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Educational Page



Music Therapy

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Music has this amazing ability to empower and transform the listener and the performer. Have you ever watched a performance vs. an interview with a singer such as P!NK or Florence Welch from Florence + the Machine? These powerhouse Mezzo-sopranos appear meek and introverted outside of their musical performances. These juxtaposing personalities are surely evidence of music's ability to express what other methods of communication cannot.

Music is a universal outlet for expression and a powerful language that crosses all borders and creates a sense of community. A fairly recent application of this language is Music Therapy. Although Music Therapy does not have an overwhelming presence in the field of clinical psychology, it is growing. The American Music Therapy Association is merely one of the organizations centered around this type of therapy and represents over 30 countries around the globe despite its name; this translates to around 4,000 music therapists. They cite the efficacy of this method as a tool for many populations such as military veterans, individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder, and individuals suffering from substance abuse and mental illness. There are even techniques for pain management.



One organization called "The Angel Band Project" has developed a program to help victims of sexual violence express feelings, foster more positive ones, and improve self-esteem. This program was created when the loved ones of Theresa Butz, a woman who was raped and killed by her abuser, used music to heal. This program is able to provide a venue for people to talk about a topic that our culture has traditionally swept under the rug and gives a singing voice to the anti-sexual violence movement. They provide Music Therapy services to sexual violence survivors at no cost and provide resources for these individuals to be recorded as part of a virtual choir, using technology to form one voice.



Overall, Music Therapy can be used to decrease levels of anxiety and depression for this population. Out of the few methods produced for this population, there are several that have been shown to help these victims on their path to recovery. One method uses recurring nightmares of victims of PTSD as a tool to create a song with the victim's expression of their nightmare in harmony with their idea of what 'happy' sounds like. Various song-writing techniques have been found to significantly decrease levels of depression and empower victims.

One such study consisted of female victims of domestic violence in a shelter actively engaging in music as well as passively experiencing music. The first group performed an active-listening exercise to 'Lean on Me' by Bill Withers, analyzed the lyrics of 'I am a Rock' by Simon and Garfunkel and listened to 'Let it Be' by the Beatles while doing deep breathing and muscle relaxation exercises. The second group played along or sang to 'Lean on Me', played rhythm instruments in a rhythm circle experience, and played and sang to 'Let it Be'. They found that overall, these exercises decreased the distress that the women in the study felt.

Although these techniques are not commonplace, they have been shown to improve the lives of victims of domestic violence. One can hope that these tools become more popular and provide another way for survivors to move on. Even if the research cited is unexpectedly disproved, how could a little music hurt anyone?

Sources:

<http://ir.library.illinoisstate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1417&context=etd> (<http://ir.library.illinoisstate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1417&context=etd>)

<http://angelbandproject.org/our-work/music-therapy/> (<http://angelbandproject.org/our-work/music-therapy/>)

<http://www.musictherapy.org/about/history/> (<http://www.musictherapy.org/about/history/>)

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The Women's Center offers educational trainings on sexual assault. To schedule any of our trainings please contact the Education Department at 570-784-6632.

If you are a victim of domestic violence and sexual assault and want to know the resources that are available to you, then you can always reach out to The Women's Center at 570-784-6631 or toll-free at (800) 544-8293. All of our services are free and confidential.