

Generation to Generation



Charles E. Smith Life Communities

Therapy with a Beat

“Music multiplies the beauty of life and all its values,” observed the Hungarian composer Zoltan Kodaly. Consensus on this seems widely shared, considering the funds people gladly expend on CDs, iPods, stereo equipment and concert tickets to inject some melody into their lives. But, beyond serving as a source of joy, music can do wonders as a tool for improving physical, social and psychological health. Indeed, an entire discipline—music therapy—has evolved around this perception.

Music therapy in practice

While the healing aspects of music have been recognized for centuries, it was not until musicians poured into hospitals to soothe and calm traumatized WWI and WWII veterans that medical professionals noted its restorative power.

Today music therapy is a respected health care profession. Skilled therapists care for people of every age coping with mental illness, physical or cognitive disabilities, injury, pain and senior-related issues. Based upon a needs assessment, a therapist structures individual or group sessions featuring music improvisation (vocal and instrumental), music performance, lyric discussion, and music and imagery. By stimulating eye contact, singing and movement, conversation and memory, therapists have as their treatment goals:

- Relaxation, socialization and communication
- Healing
- Improved cognitive functioning and motor skills
- Behavior modification

Music therapy at work

Music therapists serve clients in a variety of settings, from schools and hospitals to nursing homes and clinics. A private therapist can also visit patients in their homes. Call the American Music Therapy Association at 301.589.3300 or visit their website—www.musictherapy.org—to learn more.



Music therapists Melanie Jessop (right) and Kathleen Avins find that music touches people in innumerable and miraculous ways.

Initiatives

Recognizing the importance of music therapy, the Hebrew Home of Greater Washington has two professional music therapists on its staff, Melanie Jessop and Kathleen Avins.

Jessop explains that no single style or category of music is effective for every resident; personal taste in music significantly impacts receptivity and is taken into account when designing sessions. To illustrate this point, Avins describes a gentleman who relaxed only when listening to loud and pounding heavy metal.

Avins and Jessop focus on achieving a range of benefits with any single musical intervention, be it a group sing-along or bedside interaction. They also invite talented musicians from the community to perform for Hebrew Home residents.

Jessop studied music therapy at Elizabethtown College. Avins is advancing toward her doctorate at Temple University.

“Name That Tune”: more than a game

When music therapists initiate “Name that Tune” with Hebrew Home residents, the response is dramatic. For many participants, music is their means for awakening and unlocking stored memories of loves, treasured friendships, and happy or even sad periods experienced over a lifetime. For some seniors struggling to recall names and everyday happenings, it is sheer delight to be able to recapture a moment or face that once afforded them so much happiness—just by hearing a tune.

For links to Internet sites that provide more information about music therapy, visit www.hebrew-home.org. Click on “Newsroom” and scroll down to *Generation to Generation*.

Perspectives

“(Music therapy) can make the difference between withdrawal and awareness, between isolation and interaction, between chronic pain and comfort—between demoralization and dignity.”

*~ Barbara Crowe,
Past President of the National
Association for Music Therapy*



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Music, one of life’s sweetest pleasures, is also a tool of astonishing power. Music therapists demonstrate this observation daily.

www.smithlifecommunities.org