

# The Music Therapy Charity Funding Report

## The Role of Music Therapy for Children in a Primary Mainstream School Setting. A Practitioner Case Study Exploration.

The Music Therapy Charity have supported the costs of this PhD research project that took place at Roehampton University supervised by Dr Rachel Darnley-Smith and Dr John Rae. The project commenced in September 2018 and is still in the process of being completed with the aim of submission of the thesis being December 2023. The project has been delayed, particularly the data collection section due to Covid 19.

This study aims to explore the role of music therapy for children in a primary mainstream school setting. It does this through triangulating the perspectives of the teaching staff, the therapist and the child. The overall research question was: how does the role of music therapy support the well-being of primary aged children who are experiencing emotional and social difficulties?

### The grant costs

Research cost	Amount
Video-raters	£100
Research assistants	£100
Staff participants	£350
Clinical supervision	£180
Data storage equipment	£105
Art resources for child interviews	£20
Audio recorder	£45
<b>Total amount allocated in grant</b>	<b>£1275</b>

The Music Therapy Charity's financial support funded money vouchers to fourteen teachers who volunteered their time to participate in the focus groups and one member of staff who acted as a research assistant carrying out interviews with the child participants of the project and the video analysis raters of the clinical sessions.

Furthermore, the grant also allowed the researcher financial support in clinical supervision sessions plus funding for equipment needed for storing data and recording for the research and resources for the carrying out the interviews with the child participants. It is planned that the completion and submission for the PhD thesis will be in December 2023.

### Methodology

A mixed method case study approach was employed to answer the research questions which were explored in three ways:

- 1) Eight children referred for individual music therapy received therapy for one academic year. The eight children were seen over a two-year period, 2 in the first year and 4 in the second year. All sessions were recorded as part of the research. Using the Music Therapy Assessment Scale (Raglio, 2017), video analysis was carried out to include the start, middle and end of therapy to evaluate the emotional attunement and empathetic relationship between therapist and child.
- 2) The child participants who received music therapy as part of the research were interviewed using semi-structured questions which were analysed using thematic analysis.
- 3) Teaching staff who were involved in child participants teaching and academic support took part in three focus groups across the academic year to gain their perspectives of the role of music therapy service in the school. Two sets of focus groups were carried out alongside the children receiving music therapy sessions. Seven staff were involved in each year of focus groups. Thematic analysis was carried out to explore common themes.

### **Summary of results to date**

Data analysis is currently being carried out with the children's interviews and video analysis of the clinical sessions. The first year of focus groups with the staff participants have been completed using thematic analysis to look at similarities and differences across the three focus groups. Questions focused on the decision-making process, views about the music therapy service and experience of the service over the academic year. Key themes and findings of focus groups were:

- Music therapy is viewed by teachers as being intertwined in the whole school approach to safeguarding through being involved in team discussions and information sharing which then informs identification of music therapy referrals.
- The therapist's direct communication with families is seen as more likely to result in successful consent to therapy. Which in turn supports the teachers and the therapist's own work in the school.
- In the therapist supporting families teachers felt more enabled to reach out to families resulting in better relationships between school and home.
- The continuity and reliability of music therapy sessions were viewed as being valued for both the teachers and children providing stability particularly in a time of instability.
- The importance of the therapeutic space was valued as confidential and supportive space that the child was able to access when they most needed it.
- The value for the child of the link between the therapist and teacher providing helpful communication and information sharing on their behalf.
- The value of the use of music for children who find it verbally challenging expressing themselves providing an alternative way to explore emotions.

### **Implications and Dissemination of research**

The implications of the findings to date indicate that:

- The integration of a music therapy service within the school can support the teachers' and families' understanding of music therapy.
- The role of the music therapist directly liaising with families supports their understanding of the service resulting in greater likelihood in parents consenting to music therapy and reducing anxiety around therapy.

- The Music Therapy as a service can play an important part within school's safeguarding process through information sharing, advice and referral planning and discussions.
- The provision of both emotional support to the children and professional support to the staff within the classroom setting by the Music Therapy service is valued by the teachers.
- The role of the music therapist providing a different perspective can in be viewed as beneficial to the teacher in supporting them understand a child's difficulties.
- Having an embedded whole school approach where all staff are thinking about a child's emotional well-being is supportive to the running of a music therapy service.

The findings of the first year of focus groups were presented at the Music Therapy Charity October 2022. It is aimed that once data analysis is complete in all sections of the project the researcher will present these at further music therapy and education conferences including the SysMus23 and BAMT conference 2024.

I intend to write up the findings of this project for publication once the research is complete. Journals and professional publications which will be considered for submission will include Leading Note, British Journal of Music Therapy, Teach Primary and The Educator UK. It is aimed that these publications will benefit other music therapists working in this setting providing further evidence to what the role of music therapy can provide in a primary mainstream setting. Additionally, this could benefit music therapists looking to set up a new service in a mainstream school or schools considering the benefits what a music therapy service could offer.

#### Conference Presentations

Lenton-Smith, G. (2022, October 29-30). *Investigating a music therapy service in a primary mainstream school: The teachers' perspective* [Conference presentation]. Music Therapy Charity Conference 2022, Music Therapy in the UK Today, London.

Lenton-Smith, G. (2021, April 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> April). *Working in collaboration. Case Study research of a music therapy provision in an inner city primary school.* [Online conference presentation]. BAMT conference 2021, Open ground: Music therapy in collaboration and exchange.

Gemma Lenton-Smith  
22<sup>nd</sup> April 2023