Report to the Trustees – The Music Therapy Charity

**Project: Does working with carers affect music therapists’ concept and practice of therapy?**

Orienting the study

Since my last report (early April), the focus of my research has become clearer. For many client groups, there is a systematic knowledge base which supports and validates the work. The knowledge falls into two areas, (i) factual and explanatory knowledge which describes and defines the key characteristics of both the client group and the music therapy work that has happened with this group (ii) strategic knowledge which suggests approaches to the work and thinking about it. Both areas of knowledge are largely missing in music therapy work with carers.

Having identified the nature of this gap, I am re-formulating my research questions in an attempt to identify how music therapists currently make decisions about their work with carers and how they perceive the needs of carers. These questions seem to be a necessary precursor to the question which I have hitherto been exploring (now the third question). The research questions are therefore:

1. What informs music therapists’ work with carers?
2. In what ways do music therapists identify and engage with carers’ needs?
3. Does working with carers affect music therapists’ concept and practice of music therapy?

Data Analysis

The focus of my work since the last report has been data analysis. I initially intended to conduct a full analysis of the literature concerning carers for this pilot study, as well as exploring my own recent work with carers. However, I have realised that a full literature study is beyond the scope of this part of the research, so I am undertaking a more modest review, focussing on any indications or evidence of the factors that informed the therapist’s work with carers. Meanwhile, I am also analysing my written and non-person-identifiable records of the work I was recently involved in.

My research falls into the qualitative tradition and although I am endeavouring to allow the voices of those involved to contribute to the meaning, I am personally intimately involved in both the clinical service in question and in the search for meaning in the literature. In acknowledgement of this unavoidable reality, I am adopting a methodological stance which recognises and utilizes my personal ways of meaning-making: I am a visual thinker and am using drawing and image making, with written commentary, in an iterative process of analysis. My thinking is informed by the ‘strong reflexivity’ of ethnomethodology and because the focus of this study is the journey of thinking and understanding which informed my work, and the relationship of my work to the literature, the study belongs in the field of narrative enquiry.

I have completed an initial cycle of drawing and commentary, relating mainly to key events in the service I worked in, and am embarking on a second cycle concerned with the thinking, events and influences which informed this work.

 Jessica Atkinson 10.10.17