

The contribution of Music Therapy to the emotional wellbeing of children in residential care

Practitioner review

Moyra Hawthorn,
Depute Manager
Falkirk Family Support Project
Lecturer
SIRCC National Office

This paper gives a rare insight into the work of a therapist, in this case, a Music Therapist, working with young people in residential care. Very little has been written on the use of music or Music Therapy within the residential child care setting either within the UK or internationally and this paper is a welcome addition to literature.

Aby is not only working with children in residential care, but she works with them in the unit in which they live. My initial thoughts were, firstly, if a child has such emotional needs, could staff not address these using the everyday opportunities arising in the 'life space'? Secondly, if a therapist is working within a unit, how do they create a separate therapeutic space?

Aby addressed these questions convincingly in her identification and analysis of the 'seven issues'. It was also heartening to note, that while Music Therapy may adopt a different approach, some of the theoretical foundations are shared with residential child care in the works of Bowlby, Winnicott, Worden, Rogers and Sinason among others.

It was interesting to note that David could enjoy making people laugh in the unit while exploring serious and disturbing issues in therapy, in keeping with ideas from theorists such as Fahlberg (1990) and Ward (2003). Adrian Ward, a champion of 'Opportunity-Led Practice' recognises that some children may need extra help outside of the 'daily living arena' through a range of therapies (Ward, 2004). The challenge is to ensure that the child can be offered the necessary privacy and confidentiality in therapy while therapist and staff work in partnership to ensure that the child can feel effectively supported throughout 'the other 23 hours' when the therapist is not present (Trieschman et al., 1969). Again, Aby addressed this in the 'seven issues'.

While this paper is about the use of Music Therapy, it does not devalue the role of staff within units, who may use music therapeutically and recreationally with

children and young people. There is room for all. Equally, while this paper uses examples from the arena of learning difficulties, Music Therapy has been used effectively with typically developing young people in a variety of settings as well as other creative therapeutic approaches such as art, drama, and story-telling.

This article offers a rare insight into the therapeutic process with a young person but in a way, which is accessible to the non-musician and relevant for those working with children and young people in a range of residential settings.

Fahlberg, V. (1990). Individual and group therapy. In V. Fahlberg, (Ed.), *Residential treatment: A tapestry of many therapies*. Indianapolis: Perspectives Press.

Trieschman, A. E., Whittaker, J.K., & Brendtro, L.K. (Eds.) (1969). *The other 23 hours: Childcare work with emotionally disturbed children in a therapeutic milieu*. Chicago: Aldine Publishing.

Ward, A. (2003). Everyday life: Opportunity-Led work. In A.Ward, K. Kasinski, J. Pooley, & A. Worthington (Eds.), *Therapeutic communities for children and young people*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Ward, A. (2004). Towards a theory of the everyday: the Ordinary and the Special in daily living in residential care: International perspectives on rethinking residential care. *Child and Youth Care Forum*, 33(3) 209-225.