

HEALING NOTES

Music therapy is as old as time (think David playing the harp to rid King Saul of a bad spirit). In its modern guise, it has all sorts of other applications. Petra Jerling, Nelspruit's first qualified music therapist, explains.

Petra has always been interested in music therapy, but in her day, it wasn't offered as a course. After 22 years in teaching, however, she was ready for a new challenge. "This represented a huge career change for me." To qualify, she had to complete a two-year full-time master's degree, offered by the University of Pretoria.

Recently qualified and rearing to go, she has set up shop at Stepmid behind Sonpark. While music therapy is a recognised practice in European countries as well as America, it has only gradually been established in South Africa during the past seven years. Although the term is used loosely, especially in the drumming community, it is an accredited branch of art therapy. The course is recognised by the Health Professions Council of South Africa.

Get it asks her to elaborate on her work.

WHAT IS MUSIC THERAPY?

It is one of the expressive therapies, consisting of a process by which we use music in all its facets (physical, emotional, mental, social, aesthetic and spiritual) to help clients improve their health.

Music therapists primarily help with cognitive functioning, motor skills, emotional development, social skills and improving quality of life. We do this by using experiences such as free improvisation, singing, listening to, discussing, and moving to music to achieve treatment goals. Referrals can be made by other health-care professionals such as physicians, psychologists, as well as physical and occupational therapists. Clients can also choose to pursue these services without one.

WITH WHOM DO YOU WORK?

Just about anybody. Some examples include people with learning disabilities, the developmentally delayed, those who have been abused or suffer from mental illnesses, the mentally and physically handicapped, the elderly (including Alzheimer's and dementia patients), the terminally ill, the traumatically brain injured, those who have suffered trauma and even those who do not suffer from any clinical condition.

DOES ONE NEED A MUSICAL BACKGROUND OR TRAINING?

Absolutely not. Everybody can participate in this therapy and benefit from it. No musical abilities are required to enter the process. There are no limits as to where or with whom this therapy can be used. With all the techniques I can help people

Text: Ciska Kay



of all ages and with various problems or disorders.

It can be used in stress release, self-development as well as for treating depression, anxiety and more serious psychological disorders, and can also help people with special needs (mental as well as physical).

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS FOR CHILDREN?

Music therapy for children is conducted either in a one-on-one or group session. When I meet a child for the first time, I assess his or her level of functioning in all developmental areas and then devise specific goals and objectives to be met during the sessions.

It can help them with issues regarding communication, attention, and motivation, as well as behavioural problems.

AND TEENAGERS?

Adolescents obtain many benefits from listening to music, including emotional, social, and daily life ones, along with

help in forming their identity. Music can provide a sense of independence and individuality, which in turn contributes to a teen's self-discovery and sense of identity.

It also offers relatable messages that allow them to take comfort in knowing that others feel the same way as they do. It can serve as a creative outlet to release or control emotions and find ways of coping with difficult situations.

It can improve an adolescent's mood by reducing stress and lowering anxiety levels, which can help counteract or prevent depression.

The programmes provide them with a safe place to express themselves and learn life skills such as self-discipline, diligence and patience, and also to promote confidence and self-esteem.

Get in touch

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