

British Association for Music Therapy

The British Association for Music Therapy (BAMT) is the professional body representing music therapy and music therapists in the UK. It is a source of information, support and involvement for the general public, and acts as a voice for those who could benefit from music therapy and those who provide music therapy.

What is music therapy?

As human beings, music plays a fundamental role in our identity, culture, heritage and spiritual beliefs. It is a powerful medium that can affect us all deeply. In music therapy, music therapists draw upon the innate qualities of music to support people of all ages and abilities and at all stages of life; from helping new born babies develop healthy bonds with their parents, to offering vital, sensitive and compassionate palliative care at the end of life.

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To find out more about music therapy services in your area, or to support or learn more about music therapy, please visit www.bamt.org and contact info@bamt.org or call 020 7837 6100

Everyone has the ability to respond to music, and music therapy uses this connection to facilitate positive changes in emotional wellbeing and communication through the engagement in live musical interaction between client and therapist. It can help develop and facilitate communication skills, improve self-confidence and independence, enhance self-awareness and awareness of others, improve concentration and attention skills.

Central to how music therapy works is the therapeutic relationship that is established and developed, through engagement in live musical interaction and play between a therapist and client. A wide range of musical styles and instruments can be used, including the voice, and the music is often improvised. Using music in this way enables clients to create their own unique musical language in which to explore and connect with the world and express themselves.

Music therapy is an established clinical intervention, which is delivered by HCPC registered music therapists to help people whose lives have been affected by injury, illness or disability through supporting their psychological, emotional, cognitive, physical, communicative and social needs.

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Music therapy and neuro-disability – A brain changer

Headway, the brain injury association, estimate that there are a minimum of one million people living with the long-term effects of brain injury in the UK. The impact of a brain injury can be wide ranging. Not only can it have a profound impact on a person's emotional and psychological wellbeing, it can also affect their cognitive, physical, communication and social skills.

**“The brain that engages in music
is changed by engaging in music.”**

**Michael Thaut, Professor of Music and Professor of Neuroscience
at Colorado State University**

Music is processed across many parts of the brain, all connected to memories, emotions and communication. Making music increases brain activity: it can trigger memories stored deep in the brain and help create new neural pathways. It can also maintain pathways formed by the brain in early development. New pathways are strengthened the more they are used, and in turn this helps to sustain, maintain and develop brain functionality – known as 'neuroplasticity'. This means that music therapy is uniquely placed to help people living with an acquired brain injury or a neuro-degenerative condition such as Parkinson's disease because of the ways in which the brain processes music.



Photo by: Royal Hospital for Neuro-Disability

Currently, provision of music therapy is uneven across the UK and people are not always able to access the support they need. Many more people could benefit from music therapy if music therapy services were expanded.

Working with music therapists through music-making, clients can develop physical strength and coordination. Playing and listening to music – following the tempo and rhythm, musical sequences, responding to musical and verbal prompting – can improve attention, memory and problem-solving skills. By choosing which musical instruments to play, or styles of music or artists to listen to, clients are given the opportunity to recover decision-making skills.

Vocal improvisations and singing can help to restore speech, improve pronunciation and breath control. By developing a relationship with a music therapist, people who have suffered a brain injury or who live with a neuro-degenerative disease such as Motor Neurone disease, can also be helped to adjust emotionally and psychologically to living with and managing their condition, to express emotions and support their communication, and relationships with others. People can also regain their self-awareness and ability to relate to others by participating in musical improvisation.

The music therapist also supports him with his emotional wellbeing and provides a safe therapeutic space in which he can express and explore his anxieties and thoughts about the future.

Music therapists work in a number of settings, including hospitals, residential care settings, specialist units, rehabilitation centres and in a person's own home. Music therapists often work with other professionals including physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech and language therapists, neuropsychologists and nurses to offer assessments and provide holistic treatment that is specific to each individual's needs.

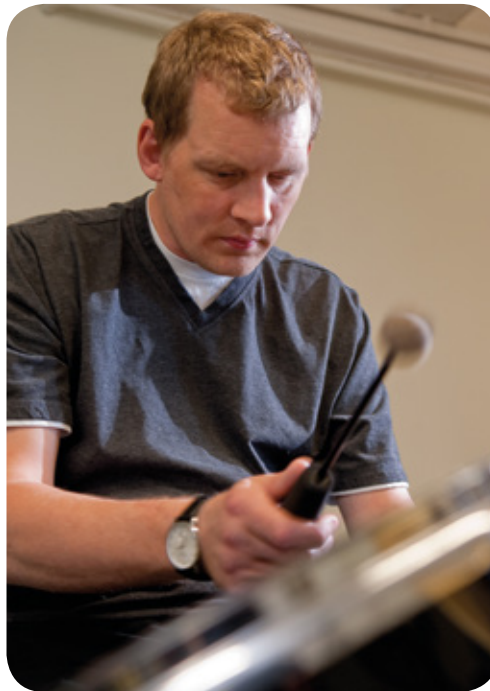


Photo by: Royal Hospital for Neuro-Disability

Justin is a young man in his early 20's, who suffered a brain injury following a road traffic accident. Following 18 weeks in an acute hospital, he is now in a rehabilitation unit and is learning to use a wheelchair. He has reduced executive functioning skills, meaning he has difficulties in decision-making, attention and memory. He also suffers from severe pain in his right arm, reducing his ability to self-propel in the wheelchair. He is trying to come to terms with the fact that he is no longer independent and will require assistance for activities of daily living such as his personal-care. He feels isolated from his peer group and has few opportunities for social interaction, which has led to him experiencing depression and low self-esteem.



Photo by: Key Changes Music Therapy © Alick Cotterill

Justin currently attends music therapy sessions twice a week, which include the use of Neurologic Music Therapy techniques, to improve his executive functioning skills. These techniques incorporate tasks that use music technology apps on an iPad as well as other music-based activities, which are motivating, engaging and enjoyable. The music therapist also supports him with his emotional wellbeing and provides a safe therapeutic space in which he can express and explore his anxieties and thoughts about the future. The music therapist uses another technique to work on his motor skills, with the aim being to improve the strength and flexibility in his right arm, thereby helping him to self-propel in his wheelchair. The live music used in this activity is chosen by him and so its familiarity and positive memories associated with it, provided a distraction from the discomfort, thus increasing the length of time Justin is able to move and exercise his arm during the sequence.

Further collaborative sessions between the music therapist and physiotherapist have helped speed his rehabilitation process, and consequently helped to reduce the cost of an expensive extended stay in the unit. Progress in these areas is already improving his motivation and mood, and an additional music therapy group that he attends is offering some much needed peer support whilst improving his communication and social interaction skills.