

EDITORIAL

Music Therapy and Child Welfare: Attending to Underrepresented Stories

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We are very excited to publish this special issue that focuses on music therapy and child welfare. Just over a year ago, Rebecca Fairchild approached *Voices* with this idea, which we whole-heartedly embraced. This is an area that has to date received too little attention in music therapy, one that has tremendous implications for equity and social justice.

The term *child welfare* refers to work and research with children, young people, and families who have been oppressed and marginalised due to their experiences of poverty, trauma, abuse and violence. Child welfare aims to support and nurture children's wellbeing, to help them to feel safe, to provide opportunities for children's voices to be heard, and to strengthen the supportive systems that surround them. The research and literature has addressed the immediate and long-term risks, mental health concerns, and challenges that children in these systems often face. However, there is a lack of foundational understanding of the internal and external resources that children draw upon in their lives to assist them to cope and be resilient in the face of adversity.

Music therapists are increasingly working in specific contexts related to child welfare, including foster care, sexual abuse, residential care, domestic and family violence, homelessness, and child protection. However, it is important to remember that all of us are likely to come into contact with people who are experiencing or have experienced various forms of abuse and trauma within the diverse contexts in which we work. For example, people living with mental illness commonly present with co-existing experiences of childhood trauma. Disabled children, children living in low-socio economic households, and children living in foster care are more likely to experience sexual abuse. A quarter of children worldwide have experienced domestic and family violence. Additionally, there can be intergenerational impacts on children and family members if parental trauma histories are not resolved or not addressed. Therefore, protecting children is everyone's responsibility, and we believe there is an important role that music therapists can play across the lifespan in providing opportunities for recovery from childhood trauma.

Hart, Gagnon, Eryigit-Madzwamuse, Cameron, Aranda, Rathbone, and Heaver (2016) have described the most recent understandings of resilience, which involves uniting concepts of resilience with principles of social justice. They have suggested that while it is important to work directly with children and families to process and overcome their experiences of trauma, it is equally important for researchers and professionals to take action to reduce children's exposure to the challenging circumstances in the first place and to challenge the systemic issues that surround this. Social worker, Baines (2008) illustrated,

An important way to resist practices that suppress difference and dissent is to constantly defend and develop ways to give voice to the voiceless and to bring the needs of marginalised clients and communities to the attention of decision makers. (p. 130)

Therefore, there is an important role that we can play as music therapists and advocates in our direct and indirect work with children and their families in the context of child welfare.

As mentioned, music therapy has been somewhat underrepresented in child welfare practice and literature, and music therapists working in these contexts may have faced challenges due to their exposure to painful stories and systemic challenges in responding to children. This special issue comes at an important time as the safety and protection of children is an ongoing concern worldwide.

Within this issue, there are 12 articles, hailing from four continents—Australia (1), Africa (3), Europe (3), and North America (5). While from various parts of the world, there are globally shared experiences and culturally specific nuances. From Australia, Janine Sheridan and Rebecca Fairchild share their collaborative approach with young people and their non-violent family members to build relationships that have been disrupted due to family violence. From South Africa, Helen Oosthuizen shares her experiences of the music therapy group work she engaged in with first time, young sex offenders; Sunelle Fouché and Mari Stevens describe their work co-creating musical spaces where young people in under-resourced communities and those in their broader school community can foster relationships as a way to access, link, and mobilize resources necessary for positive adjustment; and, Karyn Stuart shares the musical journey she embarked on with a young boy and his new foster family, creating musical connections, shared enjoyment, and a sense of togetherness between them. From Norway, Viggo Krüger, Dag Nordanger, and Brynjulf Stige present findings from research exploring how social workers viewed the advantages and disadvantages of music therapy in child welfare institutions; Ingeborg Nebelung and Karette Stensaeth explore a humanistic music therapy approach in child welfare as an approach which is interdisciplinary, collaborative, and holistic; and Christine Wilhelmsen and Gisle Fuhr present examples of relational music therapy with adolescents in the care of child welfare services. From the USA, Carol Ann Blank provides a report on the status of the use of music therapy in child advocacy centers in the US with children and adolescents who have experienced abuse; Victoria Fansler describes a systems-oriented, music indigenous process she has developed for assessing individual children's perceptions of their changing family situations; Angela Guerriero and Carol Ann Blank share their work in music therapy with families seeking parent-child reunification after temporary family separation; Michael Zanders, Melanie Midach, Lindy Waldemeier, and Brittany Barros engage in a heuristic approach to share their perspectives on their experience of the literature on music therapy in child welfare as well as their experiences with the child welfare system; and Jessica Fletcher reflects on her work with white Appalachian youth as a white music therapist using rap and Hip Hop.

This special issue has provided an opportunity to start an important conversation about ways of working creatively with children and families in these challenging contexts and will significantly increase the number of music therapy publications focusing on child welfare within child welfare institutions and beyond. We hope that this conversation will continue so that we can positively impact the ways that children and families are responded to within these systems and that music therapy services for the welfare of children and families will continue to grow.

References

- Baines, D. (2008). Race, resistance, and restructuring: Emerging skills in the new social services. *Social Work, 53*(2), 123-131.

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