



Walnut Street Center’s Music Therapy Program Helps Adults with Intellectual Disabilities Cope During Pandemic

Music Builds Connection, Confidence, and Learned Skills

MEDFORD, MA – November 19, 2020 — Since the COVID-19 shutdown, music therapists Wendy Krueger and Kathlynn Sell have helped Walnut Street Center individuals cope with the pandemic by facilitating three or more remote music therapy sessions per week, providing them a safe, predictable social and creative environment. The non-profit that serves adults with intellectual disabilities recognized in March that social distancing and isolation could put clients’ mental and physical health at risk. It quickly adapted its successful pre-COVID community-building modality for online. The live music sessions build confidence and skills, plus allow peers to see and hear each other as they sing, clap, play instruments, move, and do other musical activities. The sessions are accessible to people of all abilities and utilize adaptive equipment like picture song boards to choose tunes, play drums or shakers to feel a beat.

"Music is a powerful medium and is familiar to everyone in every culture around the world," says Wendy Krueger, MA MT-BC, Director of Up Beat Music Therapy, which contracts with Walnut Street Center. "When an educated facilitator has the insight and experience to use music in the right way for a person, the music can transcend many challenges or bring comfort when most needed," she adds. Using Zoom, the video conferencing platform, clients gain coping skills and social support, plus access to therapeutic services.

Certified Music Therapist Apply Research and Science to Achieve Client Goals

Board-certified music therapists have 1,200 hours of clinical training and internships at the undergraduate and graduate levels. They draw on a myriad of research, psychology, and neuroscience to design and implement client-centered experiences to address emotional, physical, cognitive, and social needs. Adding music like rhythmic, instrumental, and vocal music techniques can cue motor and speech functions, regulate emotions, or bring a sense of comfort during stressful times.

“Humans are rhythmic beings. We walk to a beat and snap to a rhythm. Music activates emotions, and rhythm facilitates speech and movement,” says Kathlynn Sell, MT-BC, part-time music therapist at Walnut Street

Center. "We use music to build skills. For a client who wants to learn a handwashing routine, we can write a song about it to recall the steps."

Music therapy can be a welcome distraction for individuals managing difficult treatments and conversations with doctors. It helped Former Congresswoman Gabrielle Gifford regain her speech after surviving a mass shooting and bullet wound to the brain. It can reduce the effects of dementia for older adults and improve motor function for people with Parkinson's Disease. One Up Beat Music Therapy client says, "Music is the only thing that makes me feel normal."

Remote Sessions for High-Risk Individuals with Difficulty Maintaining Safety Protocols

The 60-minute Walnut Street Center Zoom sessions are transformative and fun. They kick off with a greeting song that brings participants into a musical mindset. Songs from individuals' formative years are combined with discussion or activities to encourage physical movement, creativity, or social interaction. These brain synchronizations are significant for physically and cognitively challenged adults. As a result, participants may dance to an upbeat song, compliment a peer on a suggested tune, work with others to write a new song, or participate in a musical game.

"In sessions, we learn so much about our clients," says Sell. "During this time of high anxiety and being apart, our folks log on to Zoom and find comfort in their peers' faces. They sing songs of friendship and support to share across the miles."

Walnut Street Center Inc. is a non-profit agency that provides a wide array of services to adults with developmental disabilities. Started in the late 1960s by a community of parents seeking services for their children, the Center now offers 24-hour residential support, individual home support, supported employment, group employment, community-based day support, and day habilitation. Residentially, the agency serves over 100 individuals. Services are mainly funded through the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) from the Charles River West, Central Middlesex, and Metro-North areas. MassHealth funds the Day Habilitation program. The agency proudly partners with Medford and surrounding communities to provide quality services. To learn more, visit <http://www.wscinc.org>. Like us on [Facebook](#) and [LinkedIn](#).

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