

Music, music therapy, musical abilities and the role of music in the lives of children and adults with Down syndrome

Are we making full use of music in all its forms?

Music therapy

In October last year, we were very fortunate in having a visit from Julie Wylie, music therapist from The Champion Centre in New Zealand. Julie, with the help of Clare Tatterson, a developmental psychologist who was working with us last year – also from The Champion Centre – offered to put on a music day for children within reach of The Sarah Duffen Centre in Portsmouth. The children who came to the music day had a wonderful time, and one parent has decided to consider making music therapy a career as a result of the inspirational day. We asked Julie to write an article for us so that we could share her work more widely and it is the lead article in this issue.

In the article, Julie explains the work she does as a music therapist and illustrates the way in which music can help children by giving three case histories of children with Down syndrome. The three children are quite different from one another in personalities, development and behaviour, and Julie explains how she used music in different ways with each child.

One centre which has pioneered the development of music therapy in the UK since the 1950s, the Nordoff-Robbins Centre, describes music as therapy -

Music is an intrinsic part of all of us: pulse and rhythm are found in our heart-beat, our breathing and our movement; melody is created in our laughing, crying, screaming or singing; the whole range of our emotions can be held within the rhythms and harmonies of different musical styles and idioms. These intimate connections with music can remain despite disability or illness, and are not dependent on a musical training or background.

Because of this, music therapists can use music to help children and adults with a wide range of needs arising from such varied causes as learning difficulties, mental and physical illness, physical and sexual abuse, stress and terminal illness. Emotional, cognitive and developmental

needs can be addressed through interactive music making within a secure relationship offered by the music therapist.'

Dance

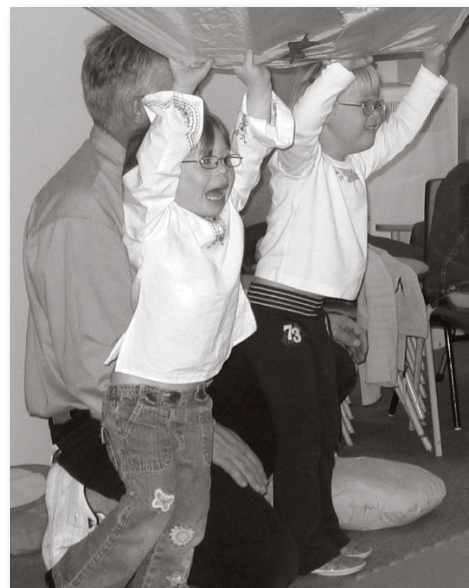
Music therapy can support the development of children in many ways, as Julie explains so well in her article. Music, in all its forms, can also provide expression and pleasure at all ages. Julie draws attention to the possibilities for expression without words and many young people and adults with Down syndrome are amazingly skilled and expressive in dance. I am fortunate in being able to travel widely and I have watched many skilled performers with Down syndrome dancing in all styles from classical ballet to jive – it only needs the opportunity and an enthusiastic professional teacher. Even without teachers, many young people enjoy the disco – disco dancing is a my daughter Roberta's favourite leisure pursuit. She is still as keen at the age of 36 as she was at 16 years of age.

Making music

More and more young people with Down syndrome are learning to play musical instruments. In the UK, an organisation called Melody was started in 2003 to promote the teaching of music to individuals with learning disabilities. The 6 case histories on the Melody website are all about children and young people with Down syndrome.

Music to develop spoken language

There is probably a great opportunity to use music in a planned way to help children and adults to improve their spoken language. I know of one example where an adult with Down syndrome in her 30's took singing lessons from a professional teacher and a spin off was more intelligible speech. Readers can find an article by Judy Barker, a music teacher and parent of a teenager with Down syndrome, on singing and music to aid language development



in *Down Syndrome News and Update* 1.3 – available on the website at <http://www.down-syndrome.net/library/periodicals/dsnu/01/3/133/>

Finding the opportunities

It seems that we could be making much more use of music in the lives of our young people, with benefits for self-expression and behaviour as well as just enjoyment. We have listed some websites which give information on music therapy and music opportunities. We know that there are many more organisations out there offering dance and music – please send us your stories of the value and enjoyment of music and any contact information that you have for readers in your country.

Editor

Websites

www.melody.me.uk
www.musictherapy.org.uk
www.nordoff-robbins.org.uk
www.musictherapy.org