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Four Winds Partial Programs: Integrating Music Therapy into Treatment

Licensed Clinical Social Worker and Program Director for the Four Winds Partial Hospital, Matthew Phillips is putting his bachelors in music therapy to good use as a board-certified music therapist.

He currently conducts a weekly music group for each of the Partial programs. He notes that regardless of their age, all program participants seem to enjoy the music groups. Phillips discusses how he is able to integrate music into teaching Dialectical Behavior Therapy skills (DBT). He reports, "It's a lot of using live instrument playing, improvisation and drumming, and recorded music as a means of emotional expression and an activity that supports the goals of DBT treatment." Phillips especially likes to incorporate the practice of mindfulness into the group. "Certainly there's the social aspect of interacting nonverbally," he reflects, "but music therapy is also another channel for mindfulness and relaxation exercises."

Developmental Groups

Phillips details how he approaches each of the different developmental groups in the Partial Hospital Program. "The younger children need to be very engaged kinesthetically," he observes, "with lots of rapid fire engagement. With them I focus on instrument playing but in a more structured way, like games. In one exercise for example," he explains, "the kids draw an outline of a body on the wall, like a gingerbread kind of thing, and draw things on the outline that represent what they may be feeling, like butterflies in the stomach, or fire for feeling hot or snow for cold. Then we match the physical sensation to a sound. Sounds range from angry to calm sounds. The kids really enjoy that. Then can have a conversation about managing emotions—for example, how to transform the angry feelings into calm feelings." In another activity Phillips works with the children and adolescents to create

copied statements such as 'This shall pass,' or 'I am strong enough,' that are assigned a different individual musical sound. These sounds are then played together to create an 'ensemble of coping statements.' Phillips relates, "The idea is that if you are rehearsing that coping phrase over and over you may have access to it when you need it at a stressful time." The music groups provide a very organized and structured experience. Each group is an opportunity for all program participants to be engaged at the same time, which is somewhat difficult to achieve when working with children.

The adolescents and adults also engage in lyric analysis. Phillips explains, "For example we analyzed John Lennon's song "Watching the Wheels." Group members discussed how the idea of being an observer of your own life relates directly to the mindfulness components of DBT."

Phillips also notes that, "The adults respond very well to progressive muscle relaxation which is often a more passive and receptive music experience that sometimes the younger people can't handle."

Color Conducting

One exercise that works for all children, adolescents and adults is called color conducting. Phillips explains, "Everyone has an instrument and they are assigned a color with a card on the floor. One person is the conductor and they conduct by picking up and putting down the color cards." All participants seem to enjoy this activity. Phillips reflects that the activity results in interesting conversations about the experience for both the conductor and the musicians.

The Partial Programs at Four Winds pride themselves on finding innovative ways to deliver treatment. By helping participants beat to the sound of their own drumming, the Programs are clearly proving how creative arts can contribute to successful and soulful clinical care.