**Something Special in the State of Sweden**

I have been in Sweden over the past 4 days as part of the voluntary work I do for Sistema Europe. If you have already heard about Sistema and decided it is not for you, please read on!

Once again I was reminded that, with effective partnerships between organisations, and with people who are prepared to work together for the good of the children and young people, their families and communities, the outcomes can be truly remarkable.

The potential tensions between music for itself and as a social tool were there as were the potential conflicts between those who believe in more ‘traditional’ methods and those who see the importance of the ‘Sistema’ ensemble approach. Nevertheless, I found a refreshing openness and willingness to acknowledge and address these issues – all for the good of the child. What makes such a difference for all of these people is seeing, at first hand, how the power of music is transforming lives.

This generosity of spirit extends internationally. Colleagues from Sistema Scotland supported Sweden in getting to where they are now. Sweden is in turn supporting others through contacts made via Sistema Europe. Sistema Europe is linked to Sistema Global. All are united by the passion and commitment of a social action programme delivered through excellence in music. A programme that, when implemented properly, provides excellent value for money. Yes, it is expensive if viewed as a music education programme, but it is so much more than that. Beware the fakes, the imposters, the cheaper, Sistema-lite projects that don’t adopt the values and ethos and that use the name only to get funding for what are really no more than music education programmes. They are wolves in sheep’s clothing. It is a challenge, for the highly visible output of Sistema is musical. But the difference is easy to spot. It is how the programme works with the children, their families, schools and communities that makes the difference.

England leads the world with some of its music education practices, but we can also learn much from the rest of the world about how to do this even more effectively, reaching out to be genuinely inclusive and enabling all who wish to continue to make music in and through ensembles. Sistema is about genuine access and inclusion where the child is supported to engage and helped, together with their families, to overcome those challenges that would have defeated many of us if we had been in similar circumstances.

The best Sistema-inspired programmes are also reaching out to find how they can work more effectively, in genuine partnership and collaboration so that the young people they nurture and support can join other successful ensembles as they progress. Together we can collectively make a real difference to all young people throughout the world! Now isn’t that something worth fighting for?