

# Music thERaPY



# Community spirit

Gary Ansdell outlines a new approach for music therapists

When you think of music therapy do you imagine a lone therapist working only in private, only from a psychological perspective, only with individuals, and seldom in collaboration with other staff or other musicians?

Music therapy is on the move. It's changing and broadening. Since it began in the UK some 50 years ago times have changed. The large hospitals have closed, many children with special needs have been mainstreamed, more people are choosing to die at home, care is 'in the community'. People's approach to music has changed too – clients arrive with different musical cultures, perhaps as refugees or migrants, or with ways of engaging with music through technology. Whether within or without of healthcare

environments, it seems that alongside illness or disability, the main problem people often face today is social isolation and cultural exclusion. We know now that these impact on health and wellbeing. We also know how much music can help.

Music therapists are addressing these changing needs through their specialist skills for working with vulnerable or challenging people, and within sensitive environments. Sometimes they work privately in therapy rooms, cultivating intimate musical relationships with individuals. Increasingly, they work with small and large groups, and with staff; they work in corridors and sitting-rooms; they collaborate with local musicians and music and health workers; they help 'circumstantial communities' put on musical

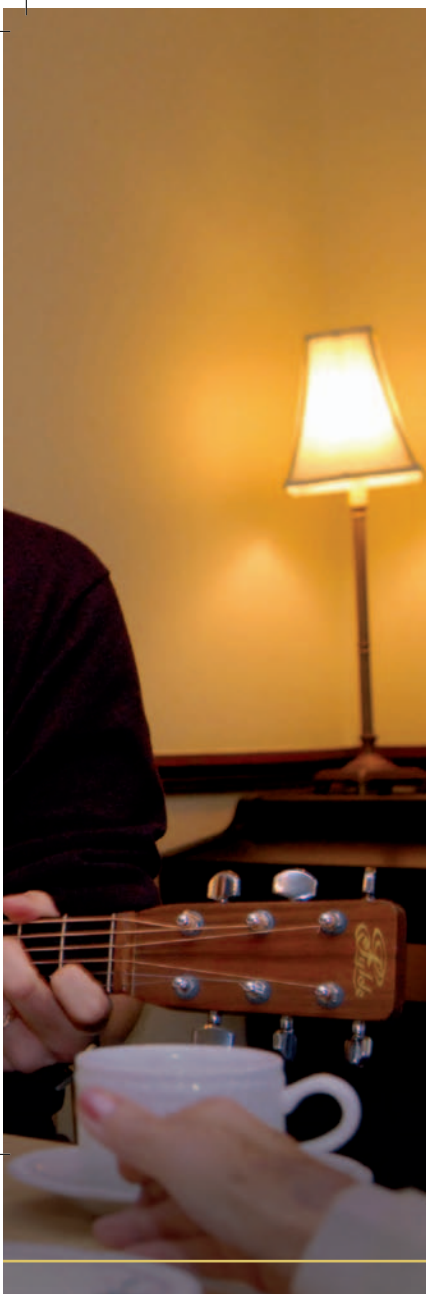
performances and celebrations; they find ways of using music to enhance everyday environments. Music therapists need to be trained to work right across the social spectrum (from the individual to the communal), and to work in whichever spaces suit a given context.

The title 'community music therapy' does not suggest some kind of merge between music therapy and community music but, rather, a broadening of traditional music therapy to address contemporary needs, along with a renewed enthusiasm for creating musical community with people and places experiencing a sense of social isolation and exclusion resulting from illness, disability and deprivation.

Here are three stories, from people with quite different backgrounds

who decided to do a professional training as a music therapist to prepare for a second career.

Harriet worked as a musician in women's community theatre with music therapy in the back of her mind, but always 'feeling not quite ready'. Mid-career she took the plunge after working on performance projects with older people and wanting to find a way of working more spontaneously with the more isolated older people with dementia – 'to do more than I was able to do then'. Music therapy training for Harriet was 'a revelation – working with children and adults, finding new ways of communicating through music, building relationships through more individual work, working with the moment rather than always directing'. Now, Harriet has integrated both



aspects of her long experience: working with children and older people; working individually and in small and large groups, and with families and performance projects. 'I couldn't have done all this before' she says, 'but it's brought together my musical journey into one job'.

Neil was looking for a way of drawing together his freelance work as a percussionist with his work as a teaching assistant in a mainstream school with children with learning disabilities. He found his music therapy training challenging, but 'what I have now, having done the training, is an awareness of the potency of my skills – how to work with music within a relationship. It's a deepening of what I could do before'. Neil now works as a music therapist with a range of

children with special needs, as well as still working as a professional musician: 'It requires all the depth of my professional musicianship to do what I do now as a music therapist'.

Libby always used music as part of her work as a teacher of young children in a special school: 'But I wanted to follow this through more professionally, and to work with different kinds of people in different settings. The training was exciting, stimulating, challenging'. She now works with a variety of individuals and groups in music therapy: 'This gives me the opportunity to work at a greater level of intensity and focus with the children, to see something different in each child, to see changes happening as you keep working with them'

We have created a new opportunity for people who need to train part-time, and for whom the community music therapy approach is suitable. Nordoff-Robbins Music Therapy is launching an innovative, training programme, validated by City University, London and hosted by the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester – the 'MA in Music Therapy (Community Music Therapy/Nordoff-Robbins)'. The part-time training will take two-and-a-half years, with weekly training sessions and placements, with material for private study delivered through e-learning formats. Successful completion of the programme will enable graduates to apply for registration as a music therapist with the Health Professions Council. The programme also aims to provide more trained music therapists for the North West region (to join the growing Nordoff-Robbins North West organisation), and develop community music therapy as an increasingly acknowledged approach for health, education and social care settings. ■



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