

## **Music therapy pilot: Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Plasmawr**

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Hello.

I'm Lynnsey Gwynedd and I'm a registered music therapist working in Cardiff and the area.

Today, I'm going to introduce you to music therapy and talk about an exciting new pilot being undertaken at Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Plasmawr at the moment.

It's a pilot to provide music therapy sessions to the school's young people until the end of this academic year.

Firstly, I'd like to introduce you to Mrs Catrin Ann Pallot deputy head at Ysgol Plasmawr.

Catrin has been especially supportive and played a key role in realising the idea of this pilot.

Here's Catrin to give you more information.

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At Plasmawr we try our best to ensure the pupils emotional well-being is prioritised.

If their well-being is well and positive, they are going to succeed academically, they're going to achieve their potential.

So we're always trying to think of new ideas to support our young people.

We have traditionally a number of therapists working at the school.

The Welsh Government provides us two therapists – two days of therapy - to the school.

And we then, since a number of years, have hired a therapist to provide two additional days.

But we felt not every pupil had access to traditional counselling – that spoken therapy was not to everyone's taste – and that we needed to find more creative ways for children to be able to discuss their feelings, express themselves, discuss any things going on in their lives or their background, and that perhaps in a more creative way.

So we turned to the arts and then considered things such as music therapy, art therapy, drama therapy.

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What is music therapy?

Music therapy is an established clinical psychological intervention.

It can give a safe outlet when experiences or emotions can be difficult to live with, to understand, and to voice.

It's important to note music therapy is not a music enriching or education experience.

So no musical skills or interest in music is required.

The use of instruments as a means of expression is at the heart of music therapy.

Here we have a diagram which shows how the brain responds when we play or listen to music.

It shows that a number of different parts of the brain are used and become active.

So how can music therapy be of help to everyone and especially to children in their teens?

It can be very useful to explore minds and a safe way to express feelings without having to put any words to those feelings.

It's also, when we work in a therapeutic relationship, it can develop cooperation and help individuals to focus as well.

It can increase self-awareness of the person and of other people and boost self-respect and build resilience.

In this slide, there's a photo of a young boy playing the drums.

This is part of an exciting project that was piloted back in 2009 – Youth at Risk.

I'll discuss that pilot that was held by the music therapist, Philippa Derrington.

So, back to music therapy.

How does it support young people of this age?

One very important thing is it can nurture social interaction and communication skills.

This happens naturally when we play and reflect clinically within the therapy - within the therapeutic relationship.

But also there's an opportunity for the individual to talk and discuss what they've played - if they like, of course.

And it stimulates listening and language skills naturally.

That is from listening to the music, listening to the clinical reflection, and then talking perhaps about the emotions that arise whilst playing.

It can also strengthen relationships with family and peers.

This is to do with the fact that music therapy is psychotherapy.

So if there's any pain or anything happening at home or something historic, this safe space gives the clients – the young people – the ability to talk about this and help them understand experiences from the past.

And one thing I've seen a bit since being at Plasmawr is the playing - something I think we all lose as we get older.

So just being in a music therapy session encourages spontaneous play and for the individual to be creative, whether that be playing an instrument or drawing; so many things can happen when we follow the client's lead.

[inaudible] music therapy is the therapeutic relationship and this is nurtured and developed through engagement and interaction and musical play between the therapist and the client.

A wide range of instruments is used, including the voice and the music is usually reflected on.

It's also possible to use therapeutic composition as well – listen to and analyse some of the songs – and technology.

Anything really that's of benefit to the client in the moment on that day.

I'd like to talk about research that's being done in this field.

A study was completed by the music therapist Philippa Derrington - who was mentioned earlier - with musical therapy evenings with children and young people at a high school.

Philippa Derrington investigated in her study to discover if music therapy could improve the emotional well-being of children in their teens, especially the effect on their self-esteem, on anxiety, behaviour, relationships with peers and with their learning.

The result of the study was that it had a positive effect on the 22 pupils who had taken place.

I'd like to share a quote with you.

"This study has indicated that music therapy can reduce anxiety, increase the student's self-esteem, and help reduce destructive behaviour.

"I believe there is certainly a case for it to be made available in secondary schools across the UK."

And I'd like to talk a little about the side effects of Covid on children and young people and how these will become more obvious over the next months and years.

The result of a survey by the Children's Commissioner for Wales, Sally Holland, has showed that children feel more isolated and less motivated since the lockdowns and increasingly with the last lockdown.

The BMJ also, in 2021, says that children's mental health in the UK is deteriorating, with depression, anxiety and self-harm increasing.

The benefits of music therapy were studied in a Cochrane report by Aalbers et al in 2017, when they worked with young people who live with depression.

According to the research, music therapy reduces anxiety and increases individuals with depression's sense of purpose.

And the music therapist Colbert said back in 2007 that school headteachers note that 47% of children and young people need therapeutic support.

Now I'd like to turn back to Catrin so you can learn more about the emotional health and well-being of the young people of Ysgol Plasmawr.

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We here at Plasmawr try to ensure the mental health and emotional well-being of our pupils is prioritised always.

Because of that, we're always trying to think of techniques – new ways – to support our learners.

Bringing therapists - be they art, poetry, drama and so - on the site offers significant support to staff who are qualified teachers, obviously, and with good understanding of mental health matters and so on.

But having that peace of mind that there are other qualified people coming on site and supporting staff is a great blessing for us.

Also often it's an opportunity for staff to discuss their feelings and for staff to have advice about how to deal with some of the conditions or situations children face.

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It's been noticed that clinical reflection is beneficial and very effective because it gives the opportunity for young people to express themselves honestly and in the moment.

Following the lead of the individual – the client – in the therapeutic relationship is vitally important.

Since being at Plasmawr, we've used different techniques within the therapeutic relationship, namely listening to well-known songs, talking, performing, drawing, colouring, playing games, and creating music.

Each one is important in terms of nurturing the therapeutic relationship.

It's important that the individual has trust in the relationship otherwise it's not possible to work therapeutically within the safe space.

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Our experience up to now of having a music therapist coming to the school has been very valuable and has been a completely positive experience.

Music is a part of young people's identity and it is lovely to see children who are unable to find their words, who don't have access to a speaking therapist, being able to express themselves through music and seeing the relief they feel coming out of the sessions.

What's also vitally important to us is that some of these therapists speak Welsh and the children are comfortable being able to have therapy in the language of their home or in their first language – the language of the school, as it were.

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I have also noticed that using words is a challenge – a big challenge – to some individuals of this age.

I feel having a team of therapists and art therapies available to high schools and primary schools in the county – in Cardiff – and indeed across Wales is very beneficial when working and cooperating with staff and parents to ensure the best for each pupil.

It's important to note that music, art and drama therapists have to complete a Master's degree and register with the Health and Care Professions Council – the HCPC.

This ensures the best service is being offered.

More information about music therapy can be found on the website of the British Association for Music Therapy and you're more than welcome to get in touch with me on this email.

Thank you for listening.