

Music Therapy: The Nordoff-Robbins approach in working with severe developmental disabilities.

Presenter: Min-Min Cheung is a music therapist, born and raised in New Zealand. She completed her Masters in Music Therapy at New York University and is trained in the Nordoff-Robbins approach. Her area of specialization is in children and adolescents with severe developmental delays.

Abstract: Over the past few decades, developmental disabilities has become one of the fastest growing categories in classified disabilities. Traditional approaches have been focused on treating the behavioural and medical symptoms of the conditions. The Nordoff-Robbins approach takes on a humanistic perspective and explores the treatment of developmental disabilities built on the foundation of a creative musical relationship between the client and the therapist. Exploring also, the possibilities of a positive long-term prognosis.

Keywords: *Severe Developmental Disabilities, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Music Therapy, Nordoff-Robbins, Musical Connection*

Paper: Developmental disabilities are on the rise all over the world, with ASD leading with the most rapid growth. Studies spanning Asia, Europe, and North America have identified individuals with ASD at an average prevalence of 1 – 2.6%. (CDC, 2015) Although developmental disabilities is not yet a category within the Annual Disability Statistics Compendium (2009), China too, is beginning to recognize the impact of under-diagnosis through collaborative studies run by the China Disabled Persons' Federation. As awareness of developmental disabilities increase so does the need for effective treatment. Traditional approaches towards developmental disabilities focused on symptomatic treatment, limiting itself to superficial and behavioural changes that do not provide a positive long-term prognosis (Greenspan & Wieder, 2009).

The Nordoff-Robbins approach provides treatment from a humanistic and holistic perspective; focusing on the engagement of the individual through creative musical experiences built on the foundation of a musical client-therapist relationship. Often the responses of the severely developmentally disabled can appear fragmented or reflexive - manifestations of their diagnosis; but through improvised and individualized musical experiences, a purposeful connection is created wherein a therapeutic self-realization is gradually fostered. Musical activities utilize *form and order, tempo and rhythm, dynamics, melodic movement* to stimulate the receptive, cognitive, expressive and communicative capabilities of the child; mimicking the exchanges of our everyday. (Nordoff, Robbins & Marcus, 2007) This stimulation gives the child “anticipation” and a “will” to want more, eventually engaging into a

personal process of self-actualization. Instead of treating symptoms, the focus is on the treatment of problems.

I will use two case studies, and related material to illustrate the Nordoff-Robbins approach in my work in children with severe developmental disabilities.

References

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