

MUSIC THERAPY

Practical, Non-Invasive Treatment For What Ails You

By Jerry O'Leary



Client Florence Rubright of Swarthmore, PA plays maracas with Jerry O'Leary on tambourine in a percussion exercise that helps coordination for gross motor skills, rhythm and timing.

What does modern civilization share with our ancestors of prehistoric days? What did the ancient Greeks and Egyptians utilize in healing rituals? What do we use effectively today in the treatment of Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease? How can we address pain management, stress management, social isolation and child birthing anxiety issues? How should we approach various childhood disorders such as autism, pervasive development disorders, attention deficit disorders and attention deficit hyperactivity disorders? What can help us focus and manage our everyday struggles and challenges into a positive and healthy way of living?

The answer is not another miracle drug treatment therapy. There are no magic elixirs. The

simple answer is music therapy. Music therapy offers each of us a practical, non-invasive treatment that helps to restore, improve and maintain a healthy and fruitful lifestyle. According to the American Music Therapy Association (AMTA), "music therapy is an established health and human service profession using music to improve our quality of life by optimizing health and wellness and addressing the needs of children and adults with disabilities and illnesses."

Some Background

Although the profession of music therapy was officially established in the 1950's throughout the Veteran's Hospital system, its roots trace back to

ancient times. Today more than 5,000 professionals practice music therapy in a wide variety of arenas from hospitals to hospice centers, schools to community centers, nursing homes to assisted living facilities, rehabilitation clinics to daycare establishments and substance abuse clinics to private practice.

Why is music therapy effective in treating different maladies and conditions? According to the AMTA, music therapy can make the difference between:

- **Resistance and Relationship** in a mental health client;
- **Passivity and Productivity** for those suffering developmental disorders;
- **Demoralization and Dignity** in Alzheimer's and Parkinson's clients;
- **Denial and Determination** for substance abusers;
- **Isolation and Interaction** in cases involving brain injuries or the aging;
- **Frustration and Fulfillment** for those suffering physical disabilities;
- **Chronic Pain and Comfort** in cases of inpatient and outpatient care.

Typical Session

In music therapy, the music and the making of it is the therapy. The music therapist acts as the song coordinator and therapeutic planner, selecting tunes that fit the client's stated preferences. When a client sings along to a favorite song, the act of vocalizing stimulates brain function and improves the individuals overall mood and well being. The client may be encouraged to improvise musically on an instrument accompanied by the music therapist. The music therapy session may turn its attention to the creation or discussion of song lyrics.

The style and structure of the music therapy session is based on the initial evaluation and assessment of the client performed by a professionally trained and educated music therapist. Based on the information that is gathered, the music therapist creates a treatment plan of thirty to sixty minute sessions addressing the needs of the client. The frequency of each session, whether daily, weekly, monthly, etc. is also recommended by the therapist to the client. As therapeutic goals are met and/or the client's needs change, the treatment plan is modified to meet the client's immediate objectives. By treating the client with music as a therapy, the lifestyle challenges faced by the individual are discussed with the music thera-

pist and all concerned parties. The long-term goal of music therapy intervention is the restoration, improvement and maintenance of the client's well being.

Music therapy is an alternative medicine practiced by Board Certified Music Therapists. In order to become certified an individual must complete an approved music therapy program from one of over 70 undergraduate or graduate colleges and universities. The minimum degree required is a bachelor's degree and the candidate must complete a closely supervised internship demonstrating accomplished musical skills and clinical training. The music therapist must have knowledge of a variety of populations as well as client needs and challenges. Training in assessment, treatment, planning and evaluation are necessary skills of a certified music therapist. The certified music therapist is committed to recognized professional ethics and standards of practice.

Local Connections

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania ranks second only behind the State of New York in the highest number of practicing Music Therapists. In the Delaware Valley area, two dedicated Board Certified Music Therapists have been focusing on the practice of this discipline directly in their clients' homes. Jerry O'Leary, MA, MT-BC and Joseph Reilly, MA, MT-BC have been treating many diverse populations in medical, educational, geriatric care, psychiatric and private settings over the past fifteen years.

Both completed the Master of Arts program at Immaculata College (now, Immaculata University) in Music Therapy. O'Leary and Reilly have treated clients ranging from 3 to 93 years of age. Their experience includes clients afflicted by mental health issues and mental retardation, developmental delays, autism, multiple disabilities, ADD, ADHD, cerebral palsy, the spectrum of psychiatric disorders, Parkinson's and Alzheimer's disease, depression, social isolation, substance abuse, cancer, hospice issues, death and bereavement.

Jerry O'Leary, MA, MT-BC, is the owner of MusicWorks, a music therapy service created to address the needs of diversified populations in restoring, improving and maintaining a healthy and fulfilling life style. For more information, please contact Jerry O'Leary at (610) 449-9669 or visit www.MusicWorksWonders.com.