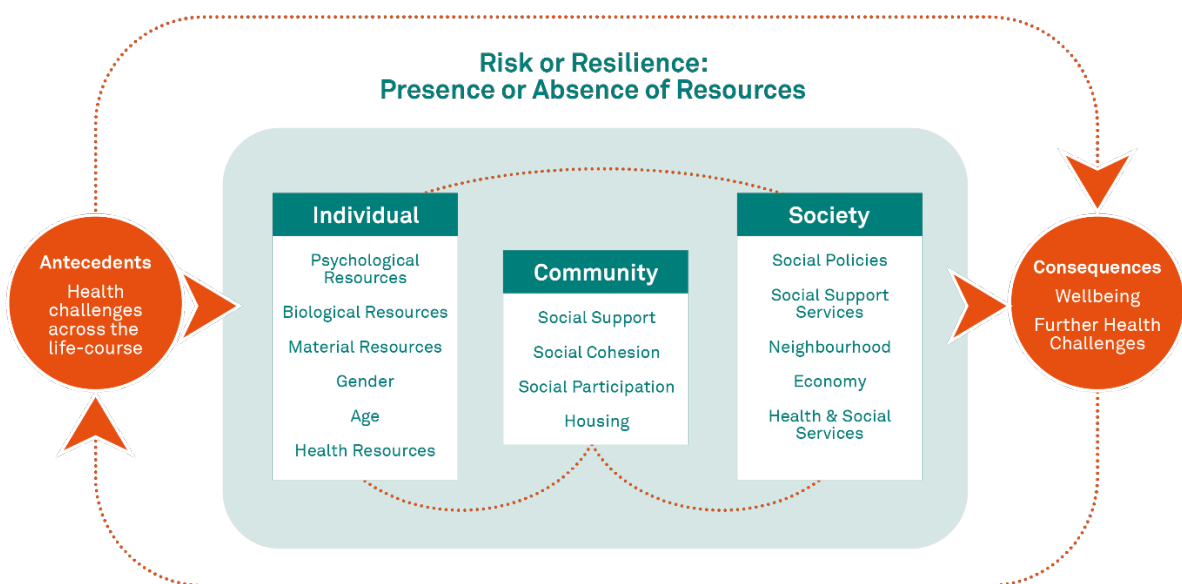


Figure 1: Ecological Resilience Framework (Windle & Bennett, 2011)

Despite knowing that resilience is possible and what some of the intrinsic and extrinsic factors are that drive resilience, we do not fully understand the influence that participation in the creative arts has on young people and their families' resilience. On a socio-political level, arts-based activities have been disrupted by the austerity agenda and public sector and benefit cuts, resulting in growing inequality between the richest and poorest sectors of society (Burns, 2019). We do not know how achievable resilience is for those of lower socioeconomic status (Thiele et al., 2017). While schools cannot change the economic and social circumstances which children grow up in, they can address issues of equality, wellbeing and resilience. Research shows that this may influence the long-term health of the individual child and arguably the community within which that child lives. This positions resilience as a key target for research and practice.

Therefore, the current study sets out to address the following three research questions:

1. What does resilience mean to IHL families?
2. Using an ecological approach, what intrinsic and extrinsic resources does IHL provide to its families?
3. What more can IHL do to promote resilience in its families?

3. EVIDENCE SYNTHESIS

Below, we draw together key themes from existing evidence on resilience in the context of musical learning and end with a summary of the rationale for the current project.

Benefits of musical learning

Music has long been argued to support physical and mental wellbeing and has found its way into a number of therapeutic settings (de Witte et al., 2020). There has been considerable research to demonstrate the benefits of musical learning amongst children, beyond the development of musical skills. Musical instruction has been found to have an important role in children's intellectual, personal and social development (Hallam, 2010).

Learning to play an instrument is a challenging task that is usually maintained over an extended period of time. Engaging with musical training appears to positively impact a range of academic outcomes, including children's cognitive skills (memory and attention), spatial reasoning, attitudes towards learning, academic engagement and general attainment (Martin et al., 2013; Román-Caballero et al., 2022). These benefits tend to increase in line with the duration of involvement in musical learning (Schellenberg, 2006).

School-based music lessons can encourage people from a wide range of backgrounds to engage with musical learning and increase access to opportunities for students from disadvantaged backgrounds who may not otherwise have an opportunity to learn an instrument. Research demonstrates that participation in music-based activities also influences children's emotional development (Daykin et al., 2008). Musical learning has been linked to an elevated sense of purpose and self-worth and increased self-reliance (Hallam, 2010; Martin et al., 2013). Opportunities to develop creatively can facilitate identity formation and help children to learn more about themselves (Zarobe & Bungay, 2017).

Group-based music activities extend social networks and provide participants with a sense of belonging through group membership (Daykin et al., 2008). Interacting with others supports the development of valuable social competencies, including listening and communication, turn-taking, and the ability to work cooperatively as part of a team (Hallam, 2010). Wood et al. (2013) reported an evaluation of a group drumming intervention designed to support the social and mental wellbeing of at-risk young people, finding improved social relationships and self-esteem over the ten-week period. Research emphasises music activities as an effective tool for increasing social inclusion and social cohesion in the classroom and building a sense of community (Hallam, 2010).

In addition to musical education as part of a formal curriculum, children may choose to participate in structured and supervised music-based extracurricular activities that take place outside of usual school hours. Extracurricular activities provide opportunities for children to try out new experiences and overcome challenges in a safe and supportive context, promoting mastery of non-cognitive skills such as creativity, independence, problem-solving, and perseverance, and increasing confidence and coping efficacy (Heaslip et al., 2021). The opportunity to master skills and overcome challenge can increase children's motivation to learn and achieve in school (Fischer & Theis, 2014; Hallam, 2010; Shulruf, 2010). It may also influence longer-term academic trajectories by increasing future educational aspirations (Peck et al., 2008). Additionally, extracurricular participation usually involves interacting and forming connections with peers and adults that children

may not otherwise encounter in the classroom (Siperstein et al., 2019). This supports them to develop team-working skills, facilitates a sense of belonging, and extends social networks to increase social capital (Vandell et al., 2020). Together, this can support children's social and psychological wellbeing (Boelens et al., 2021; Oberle et al., 2019).

The research evidence clearly points to the benefits of musical learning for children's intellectual, social and emotional development. Musical education, delivered within and outside of the school curricula, offers a valuable developmental context in which children can learn more about themselves and develop non-cognitive and social skills which may be linked to resilience (Zarobe & Bungay, 2017). Music making may be a powerful tool that children and young people can engage with to support their development and promote resilience. Yet, despite strong evidence that music-based activities are a resource for wellbeing, children in the UK do not have equal access to these learning opportunities and students from low-income backgrounds are more likely to be excluded from participating in extracurricular music-based activities.

Inequalities in access to educational opportunities by SES

Socio-economic status (SES) is a measure of social position, determined by employment, salary, and educational status. In the UK, there are marked SES inequalities in academic achievement. Students from high SES backgrounds tend to have better academic achievement outcomes compared to low SES (Hubble et al., 2021; Thomson, 2018). One explanation for this SES gap in academic achievement is the unequal access to and participation in extracurricular opportunities (Conway & Carbonaro, 2010). Higher SES schools are at a financial advantage for providing students with a range of school-based extracurricular activities, and children from high SES backgrounds are more likely to access extracurricular opportunities outside of school (O'Donnell & Barber, 2021). Paradoxically, research shows that extracurricular activities may benefit socioeconomically disadvantaged students as much or more than advantaged students (Conway & Carbonaro, 2010).

A second potential mechanism for SES differences in academic outcomes is differences in parental involvement in children's education by SES (Ingram et al., 2007). Parental involvement, including parents' academic expectations for their child and a child's access to home-based learning support (e.g., reading with the child, talking about school related matters), is positively related to student academic achievement (Castro et al., 2015; Tan et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2016; Wilder, 2014). Parents from high SES backgrounds are, on average, more visibly involved in their child's education compared to those from low SES backgrounds (Crosnoe et al., 2002; Turney & Kao, 2009). In a meta-analytic study examining the relationship between parental involvement, student academic achievement and SES, the benefits of parental involvement could be stratified by parents' educational level and familial SES (Tan et al., 2020). Specifically, parental involvement was positively associated with student achievement, but benefited only those students whose parents were more educated, while SES influenced the pattern of parental involvement and the impact of parental involvement on academic achievement.

Wang et al. (2016) examined mechanisms that may explain the link between SES and parent involvement and found that parents' perception of barriers to involvement (e.g., resources, limited knowledge to support their child, and communication issues) and lower expectations for children's educational achievements significantly mediated the relationship between SES and parental involvement. These findings are important because they reiterate that the link

between SES and parental involvement may be less to do with desire and motivation, and instead reflect the barriers to engagement faced by low SES families, including limited essential resources such as time, money, or transport (Green et al., 2007).

Taken together, the evidence suggests that increasing educational opportunities for low SES children and encouraging parents to be meaningfully engaged in their education is critical for children's development. Programs which address potential barriers for low SES parents to foster greater involvement have the potential to positively impact academic, social and emotional development.

An ecological systems approach to development maintains that understanding the context of a child's environment is critical in addressing socioeconomic disadvantage (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Extracurricular activities are an important ecological asset for children and young people, working at multiple levels (e.g., individual, family, wider community) to promote positive development and wellbeing (Zarobe & Bungay, 2017). In the next section, we consider extracurricular activities as a resource for development that may support children's resilience.

Applying the resilience perspective to young people and their families

The previous sections showed that access to and use of a range of resources can have academic, non-cognitive and social benefits for young people, and that SES-related barriers to participation put children from low-income backgrounds at a disadvantage. It is therefore important to take an assets-based approach rather than a deficit approach to promote what helps rather than simply ameliorate what hinders outcomes for young people and their families.

Researchers have not yet identified one essential trait or coping strategy that determines resilience (Bonanno, 2021), but have identified a range of intrinsic and extrinsic factors or building blocks that are necessary for resilience in young people (Daniel & Wassell, 2002). Intrinsic factors are typically held within the individual or 'self', and include the need to feel a sense of belonging and to feel secure, a sense of self-efficacy (Schwarzer & Warner, 2013) (mastery and control, along with an accurate understanding of personal strengths and limitations), and self-esteem (internal sense of worth and competence). Extrinsic factors rely on others and the environment, and include secure attachments and relationships, access to wider support from family and friends, and positive experiences at school and/or in the community.

Interventions and activities designed to support intrinsic and extrinsic resilience within the community are therefore critical. Research has shown that vulnerable early adolescents who participate in positive extracurricular activities during their final year in high school are twice as likely to graduate from high school and enrol in college than their vulnerable peers who participated less frequently in positive extracurricular activities (Peck et al., 2008). The creative arts, in particular, have been shown over numerous studies to promote resilience in young people. In a rapid review of the literature, Zarobe and Bungay (2017) found that creative activities increased self-esteem, sense of achievement, empowerment, social skills, and promotion of social engagement in young people. The authors suggested that these characteristics were linked to resilience, which is a key component of mental wellbeing, enabling people to cope with adversity, achieve their full potential, and contribute to society.

More specifically, adolescent participation in dance and drama have been shown to strengthen resilience through increased social competence, problem-solving skills, autonomy, a sense of purpose and future, and sense of belonging (Grunstein & Nutbeam, 2007). We are not aware of any research that investigates the influence of other creative activities, such as music-making, on young peoples' resilience.

Conclusion

This evidence synthesis has shown that young people who participate in music-based educational activities, in and out of school, experience a range of academic, emotional, and social benefits. A resilience perspective, which aims to identify the intrinsic and extrinsic assets and resources that help rather than hinder young people and their families, has been identified as a useful approach for researchers and practitioners alike. However, there is a lack of research examining the influence that participation in music-based activities has on resilience in young people and their families. In-depth qualitative research from the perspective of the families of children participating in music-based interventions, such as IHL, would help to provide this insight.

4. METHODOLOGY

Participants and Recruitment

A total of 22 parents/carers took part in the study. Recruitment took place between December 2021 and February 2022. Participants were eligible to take part in the study if they met the following inclusion criteria: at least 18 years old and able to give informed consent; are a parent/primary carer of a young person who has participated in the IHL programme; can understand English to a degree where they are able to understand the information provided and answer questions during the interview. The IHL team arranged all interviews on behalf of the research team to minimise the unnecessary sharing of personal data. The IHL team initially extended invitations to parents/carers who met the study inclusion criteria, providing a copy of the participant information sheet and an opportunity to ask questions. To protect confidentiality, parent/carer contact details were held by the IHL team in a secure location and were not made available to members of the research team. Parents/carers who met the inclusion criteria and wished to take part in the study were invited to a remote telephone or video interview, where informed consent would be obtained. We received ethical approval from the University of Liverpool prior to the study being conducted (Ref: 10470). See Table 1 for summary demographic characteristics of the sample.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of parents/carers (N=22)

Demographic characteristics	Range	N/Mean (Standard Deviation)
Age	31 – 60	41 (7.40)
Gender		
Male		4
Female		18
Relationship to child(ren)		
Mother		17
Father		4
Grandparent		1
Number of children		
1		11
2		9
3		2
Age of children when first started IHL	2 – 10	4.89 (2.48)
Duration of involvement with IHL (years)	2 – 12	5.34 (2.48)

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted by two research assistants. All interviews were conducted on an IHL Zoom account. If participants could not access Zoom, they were given

the option of a telephone interview. All telephone interviews were hosted by IHL using a three-way phone call system, initiated by a member of the IHL team with the research assistant and participant.

Each interview began with a summary of the research project followed by a series of demographic questions (Section 1), including: date of birth; gender; relationship to child(ren); age of child(ren) when first started the IHL programme; and how long the child(ren) had been involved in the IHL programme. The interview was then split into three sections asking the participants to reflect on their own *and* their child(ren)'s lives before, during and, where relevant, since participation in the IHL programme. This open, chronological, and retrospective approach was used to trace feelings and events to specific points in the participants' lives.

Section 2 of the interview asked participants to reflect on life before IHL and whether music played a role in their life and their child(ren)'s lives. Section 3 covered the process of joining the programme, including the participants' motivations and their first impressions, as well as those of their child(ren). Finally, section 4 covered the time since joining the IHL programme, including what a typical day/weekend looks like, child(ren)'s temperament and communication, and the role of music in their and their child(ren)'s lives. Each interview ended by asking participants what resilience meant to them and whether they considered themselves to be resilient and why.

All interviews were audio-recorded using a Dictaphone or the recording function of Zoom. Interviews were then fully anonymised, transcribed, and uploaded to NVivo-12 for analysis.

Data Analysis

We analysed our data using a directed qualitative content analysis (Assarroudi et al., 2018) whereby a pre-defined coding framework was developed from the ecological resilience framework (Windle & Bennett, 2011). The use of theory in qualitative research provides an analytical lens to interpret the dataset and enables a comprehensive conceptual understanding (Reeves et al., 2008). A similar approach has been used previously to apply the same framework to informal carers of people living with dementia (Donnellan et al., 2015).

First, we read the transcripts several times to ensure familiarisation with the data. The analytical process began by developing a categorisation matrix based on the ecological resilience framework, agreeing on the theoretical definition of the categories, determining coding rules, and coding the transcripts according to the matrix (Thomson et al., 2022). As part of this process, we prospectively coded for participants' definitions of resilience. The three research assistants independently coded all of the transcripts and the senior authors co-coded a subset of the data to ensure rigour. We held team meetings regularly in which the senior authors discussed and compared coding across the research team. We discussed any discrepancies, omissions and/or ambiguities until a consensus was reached. All final analytical decisions were reviewed and agreed upon by all authors. As we asked participants to reflect on both their own and their children's resilience, we integrated both experiences in our analysis.

5. FINDINGS

In the following subsections we present the themes from our qualitative analysis under each of the research questions. Parents/carers reflect on both their resilience and their children's resilience throughout and so this is integrated in our analysis:

1. What does resilience mean to In Harmony Liverpool parents/carers?

The IHL parents/carers defined resilience in different ways, but most definitions centred on the themes of perseverance and adaptability. Perseverance was characterised by participants as determination and not giving up. Participants 22 and 11 describe resilience thus:

*I think it means, you know, being aware that sometimes you'll find yourself in difficult situations and being able to say 'I'm not giving up'. **P22, male, aged 54, father to two children who attend(ed) IHL.***

*Keep trying, even when you can't do it. And if you can't do one try again. You never know when you can actually pick it up and learn to do it. **P11, female, aged 38, mother to two children who attend(ed) IHL.***

Fittingly, in the following quote, Participant 16 compares perseverance in life with the perseverance required when learning to play a musical instrument:

*I guess like learning and music kind of mimics... and the way that when you're learning and you make mistakes, and you have to carry on going, and that's kind of... it's a nice little illustration, I guess. **P16, female, aged 32, mother to one child who attend(ed) IHL.***

Other participants described perseverance in terms of carrying on in the face of life's challenges. One of the fathers we interviewed described this as 'passing through problems and keeping going':

*I think resilience is when we, despite all of the problems, despite all the issues we can have halfway we will keep going, we get there. I think that is what resilience means to me. I think it's our capacity to pass through the problems and keep going. **P14, male, aged 42, father to one child who attend(ed) IHL.***

When describing what resilience meant to them, many of our participants reflected on times when they and their families had persevered and carried on despite facing obstacles. In the following quotes, Participants 10 and 18 describe this as something they have done throughout their whole lives:

*I've persevered and carried on. I just kept going and going and going. I think I took about ten interviews for every promotion. And she went, if you don't get it, you will go again for that other one. And I was like, what, and I just know, I won't stop. And I'm not ashamed of this. I'm very proud of this. I just, like, whatever life throws at you, the cards, get on with it, and move forward. **P10, female, aged 43, mother to one child who attend(ed) IHL.***

*Throughout my whole life, I had to be really strong, going through different aspects of life and then to get to where I am now. I know I'm a strong person, and I am very resilient. **P18, female, aged 35, mother to two children who attend(ed) IHL.***

Many of our participants described their children as resilient too, reflecting specifically on their confidence to keep trying and never giving up:

*[Daughter] is able to confidently keep trying if she fails, for example, like you said she is able to try again. **P7, female, aged 50, mother to one child who attend(ed) IHL.***

*So, resilience to me means not giving up on anything. So [Daughter's] definitely resilient... she carries on with gymnastics for six years even though she's tachycardia... she's definitely resilient because she didn't give up. **P8, female, aged 38, mother to three children who attend(ed) IHL.***

Some of our participants fostered a sense of resilience within their family unit. This suggests that resilience is more than just a trait or psychological attribute: it is dynamically embedded within people's social networks. In the following quotes, Participants 5 and 6 describe what family resilience means to them and how they promote resilience in their children:

*Resilience for us as a family is about not being perfect for things and having the confidence to keep trying. Keep trying until you feel comfortable and confident that you're doing it right. It's about getting back up and trying again, trying harder... It's about being able to bounce back without any negative effects on your wellbeing. **P5, female, aged 37, mother to one child who attend(ed) IHL.***

*If, you know that, in your heart of hearts, you tried your best and that's all we'll ever ask from you... she's not kind of a straight A type of child... But we're kind of like, we're not setting the goals. We're giving it that kind of support of, we're here for you. **P6, female, aged 48, mother to one child who attend(ed) IHL.***

The second major theme associated with resilience was adaptability. Whilst the ability to persevere and 'pass through' hurdles was important, perhaps more important was the ability to overcome these hurdles. The following quote from Participant 3 illustrates this perfectly:

*Resilience is kind of having the ability to overcome things, maybe push yourself into believing in yourself and, I don't know, push for what you believe in and stand up for yourself... having the skills to overcome things, and everybody's going to worry at times, everyone's going to have anxieties growing up. **P3, female, age unknown, mother to one child who attend(ed) IHL.***

Some participants defined resilience and adaptability as acceptance of adversity. Below, Participant 1 outlines the role of acceptance during the COVID-19 lockdowns:

*The pandemic and lockdown... resilience means your ability to accept this fact and to run your life in a good way. With this problem. **P1, male, aged 40, father to two children who attend(ed) IHL.***

Other participants emphasise the importance of monitoring progress so they can learn from their mistakes and move forward:

*If you make a mistake, learn from it to move forwards. Rather than, oh I can't get this, I'm not going to do it. It's always kind of like, you know, you make a mistake, we all make mistakes, learn from it, you keep making those mistakes, then you need to stop and revisit how you're addressing just to like, move forward and deal with the issue at hand. **P6, female, aged 48, mother to one child who attend(ed) IHL.***

As with the theme of perseverance, many of our participants reflected on ways in which their children had demonstrated resilience by overcoming challenges:

*My kids are more resilient than me... I noticed they can be adapting in very bad situation or, or good situation. But surprisingly, they adapt in like two days and they switch to the Arabic language and they try to speak Arabic even if it is not completely correct. **P1, male, aged 40, father to two children who attend(ed) IHL.***

*I definitely think [Daughter's] got the skills to be resilient because obviously, she overcomes all the challenges that she's ever been thrown at. **P3, female, age unknown, mother to one child who attend(ed) IHL.***

One way that our participants' children overcome challenges is through problem solving skills:

*If she's been resilient, she's capable of assessing things, you know, if there's a problem, she can assess it and if she can deal with it. You can't be happy 100% of the time, that's just not life. Problems can be solved. Absolutely. And you know, you don't have to worry about them. **P13, female, aged 60, grandparent to one child who attend(ed) IHL.***

2. Using an ecological approach, what intrinsic and extrinsic resources does IHL provide to its families?

Participants recognised resilience as an important resource and discussed various aspects of IHL that may help their family to build resilience. Intrinsic building blocks were identified in the themes of confidence and self-efficacy. Extrinsic building blocks were captured by the theme of social relationships.

IHL was seen to support children's emotional wellbeing and the development of a range of personal and social skills. IHL was described as "a confidence booster" (P21) and parents/carers commented on the intrinsic process of building confidence that was related to a sense of accomplishment, beyond learning to play an instrument:

When you get to the stage where you're learning an instrument, it's really good for kids, I think, you know, it's good. It's good to build their confidence in that specific

*thing, but to build their confidence generally knowing they can achieve things. **P16, female, aged 32, mother to one child who attend(ed) IHL.***

Other features of IHL, including working as a member of a team, having new experiences such as performance and travel, and commitment to a routine, provided children with opportunities to build valuable transferable skills:

*It's not about learning how to read music or play an instrument, it's the resilience, it's the confidence and the communication it brings. **P6, female, aged 48, mother to one child who attend(ed) IHL.***

*It gives her something to focus on, always kind of just given a load to skills as well throughout the years, because she's always been balancing one thing with another. It's given her all those time management skills to be able to balance things when it came to exams and stuff like that. **P11, female, aged 38, mother to two children who attend(ed) IHL.***

New experiences and a sense of the world 'opening up' were not limited to children, as demonstrated by the following quotes from Participants 8 and 11:

*It really opens us up as a family to a whole part of the world. **P8, female, aged 37, mother to one child who attend(ed) IHL.***

*It's never something we've ever been introduced to growing up. And so, going the Philharmonic and things are firsts for those, was quite daunting because it's something we've never done. And now it is part of our everyday life. **P11, female, aged 38, mother to two children who attend(ed) IHL.***

IHL helped children to develop intrinsic social competencies, including empathy and an ability to communicate with others, which enabled them to form and maintain personal relationships. For instance, Participant 16 described the emotional awareness that her child had started to develop:

*Just sort of being aware of how you're feeling and how things, everything around you, music, and other things can impact that. // And this is kind of helping with that. It's the same kind of deal that it's, it's sort of making you just aware, like you're aware. There's like, what are you feeling right now? How is this making you feel? And then what can we do about this? And that whole process? I feel like it kind of helps with that in that it teaches you. **P16, female, aged 32, mother to one child who attend(ed) IHL.***

As the following quote illustrates, sociability was linked to an overall sense of competence and increased self-esteem:

*Being able to stay after school and do the music so many days a week, gave her the opportunities to, you know, build friendship groups, build confidence, and do all of that. // she knows that she can go make friends. **P11, female, aged 38, mother to two children who attend(ed) IHL.***

Alongside support for forming connections with others, IHL provided an environment where children could learn more about themselves or, as Participant 16 put it, “*get[ting] in tune more with yourself*”. For some older children, this included building insight into future opportunities:

It's also given a confidence, with a few chats, because she's thinking of music, working in the music industry. So, she's got an idea for the future as well. P11, female, aged 38, mother to two children who attend(ed) IHL.

P11 went on to talk about her daughter's ability to understand herself and her interests. She recalled a recent open day event they had attended together where she had been able to confidently communicate her interests, abilities, and hopes for the future to a stallholder:

I have to make sure to step back and allow [Daughter] because she wants to now talk about achievements. // So, when she went over, the confidence she had talking about experiences with music and, and knowledge and everything that she's got. P11, female, aged 38, mother to two children who attend(ed) IHL.

Overall, the experiences and opportunities offered by IHL helped participants to develop a sense of competence and self-awareness, which together, cultivated a deeper sense of self-worth:

She's very much, I am who I am. And now, I'm not going to kind of bend or flex to, to look the same as everybody else. It's kind of like confidence in inner abilities. P6, female, aged 48, mother to one child who attend(ed) IHL.

She's (daughter) very resilient, to be fair, a little bit more independence, a little bit more headstrong, and has got a little bit more of a voice as well, is able to like have her own voice whereas previously she was just a yes person. P8, female, aged 38, mother to three children who attend(ed) IHL.

The intrinsic process of building confidence was not limited to children. In the quote below, Participant 8 explicitly acknowledges the benefits of IHL for the wider family:

It underpins everything because it's like a little golden thread now running through a life that she'll always have, like these, this knowledge, these skills that she'll be able to transfer in our family life, in a world of where, and everything that she goes on to do it. P8, female, aged 38, mother to three children who attend(ed) IHL.

Self-efficacy was a second, and related theme that reflects participants' belief in their ability to meet the challenges of specific tasks. In Question 1, we saw that participants defined resilience as strength, motivation, determination and perseverance. These same intrinsic skills were linked to self-efficacy. Participant 1 offered:

If you have self-encouragement to do something like learning new skills, learning music, or in my example, follow a specific kind of regime... I think this will help them in their resilience. P1, male, aged 40, father to two children who attend(ed) IHL.

*It definitely helped her build, like, the confidence and just give her the courage to try things which normally she wouldn't do probably. So, it's definitely building, like, resilience in a way too, to step up and overcome. **P19, female, aged 37, mother to two children who attend(ed) IHL.***

Resilience was characterised as an ability to problem solve and use resources to mitigate challenges. Many parents/ carers emphasised their child's ability to problem solve and likened this to the process of music learning:

*It's like with the music when she plays. And she said, I can't do it, can't do it. And I said, she was, just go! There's no such way, I can't. I can't do it. And you'll try. And if you get it wrong, doesn't matter. It doesn't matter, [daughter's name], you can try it again. **P7, female, aged 50, mother to one child who attend(ed) IHL.***

*So, you know, to be persistent at something and to keep trying, it's something, like all of the sort of the habits that you have to have to be good at music, and music are good habits to have in life. **P8, female, aged 38, mother to three children who attend(ed) IHL.***

IHL was described as “something totally different” (P7) and children valued the opportunity to engage with something separate from school and other extracurricular activities. A prominent idea in the data was music as a creative outlet and the sense of joy and purpose that came from playing an instrument. Music became a way for children to “escape from school stresses and the stresses of exams” (P3). For instance, one parent described how her daughter plays her instrument at times of challenge. Her ability and enjoyment of playing helps her to “feel better and more complete” (P3). Many children were said to turn to music when they became overwhelmed:

*It's there, like, a bubble to, okay, we have these problems and all, I feel sad, or I'm stressed with something, but I'll play a bit of music or I'll play my instrument, and it will just take you to another universe. **P19, female, aged 37, mother to two children who attend(ed) IHL.***

*She feels it's a way for her to escape from school stresses and the stresses of exams... she will escape and she'll go to a room and she listens to music. And it takes it away from those stresses. **P11, female, aged 38, mother to two children who attend(ed) IHL.***

Several participants recalled children's experiences of navigating common challenges associated with growing older. They described their involvement in IHL as a source of self-efficacy that promoted resilience in response to stressors including difficulties at school, exam periods, and friendship conflicts. IHL and music learning was seen to help children to form effective coping strategies that supported them in overcoming everyday adversity.

With regard to extrinsic factors, personal relationships, including family relationships and relationships within the IHL community, played an important role in participants' experiences. Such relationships represent a protective extrinsic resource that may foster resilience. Importantly, there was a sense that active involvement in IHL supported

relationships at a local level, within family units. For example, for Participant 11, music became something that she and her daughter could enjoy together and 'bond over':

*[Daughter] is talking about the piece and whether she has played this piece before and we'll talk about it and yeah, the emotions that different pieces spring we talk about that all the time. And we put we put classical music on in the car. **P11, female, aged 38, mother to two children who attend(ed) IHL.***

Several parents expressed a sense of pleasure and pride in sharing their child's achievements:

*It's just such an opportunity to take up. They must get such, you know, thrill about something, you know, watching a child grow from whatever age and watch them play that, you know, can't be anything better. Because as I say, I've watched the group they play with now. And I've seen them grow. **P7, female, aged 50, mother to one child who attend(ed) IHL.***

Membership in the wider IHL community provided opportunities to connect and develop supportive relationships with other IHL families. A sense of belonging and the idea of being part of a wider "family" came up in several interviews. Participant 21 commented:

*It's also a bit of a family, you know, a bit of a family together. **P21, female, aged 31, mother to two children who attend(ed) IHL.***

*So, it's just it's a part of our lives, and we feel like we've never really been without it. So, we'd be lost. It'd be heartbreaking to think of life without it. **P11, female, aged 38, mother to two children who attend(ed) IHL.***

These relationships between families can be seen as extrinsic resources that provided a platform for the exchange of support, guidance and acceptance. Some participants explicitly mentioned the enjoyment of sharing experiences with other families in IHL:

*They always enjoyed when they were taking part in things with their friends as well. So, it was that. It was, just the, you know, new experiences with their friends and sharing together and when they learn something new. **P12, female, aged 41, parent to one child who attend(ed) IHL.***

Finally, the IHL staff are themselves an important extrinsic social resource that may promote resilience. Parents/ carers attributed resilience to IHL's supportive and caring environment. One commented:

*Almost like they've been sprinkled with magic dust because it's not a relationship that you have with teachers. **P6, female, aged 48, mother of one child who attend(ed) IHL.***

Many described the significant efforts made by staff to get to know each child as an individual. Below, Participants 2 and 18 comment on the close relationships that were formed between families and IHL staff:

*The In Harmony staff, the relationship they have with the children that they teach is, is, it's crazy. And you know, to kind of like, know each individual child and what buttons to kind of press and what to avoid and how to get them to kind of motivate themselves again and all this kind of stuff. **P2, male, aged 36, father of three children who attend(ed) IHL.***

*It's just such a happy place... the children are so appreciated and everything they do is being noticed with the way to improve and the way it's being kind of showcased to the entire school. I think this will definitely help them, like, build their resilience. **P18, female, aged 35, mother to two children who attend(ed) IHL.***

This personalised approach was seen to help children to stay motivated and feel better prepared to manage the different challenges faced in day-to-day life, as well as future adversity.

3. What more could IHL do to promote resilience in its parents/carers?

Whilst feedback on the IHL programme was overwhelmingly positive, some participants made constructive suggestions for improvements moving forward. For example, some parents/ carers felt IHL could do more to maintain relationships with children who had left the programme. Several described a decline in their child's interest for the programme's activities, particularly as they aged. One child stopped attending sessions but later wanted to return. She found it difficult to re-establish contact and return to the programme:

*I think she felt she didn't have the right to go back. She'd missed the boat. **P20, female, aged 48, mother to one child who attend(ed) IHL.***

Regular follow-ups were proposed to maintain the link between IHL and families, to let children know that they were missed and would be welcomed back, and to support children if they wanted to re-join the programme:

*I just wish they will devote a tiny bit more follow up with the kids// even if it was once a year, to just try and keep that information and just give them or their mums and dads or something a little call ... just to say, even like, you know, do you want to come back? Just, you're welcome. **P20, female, aged 48, mother to one child who attend(ed) IHL.***

Participants felt strongly that enrolment in programmes like IHL should be open to children living in other areas of the city. Even IHL families who had relocated to a different area of Liverpool found that younger siblings were not eligible to join the programme because they were now out of area:

*I know that the money issue is there and everything, but yeah, it's unfair to other children. They don't get to experience this. **P18, female, aged 35, mother to two children who attend(ed) IHL.***

Despite the clear awareness of a disparity in access to IHL, participants did acknowledge the financial barriers to providing the programme across a wider area. Most parents/carers expressed gratitude for the opportunity to be part of IHL. Indeed, many discussed the

affordability of music learning and acknowledged that their personal circumstances would have prohibited them from accessing this kind of opportunity without IHL:

*At the time, I wouldn't have been able to afford it as well. So, I know a lot, a lot of people are in the position now where they wouldn't be able to afford that as well. **P15, female, aged 38, mother to two children who attend(ed) IHL.***

*I mean, for us, I think for most families around here, we don't have tonnes of money, so we're probably not going to be able to access this stuff any other way. So being able to access this is a huge deal. **P16, female, aged 32, mother to one child who attend(ed) IHL.***

Participant 19 commented on the accessibility and convenience of the programme's activities. They were more able to take advantage of the programme because sessions take place at the children's school, rather than at a private venue that may be harder to access:

*It's a very little commitment. In comparison if I need to take her for a private lesson somewhere. Exactly. Yeah. So, it's very convenient. // I appreciate it very much from this. So just happening in school and I don't need to drive them anywhere or pay for extra lessons or anything. **P19, female, aged 37, mother of two children who attend(ed) IHL.***

Affordability and accessibility were crucial factors that enabled families to benefit from IHL. Participant 5 reflected on what life would be like without IHL. In the quote below, both money and time are highlighted as barriers that would determine how likely the family would be able to access music learning without IHL:

*I think it might cost me a fortune and getting him some music lessons. But music would certainly be in his life. I just don't know whether it would be as much as he is able to access now because he takes part in music lessons three times a week in school. And I know that we're... in fact, four times with strings ... that just doesn't have that room in a weekly calendar between schooling and after school and hours for him to be able to take on that much. So, it's definitely fulfilling. And it [life] wouldn't be as rich as it is now. **P5, female, aged 37, mother to one child who attend(ed) IHL.***

6. CONCLUSIONS

The current study used qualitative methods to interview 22 parents/carers about their own and their child(ren)'s lives before, during and, where relevant, since participation in the IHL programme. We were specifically interested in identifying if and how IHL promoted resilience and which intrinsic and extrinsic resilience resources were provided by IHL. We set out to address the following three research questions:

1. What does resilience mean to IHL families?
2. Using an ecological approach, what intrinsic and extrinsic resources does IHL provide to its families?
3. What more can IHL do to support resilience in its families?

First, resilience meant different things to different parents/carers but central to most definitions was a sense of perseverance and adaptability. Perseverance was characterised as determination, not giving up, and passing through problems and keeping going. Our participants reflected on times in their own lives when they had carried on despite facing obstacles. They also frequently described their children as resilient and actively fostered a sense of resilience within their family unit. Adaptability was characterised as the ability to overcome obstacles. Our participants demonstrated adaptability through acceptance and learning from mistakes. As with the theme of perseverance, many of our participants reflected on ways in which their children had overcome challenges, including through problem solving skills.

Second, IHL promoted resilience in its children and families via the promotion of intrinsic (e.g. confidence - skills, competence, self-knowledge; and self-efficacy - perceived ability to face challenge, music as a creative outlet) and extrinsic resources (e.g. social factors - family relationships, IHL community, including fellow families, and IHL staff). IHL helps to increase inclusion and sense of belonging amongst families from diverse backgrounds, including low-SES. IHL empowers its families by providing opportunities to develop new skills and make decisions which, in turn, support the development of a positive self-concept, and by engaging them in a family-like community to strengthen the sense of connection and belonging, provide access to support and enjoy the company of others.

Finally, whilst feedback on the IHL programme was overwhelmingly positive, some participants made useful suggestions which serve as useful implications for IHL moving forward. These included maintaining relationships with programme alumni through regular follow-ups and attempting to reach children and families in other areas of Liverpool. Our findings highlight the potential to enhance the resilience of IHL families by empowering them through opportunities to develop new skills and make decisions, and by engaging them in a family-like community to strengthen the sense of connection and belonging.

Taken together, our findings show that, whilst IHL cannot remove hardship or inequalities, it can and does provide families and children with life skills and resources that they can use to manage and adapt to stress both in and outside the programme, now and in the future.





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