

End of Year Report for Sam Lowit, Music Therapy Student at Queen Margaret University.

I have thoroughly enjoyed the past year of my course at Queen Margaret University. Whilst many aspects of the course have been difficult I feel these have been valuable experiences, crucial to my development as a music therapist.

At the beginning of my studies at Queen Margaret University, my year group was informed that this course would change us. Whilst this seemed to be an inevitability given the nature of a therapy course, I was perhaps surprised at just how much I would grow as a person. Personal therapy, the inter-personal learning group and material brought by clients has forced me to face some of the issues which I have carried around with me my whole life. Whilst these issues are small compared to the difficulties faced by many others, this has served to remind me that no life is easy or free from difficulties. Additionally, the course has allowed me to count my blessings more sincerely and fully than before. Through my ongoing personal therapy, I continue to identify triggers and areas which are difficult for me, this is crucial to my development as a therapist but also personally challenging and deeply rewarding.

One of the aspects of the course I found difficult was my placement. My placement was in a primary school working with children, most of whom were on the autistic spectrum. From this, I learnt a great deal about music therapy and more specifically working in the developmental model. There were three particular challenges that this placement posed for me in addition to those inherent to starting out as a therapist. Firstly, due to an operation I missed three weeks of practice placement which limited both what I could learn and achieve clinically with my clients. Secondly, I did not always agree with the approach of my practice educator, whilst I was always respectful of the fact I was there to learn, I found they were often a little overbearing in my work with clients. Thirdly, working in schools brought up a lot of issues in my personal therapy. Overall I learnt on my placement not just practicalities, techniques and clinical skills but also discovered something about which approach, settings and client groups I want to work with once I've graduated.

I was also surprised by how much I have enjoyed the theoretical and research elements of the course. I find the way these two things enmesh and feed into clinical practice fascinating. The methodology of research, theory and my study of the rudiments of statistics appealed to my philosophical and scientific interests. Through this I have developed a particular interest in mentalisation-based music therapy and the existentialist and person-centred traditions in the psychotherapies.

Outside the course last term, I worked with young homeless adults and vulnerable children in a community music capacity with the Frontiers Music project run by the charity, the Tinderbox Orchestra. This presented a difficult task in disentangling my role as a community musician at work and a music therapist on placement. This was also pertinent symbolically as the self which is emerging through my time on the course differentiates and assimilates with the selves that I have been during my work in community music and care work prior to coming on the course or to Edinburgh. This year I have been given the positions of lead tutor and assistant tutor for Frontiers Music at two venues helping me develop my skills and contacts within the community music world. Thinking of my work in acute inpatient settings with psychiatric clients, one of the most common clinical aims I have is to develop the use of music after therapy. To this end, my involvement and understanding of community music resources in the area has enabled me to connect clients to community music resources to work towards building resilience, better coping strategies and better relationships with the community mental health team upon discharge. Another challenge this poses is the danger of a client attending a community music project I am involved in.

This year I hope to balance my personal life better with the demands of the course, placement and work as well as hone my clinical skills so that I feel confident enough once I have graduated. Group work poses a particular challenge for me and so I anticipate a greater focus on that during my planning for my placement.

I cannot begin to thank the Music Therapy Charity for this support and opportunity. The money from this bursary has gone a long way to meeting both my travel needs – as my placement was in another city – and paying for my personal therapist. Financially this has alleviated a lot of worry and allowed me to focus more fully on the course and my personal therapy. Furthermore, the support of the program team in nominating me for this bursary means a huge amount.