

Music Therapy ***Restoring Strength and Identity through Song***

Everyone understands the universal brilliance of music, and its power to inspire intense emotions, compelling ideas, utter truth. Putting that power to work in a health care setting can literally change lives, and help strengthen a person's mental, physical, emotional and spiritual health.

At Dr. Peter Centre West End, we use music as a therapeutic tool to help people living with HIV/AIDS establish, work towards and achieve non-musical goals. Music is the common thread that enables our music therapist to establish trusting relationships with clients and, in turn, help stimulate self-awareness, learning, self-expression, communication and personal development.

This unique therapeutic relationship helps clients, who are often coping with other life disadvantages including addiction or mental illness, shift and expand their understanding of their own identities and the way in which they participate in their own lives. Music therapy enables a wide range of outcomes including reductions in client pain and anxiety, improved stress management, and enhanced feelings of control, confidence, and empowerment.

No musical experience is necessary. What counts is the musical experience, and what it brings to each participant.

“Going through what I must in my life makes my emotions get stuck inside. I find that music therapy is a good way to release unwanted and negative emotions and to make myself feel better – and freer... I think music is healing – it helps to connect me with something deeper inside. Without it I think I would just go crazy. Now, when I am alone music is my best friend. It is something that keeps me sober and keeps me dealing with my emotions and being honest with myself.”
- Dr. Peter Centre West End Participant

Giving Voice to Ability, Creativity and Life History

A regular music participant recently had a stressful weekend and chose to write a song about it.

“The lyrics were incredibly personal, and when we began working out the music and talking about the lyrics, the participant's pride at having been able to put this work together began to show,” our music therapist, Carolyn Neapole, explains.

“This new coping mechanism for exploring painful, dark emotions allowed the participant to acknowledge a difficult situation and express her pain in a way that didn't harm her. In sharing the song with me the participant allowed me to witness her experience. Her negative experience of feeling stress and sadness was expressed and poured into the song. The participant found her voice and worked her way out of very dark place.”

In her practice, Carolyn assesses the cognitive, emotional, sensory and behavioural issues of each participant. Based on their musical responses, she designs musical interactions and activities for individuals and groups that can include singing, playing instruments, moving to music, listening and/or creating music. The style of music or instrumentation varies depending on the preferences and needs of each participant.



Music therapy can include:

- musical improvisation
- musical and spoken life review
- communal music making such as “jam sessions” and group singing
- music and imagery for relaxation
- therapeutic song writing with a focus on narrative construction and lyric examination
- music and memory exercises.

Music is regularly accessible for all participants and residents in the common areas of Dr. Peter Centre West End. Live concerts by visiting community performers also promote social inclusion and encourage community life. Volunteers and music therapy students completing education-based work placements often assist with the program. Music therapy is part of the Centre’s interdisciplinary clinical treatment plan that also involves nursing, counselling and recreation therapy staff.

The Music Studio and Therapy are available five days per week. The Music Therapist engages with about 30 unique participants and residents in a meaningful, therapeutic way each month.

Supporting a Civil Society

At the Dr. Peter AIDS Foundation, we’re helping to rebuild lives shattered by HIV/AIDS, addiction, mental illness, poverty and discrimination because of gender and sexual orientation. The innovative, comprehensive model of care at Dr. Peter Centre West End is improving people’s health, helping people find strength in the face of an incurable illness, and inspiring health care providers around the world.

The **Music Therapy Program** provides an important component of care for the people we serve. Each year we require support from our community of caring donors for this initiative.

We hope you will share the vision and join the Dr. Peter AIDS Foundation in making a tangible and lasting contribution to improve the health and lives of people living with HIV/AIDS.

For more information on supporting the Dr. Peter AIDS Foundation and its Music Therapy Program, please contact:

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“Music therapy offers the idea that people can redefine themselves by connecting with a different part of the person they already are – that through having a relationship with music, a person who defines him or herself as a junkie, a criminal, a disease, is also a singer, a songwriter, and an artist. Music doesn’t erase or magically fix problems but it does give people the chance to see that the artist is inside and if they are able to, they can be that artist and think about themselves as a creative person. This change in self-judgment can be a seed for larger changes in a person’s life.”
- Carolyn Neapole, Music Therapist, Dr. Peter Centre West End