

Nordoff Robbins Music Therapy at The Wallich: St Leonard's Hostel, Swansea

Tom's Story – written by Jo Humphreys, Nordoff Robbins Music Therapist

Musical Meeting

I first met Tom in my second week at St. Leonard's. He was in the communal lounge where I was setting up my instruments and I invited him to stay for the first session of the day. He showed an interest in the melodic table tubes, picking up a beater and playing a single note saying he found the sound of the instrument relaxing and enjoyed hearing it resonate. As he played a few more notes, I repeated them on the piano. He smiled and said, "**I've never done this before,**" but continued to play.*

*As I continued to reflect his short melodies back to him, we established a musical dialogue; he noticed this, saying "**It's like talking isn't it?**" As our musical conversation progressed, I started to provide a piano accompaniment, listening to the pitches he was playing and tailoring what I played to compliment his melody. Tom was now the soloist in our music, and as his playing became more assured and expressive, he started adding notes to play longer melodic phrases, exploring the whole range of the instrument and swaying his body in time to our shared music. When I instigated a crescendo, he followed me, playing more loudly and exclaiming "**It's brilliant this! I loves it!**".*

After improvising together for the majority of the session, Tom then went on to talk about his life, telling me about difficult times in his past, his experience of the criminal justice system and his battles with mental health and addiction. Just as I had done when we were playing the instruments together, I listened carefully without judgement to what he was offering, reflecting what he said back to him, and providing a supportive presence whilst he spoke. When our session ended, he thanked me, saying he felt it was just what he needed that day and promising me that he would see me again the following week.

Father and Son

It was several weeks later that Tom had his second session. Although I had seen him briefly a few times on my weekly visits, he had not been clear-headed enough to attend. He did however tell me that one week previously, he had heard another service user in music therapy playing a particular song, 'Father and Son' by Cat Stevens, which had resonated with him. He explained that it held great personal significance for him and reminded him of his own father and, having been prompted by hearing this song being played, he had arranged to visit his father later that day. This was a powerful reminder to me of the ability music has to permeate a setting more widely, reaching beyond the people in the room and providing experiences to others which can be just as impactful.

*When I did see Tom again for a session, I began to play 'Father and Son' on the piano and he recognised it immediately, saying **"You remembered. You remembered about me. Nobody ever remembers about me."** He then joined in, singing a word-perfect rendition of his favourite song, and requesting several further songs so that he could continue singing.*

Companionship

In my final week at St Leonard's, Tom joined me for another session. We improvised together, with Tom playing the table tubes as he had done in our very first session and going on to sing his favourite songs.

*As we reflected on our sessions, he commented again on the strong sense of musical communication and companionship he had felt. Although Tom's engagement was not regular owing to his complex and sometimes chaotic lifestyle, I always committed to finding him each week to see how he was and remind him that he was welcome to join me in music therapy whenever he felt able to. This hadn't gone unnoticed, as he remarked in one of our sessions, **"You come back every week. You don't forget about us, do you."***

By having his musical expressions listened to, remembered and valued in music therapy, Tom experienced feeling listened to, remembered and valued as a person; something which he, and everyone at St Leonard's, is deserving of.

**Not his real name*