

March 9<sup>th</sup> 2010  
Erskine Action Group

Next up in the Flexi-care assembly line of events was a trip to Erskine to hold a workshop for the Erskine Action Group, another club for adults with learning difficulties. The group meet in The St. John Bosco Primary School in the town.

Tom picked up Lesley and then vroomed to Inchinnan to meet Jess and they bravely entered The Land of Endless Roundabouts that is otherwise known as Erskine. That proved troublesome and they drove around for a while before finding the school tucked away. Jane too had problems finding the school but as soon as she arrived we quickly unloaded the Berlingo and ventured inside.

The Buddy Beaters were:-

- ✓ Jane Bentley
- ✓ Tom Chalmers
- ✓ Lesley King
- ✓ Jess McMillan



*Three dedicated followers of fashion*

We set up in what looked like a staff room, just off the main assembly hall and Tom eyed up the comfy looking soft chairs. We were joined by 17 group members one of whom was Mark and he said at the beginning that he had seen us on October 29<sup>th</sup> last year when we played at the Renfrewshire Disability Arts Forum relaunch, and he had been one of the Dizzy Feet dancers.

Jane wasted no time and introduced herself and then the rest of Buddy Beat and we performed for a minute, strutting our stuff.

Firstly, out came the inflatable globe and that went down very well as everyone was encouraged to announce who they were. We then handed out the Boomwhackers and instantly everyone was whacking away, smiling faces all around. Jane got the group to stop and start by counting in and counting out to

four on her command and then suggested that anyone in the group could do the same. Lesley was the first and she led the way and that encouraged carer Alex, Caroline and Mark to do likewise. From there Jane got the

ladies to play on their own and then the gents. This raised comparisons between the sexes and this was repeated with Jane once again leading the girls and Tom taking charge of the boys (who were miles better!). Jane ended this part of the workshop by starting the group playing loudly and then taking them down to church mice quietness before exploding back to a powerful stop.

Then Jane demonstrated the drums and the percussion instruments and as usual the frogs brought a few sighs and aahs. When Jane gave the word, the group grabbed what they had previously been eyeing up, and unusually the majority of the gathering selected percussion and left five or six drums sitting in the centre. Jane began with a jamming session and after a few minutes quietened the percussion so that it was only the drums that could be heard and vice-versa. Then Jane asked for just the percussion to play and she led them through loud to soft and back to loud and counted them to a stop, which was rather impressive in its togetherness.

Next up, The Stick of Power came out and Jane used this to pick out each and every one around the circle, giving them a few seconds on their own to make up a rhythm. Jess was first to be selected, then Tom and finally Lesley and this showed everyone what kind of beat they could do. This went down very well and some great rhythms appeared- Kirsty, who had one arm in a sling showed great style as did John who sat beside Jess and Mark, who sounded as though he played castanets all the time. The quietest and most withdrawn person in the group was a lady called Kathleen, who had sat cuddling a shaker without taking part. Jane knelt in front of her and gently coaxed her into moving her shaker and then she successfully got Kathleen to echo her own shaker. That was a very touching moment. Once everyone had had a go, Jane built it all up into a big jam before splitting the group into two- each half took it in turns to either play or be an appreciative audience and we ended the first half with a crashing rumble!



During that first half hour or so, there had been a young man called Douglas and he sat beside Jane, but didn't really want to take part, claiming that the Boomwhackers and drums had hurt his hands. During

the tea-break he sat with us and told us all about his job in the Erskine Bridge Hotel on a Friday. This must have recharged him somewhat for he came out for the second half all guns blazing!

Douglas was sporting a Queen t-shirt, and Jane started with everyone playing that strong riff from We Will Rock You and this pleased Douglas no end and he was soon singing out loud. Then we all played together, just feeling the music and letting it flow. Jane then instigated a Play and Point game and everyone had their turn, but it was Douglas who approached it with gusto and his rhythms certainly filled the room. After that we played Copy Cat and it moved around the circle and Jane closed the evening with a storytelling game. Weaving this story (with the help of the group) as she went, each person in turn provided a suitable special effect on their drum. The story basically revolved around a witch who went for a walk in the jungle and a bat dropped on her head. Then she met a prince on a horse and they then bumped in a troll. They all decided to walk further in the jungle and came across hollow tree trunks. The witch had an idea to use them as drums and suggested that they form a band and the story ended with everyone jamming loudly until the final stop command came from Jane. And oh yes, they all lived happily ever after.

That was another good evening for Buddy Beat. Each time we meet these Flexi-Care groups the different characters come shining through and this workshop was no different.

Words and pictures by Tom Chalmers