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Free Play Music Therapy for “In Between” Youth in an Emergency Shelter Setting:

Development of a Clinical Method

Capstone Thesis

Lesley University

May 5th, 2023

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Clinical Mental Health Counseling: Music Therapy

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Abstract

This thesis explores how clinical improvisation in music therapy can be a benefit for adolescents who are considered “in between” placements. The method was created for youth who are residing at an emergency shelter with limited therapeutic services. Drawing inspiration from Juliette Alvin and free improvisation in music therapy, facilitating a low expectation, non-required, and varied instrumentation choice music therapy group may be beneficial for this population. A method was created to provide a free play music therapy group for “in between” youth ages 13- 17 at an emergency shelter with a variety of racial and cultural backgrounds and identities. I was fortunate to discover personal growth in improvisational skills, how familiar melodies appear repeatedly, and adolescents enjoy being able to play instruments without any restraints or qualifications. This method appears to be a beneficial aspect of an emergency shelter programming schedule and can be adapted to meet the needs of the youth being served.

Keywords: improvisation, music therapy, free play, benefits, youth, “in between”.

Free Play Music Therapy for “In Between” Youth in an Emergency Shelter Setting:
Development of a Clinical Method

Introduction

The creation of the proposed method aims to serve the youth that are “in between” placements and are residing in an emergency shelter. Due to the uncertainty of lengths of stay, resources available for individual youth outside of the shelter, legal proceedings, education programs, pending psychological evaluations, and other implications of the situation the youth come into the shelter’s care in, a youth might not have access to long term expressive arts care. Free play, or improvisation, in music therapy has the potential to be a therapeutic resource in between youth can utilize while at the emergency shelter and beyond. Introducing improvisation with a variety of instruments in a low expectation and non-required environment creates a space for the youth to find their own relationship to music and creativity. A youth is able to connect with their expressive side in a safe environment, in a group setting at their own will.

Giving youth who are in an emergency shelter or in between placements an expressive outlet is vital to their processing of their current situation. Youth who may be involved in the foster care system or the juvenile justice system are limited in their preferred outlets due to their involvement in these two programs. Creating a space at the emergency shelter for creative arts therapies will be a potential benefit for the youth during their stay at the shelter.

I hope to apply experiential knowledge to proven knowledge found in the literature, grow in group leadership skills, and how to adapt to the unpredictability of the improvisational process and what it may look like.

Literature Review

According to the March 2023 Quarterly Report of the Nebraska Foster Care Review Office, there were 3,596 youth in the foster care system in Nebraska (NE, 2023). Of that number, 3 % have also been in the juvenile justice system. These youth are considered to be “dual status”. When the dual status youth enter the emergency shelter, they are “in between” or waiting for their next placement. Therapeutic services are limited at the emergency shelter due to the turnover rate of the youth moving on to placements. Short term therapeutic groups and interventions can be beneficial but are not enough to facilitate healthy enough emotional regulation techniques for these young people. Creative arts therapies, and music therapy specifically offer a solution to this problem. Clinical improvisation is a method within music therapy that shows potential to assist in such solutions.

Dual Status

There are complex processes between the two systems of the juvenile justice system and the foster care system. For example, when youth are required to move from state to state, and in instances of foster care, private foster care systems verses state run, the intention of tracking individual children and adolescents through the systems is not a streamlined process. Simmons – Horton addresses this fact, but is able to define four common pathways for a youth to become a “dual status youth” (Simmons-Horton, 2021) Two of the four options start with a child either having an open child welfare case or has previously had one and then entering the juvenile justice system (Simmons-Horton, 2021) The other two pathways consist of the youth entering the juvenile justice system and then being referred with no previous contact with a child welfare system, or being arrested and do not have a safe home to return to and are then placed in the child welfare system (Simmons-Horton, 2021). By not having correct data on how many youths

hold dual status in our nation deprives the field of being able to adequately serve them to its highest potential. The four pathways are a reminder of how easy it can be for an adolescent to become dual status. The study that Simmons – Horton conducted included interviews with previous dual status young adults. The young adults were able to share their experiences in retrospect of their time being a dual status youth (Simmons-Horton, 2021). Main themes that were reported included “experiences of or leading to dual- involvement,” “environment and systemic traumatic experiences” and “absence of normalcy” (Simmons-Horton, 2021).

While youth who are considered dual status come from a variety of ethnicity and racial backgrounds, “males represented over 60% of all dually involved youth, and nearly 40% are in congregate settings. Regarding race and gender, African American youth are overrepresented in foster care and juvenile justice.” (Simmons-Horton, 2021). Female dual status youth tend to be arrested for minor offenses, have a higher exposure to traumatic history in the foster care system, and have a higher risk of substance abuse and reduced peer and family relationships compared to females who are not dual status. (Simmons-Horton, 2021)

Juvenile Justice System

With the emergency shelter being co-ed on both floors, youth of all genders are able to interact with each other during groups, school, and other programming time. Many the youth that are served in the emergency shelter have some type of interaction with the juvenile justice system before entering the emergency shelter. Furthermore, there are differing experiences for each gender. A recent study by Reed, Sharkey, and Wroblewski concentrated on female youth’s unmet needs related to trauma. The study highlighted how the female youth’s involvement in the juvenile justice system exasperates the severity of those needs. Their findings revealed that, “relative to boys in JDC’s, girls tend to be low risk and high need and are more likely to come to

JDCs with histories of trauma and abuse including sexual exploitation. Girls of color are overrepresented in female delinquency cases, particularly Black and Latina girls. Girls are more likely to be detained for lower level and non-serious offenses (called “bootstrapping”) such as truancy, running away, and underage drinking due to a lack of appropriate services for girls and their families within their communities” (Reed et al., 2021). A trauma-informed approach with the youth at the emergency shelter better serves these dual status, in between youth. In the same study, the authors present a theory to support a trauma-informed approach called System Responsiveness as well as Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (Reed et al., 2021). Findings from the study revealed that as the girl’s needs in custody were being met, the trauma symptoms were becoming less intense (Reed et al., 2021).

Foster Care

In 2018, Yi and Wildeman collected national Child Protective Services rates in relation to percentages of children in different areas of foster care in the United States as of the end of 2015. Their findings revealed that four percent of youth in foster care live in homes they will be adopted in to, 30 percent live in kin care homes, 45 percent live in professional foster homes, 14 percent live in a group home or another institutional setting. The last 8 percent live in independent living, trying to reunify with their bio family, or have run away (Yi & Wildeman, 2018). Due to the rates of different homes that children and adolescents report living in during their time in foster care, the 45% of children and adolescents who live with a non- family member speaks to the foster care system as a whole. This study explores what the foster system could look like if there were more resources allocated to both sides of foster care, a child’s original home and their foster home (Yi & Wildeman, 2018). Yi and Wildeman proceed to state the potential interventions that could be implemented for caregivers and youth. These are,

“comprehensive assessment of placement options, support for caregivers, substance use and mental health treatment, extending foster care beyond age 18, integrating youth into health social institutions and expanding support for housing and health insurance” (Yi & Wildeman, 2018).

Youth Stories of Experiences in the System

Capturing the experiences of youth in these systems has shown to be beneficial for informing treatment. For example, Chaney and Spell (2015) decided to take a qualitative approach in their study. They interviewed six African American women who lived in the southern part of the United States (Chaney & Spell, 2015) Criteria for participating in the study was being over the age of 18 and no longer be a part of the foster care system. (Chaney & Spell, 2015) By using a narrative format, each woman was interviewed about her experience in the foster care system. Common themes that appeared in the study included confusion about why it was happening, both positive and negative foster home situations, strong social supports outside of the foster home, having an “inner strength” and the want to mentor younger people in similar situations (Chaney & Spell, 2015).

In an article by Goldfarb et. Al (2019) the authors describe how youth in the foster care system experience limited opportunities for their voices to be heard. Youth who are placed in the foster care system are there due to abuse, neglect, parent’s inability to properly care for them or for themselves (Goldfarb et al., 2021). Once in foster care, adults who have limited history with the youth make important decisions for the youth without the youth having a say (Goldfarb et al., 2021). The article goes on to determine that foster youth who have more opportunities for their voices to be heard about their case and in legal proceedings, they have higher satisfaction with results that occur (Goldfarb et al., 2021).

Juvenile Justice and Youth

Youth in the juvenile justice system are expected to use their voices to change the system they are oppressed by. Tilton (2013) examines the REACH project between undergraduate students and youth in a juvenile hall in Southern California. This process prompted an examination of common negative thoughts about youth in the juvenile justice system (Tilton, 2013). The undergraduate students created opportunities for the youth in the juvenile hall to explore the questions of what could be transformed in the juvenile justice system as a whole (Tilton, 2013). The partnership gave each group the opportunity to grow and collectively work towards becoming agents of change (Tilton, 2013).

An effective avenue for youth associated with the juvenile justice system to share their voice about their experiences is involving them in research. Haskie- Mendoza et al., combined Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) and Xinachtli (a healing- informed curriculum) to inform detention reform and alternatives with Latina adolescents as research partners (Haskie- Mendoza et al., 2018). By allowing the adolescents to be researchers, both the adults and youth's perspectives were taken into account (Haskie-Mendoza et al., 2018). This process was emphasized by “not only collecting data but allowing space for healing moments in the process.” (Haskie-Mendoza et al., 2018).

Creative Arts Therapies and Youth

Current Treatment Approaches

Providing opportunities for youth to be able to process and work through complex emotional material, Murphy and Jenkinson (2021) found that incorporating words and literature into the therapeutic process was useful. “ A key focus of bibliotherapy is the potential of literature to facilitate reflection, promote engagement with a therapeutic process and generate

healing and development” (Murphy & Jenkinson, 2021). This review of the current literature on the topic leads us to an example of literary engagement can be used in a group setting (Murphy & Jenkinson, 2021). Group members were asked to bring a song lyric, a poem or prose that they identified with (Murphy & Jenkinson, 2021). By sharing their piece of literature, group members would practice reflection and connection (Murphy & Jenkinson, 2021).

Creative Journaling

In a study by Vela, Smith, Rodriguez and Hinojsa (2019), the researchers investigated the impact of utilizing positive psychology intervention and creative journal arts in a group setting with Latina/o adolescents (Vela et al., 2019) Utilizing the creative arts journals over seven weeks showed a higher rate of resiliency in the students who were in the journal group verses the students who were not (Vela et al., 2019). The researchers identified Latina/o students who had academic struggles and mental health concerns. The article also highlights the differences in the two groups.

One other approach being used is called “Photovoice” (Capous-Desyllas & Mountz, 2019). The authors captured LGBTQ former foster youth’ experiences using photographs. The LGBTQ youth that participated had been a part of the Los Angeles County foster care system growing up (Capous-Desyllas & Mountz, 2019). A total of 18 youth completed the photographing portion of the “Photovoice Methodology” which is an arts- based research approach (Capous-Desyllas & Mountz, 2019). Using a phenomenological approach for analysis, the researchers found codes, and codes were then put into themes. Findings revealed the youth were able to “construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world through photographs that represent their lived experiences” (Capous-Desyllas & Mountz, 2019, p.272 -

273). This project gave voice to these youth's experiences being LGBTQ and other intersectional people being in the foster care system in retrospect.

Music Therapy and Improvisation

Music Therapy is practiced worldwide, with five central models and three traditional methods being the most known (Drăgulin, 2014). Out of the five central models, Nordoff-Robbins model, Analytically Oriented Music Therapy or the "Priestly" model, and Free Improvisation Therapy or the Alvin model all have improvisation as a central element of the music therapy service (Drăgulin, 2014).

Paul Nordoff and Clive Robbins began creating a musical environment at the Sunfield Children's Homes in Worcestershire, England in the fall of 1959 (Robbins, 2005). Nordoff's extensive musical skills as a composer along with Robbins experience with the disabled children at Sunfield combined to create the beginning of what is now known as the Nordoff-Robbins model of Music Therapy (Robbins, 2005). By offering different instruments, percussive and melodic, the children were able to engage in being in a "musical relationship" with Robbins and Nordoff (Robbins, 2005).

Juliette Alvin called her improvisation style "free" to allow the client to choose what is created during the session (Bruscia, 1987). Alvin's approach used musical instruments over vocal activity to allow the client to release negative energy on instead of to the therapist or peers (Bruscia, 1987). She found that the piano was better for individual sessions, with the guitar being better for group work (Bruscia, 1987). Both pitched and unpitched instruments were utilized during individual and group sessions (Bruscia, 1987).

Mary Priestley attended a lecture given by Juliette Alvin and promptly started her studies of music therapy in 1967 (Cohen, 2017). Mary Priestley's approach is named Analytical Music

Therapy with the intent of improvised music based on a theme then processed between client and therapist (Cohen, 2017). Priestley's method combines psychodynamic thinking and improvisational music to give the client's issues a place to be processed (Cohen, 2017).

Music Therapy, Clinical Improvisation and In Between Youth

While research is limited, there is a small yet growing body of knowledge in music therapy on In Between youth. For example, a study conducted in South Korea brought music therapy services to adolescent offenders in the juvenile justice system. Out of 215 adolescents, 178 completed all parts of the study, from pre to post tests and 15 music therapy sessions in a group setting (Chong & Yun, 2020). Music Therapy interventions used during the groups included improvisation, receptive listening, lyric analysis, song writing, collaboration (Chong & Yun, 2020) Youth reported gaining new skills, perseverance, processing emotions, finding joy in creating something new, and challenging themselves (Chong & Yun, 2020). While improvisation was not the only music therapy technique used in this study, youth were able to utilize the technique in their time in the juvenile justice system and beyond.

Wiess and Bensimon (2020) share their study carried out with adolescents who had been uprooted from their homes in the Gaza Strip due to political conflicts. They used a concurrent nested design, which involved two methods to confirm each other in one study (Wiess & Bensimon, 2020). This study highlights the importance of structure in the music therapy groups for the adolescents. This created stability and safety that they didn't have in other areas of their lives (Wiess & Bensimon, 2020) Improvisation was used every session, but a different theme would be chosen to play to. Findings revealed that by maintaining a structure of the improvisation in every group, the adolescents could express their emotions and thoughts in the improvisation because it was a safe space (Wiess & Bensimon, 2020).

This literature highlighted what it means to be a dual status youth. It also shed light on the current structures and issues of the juvenile justice system and foster care systems. Creative arts therapies were explored, the origins of improvisation methods in music therapy, and current approaches in music therapy and improvisation and dual status youth/ in between youth.

Methods

For the created method, there was four sessions over the span of four consecutive weeks. Each session lasted approximately an hour long between set up, verbal check ins and gaining consent for participation, engaging in music creation, and a collective wrap up. The sessions were conducted in the lower-level common room, except for the fourth session being moved to the yoga room due to a lower level of participation. The sessions were not required for the youth to participate in, each youth participated voluntarily and with understanding that they were in a creation of a method. I did reduce my level of time on the floor during the four weeks so the youth would associate me with the music therapy group more than just being a clinical intern.

Participants

The participants for this method were found in the lower level of the emergency shelter at Cedars. Lower-level youth are those who benefit from a schedule that has less free time during the day to maintain opportunities for positive skill building and reduce instances of negative behaviors. The ages of the participants ranged from 13 to 17, with various ethnic and cultural backgrounds, as well as gender identity. The largest group consisted of five youth, with the smallest consisting of only one youth.

Procedure

The created method was intended to be structured this way:

Step 1. Preparation. I would have the instruments that correlated with the theme of instrumentation for the session.

Step 2. Welcome. Greet staff and youth that were present and invite them to play music with me. I would inform the participants of the intent of this group and obtain verbal consent for participation.

Step 3. Introduction/Warm up. I offered instruments to the participants and assist in modeling how to play them.

Step 4. Intervention. Free Play. The music making would begin and I would accompany individual client-participants, or the general group as needed.

Step 5. Closing. After a natural course of music making had occurred, I facilitated the close of the music and asked the participants their thoughts and ideas about what they had just experienced. Depending on the time and the general responses of the participants I would determine if another round of free play would occur or not.

Step 6. Wrapping up/Cleaning up Together. After the final completion of the music making, I would ask for assistance to pack up the instruments and dismiss the participants to other parts of programming.

Instruments and Equipment

A list of the instruments that were presented and used by participants are as follows: electric keyboard, acoustic guitar, on chromatic scale of Boom whackers, bucket drums, drumsticks, two steel tongue drums, tambourine, large egg shaker, cabasa, djembe, frame drum, ukulele, and a foldable keyboard. Other equipment that was used included a laptop, Garageband, a microphone, and internet access.

The first session included instruments of various types or considered the “All Instruments” session. The second session was “Melody Instruments”, the third session being “Percussion Instruments” and the fourth to be “Electronic or Recording Instruments”. After the conclusion of the sessions, I would record a summary of events that occurred, musical elements, and themes that came to me during the session using a voice memo application.

The Four Sessions

Session One

The first session included five youth. Two youth had participated in the previous weekly music therapy free play group. After introductions, all five participants gave verbal consent to participate in the group. For the first session of four being “All Instruments,” there were five bucket drums, five sets of drumsticks, an acoustic guitar, an electric keyboard, frame drum, a steel tongue drum in the key of D, large egg shaker, tambourine, and one octave of Boomwhackers. The improvisation lasted 30 minutes, with youth switching what instruments they were playing, and I would utilize the technique of matching to what each youth was playing at a time and go around the room to include everyone.

Session Two

There were four participants, with one youth having been in the previous week’s group. All participants were informed of what the group was about and gave their verbal consent to participate. This session was “Melody Instruments” and included the electric keyboard, a foldable keyboard, an acoustic guitar, a ukulele, the steel tongue drum in D and one in C, and a full octave of Boomwhackers. Participants were asked if there were melodies they would like to share musically.

Session Three

There were only two participants for this group due to other programming requirements for other youth. Welcome and introductions to the day's session occurred. Verbal consent was provided.

This session's topic was entitled "Percussion Instruments" which included the following instruments: bucket drums and drumsticks, both steel tongue drums, a guiro, the large egg shaker, tambourine, the frame drum, a djembe and one octave of Boomwhackers. This group was only 30 minutes long due to the participants returning from school at a later time, and when the next programming activity was to start.

Session Four

There was only one participant for the fourth session. Introductions were shared and the purpose of the session was shared. The participant gave verbal consent. This session topic was "Electronic and Recorded Music". Instruments that were utilized were the electronic keyboard, the frame drum, the steel tongue drums and the acoustic guitar. Garage Band and a microphone were also used. This session went for an hour and a half due to no other programming requirements for the participating youth.

Inductive Analysis

At the conclusion of each session, I recorded a verbal journal reflection of the session, and what it was like to experiment with the method. Areas I reflected on were, taking into account how many participants, the instruments used, musical instances that stood out to me, theme words that I associated with how the session went, the youth's responses to my questions and my own reflection about the sessions.

Results

Reflections from each Session

Included in this results review are generalized reflections from each session. This is to share my personal experience leading these groups for the created method and give insight into the emergency shelter. Each week was different from the previous due to scheduling and programming requirements, as well as the individual youth who were involved each week. The first session compared to the last session look very different but were able to provide these in between youth a safe space to express themselves if they chose to.

Session One

Session one consisted of mainly bucket drums and the keyboard for the instruments the clients chose to play. The youth were able to rotate in between the keyboard and the bucket drums on their own without prompts from me as the facilitator. Clients did share about previous musical experiences they have had and appeared to enjoy the process of the improvisation. After the group, my reflections included a feeling of excitement and looking forward to next week's group as this group was the first time all available youth in the lower level of the emergency shelter had chosen to participate in the free play music therapy group.

Session Two

The second session was noticeably different than the previous week's session. The groups make up was female dominated compared to the first session's male dominated group. This played a factor in what music was played and how it was played. The mood of the group was low energy, not excitable, and comfortable with being together. I reflected on the well-known melodies that the clients asked to learn how to play and how music is an integral aspect of the human existence throughout its entirety.

Session Three

The third session was not as engaging as the previous two due to unexpected programming issues that had occurred that day. Due to this, I was able to reflect on how a lack of engagement from participants looks like in this method and what other factors contribute to that as well.

Session Four

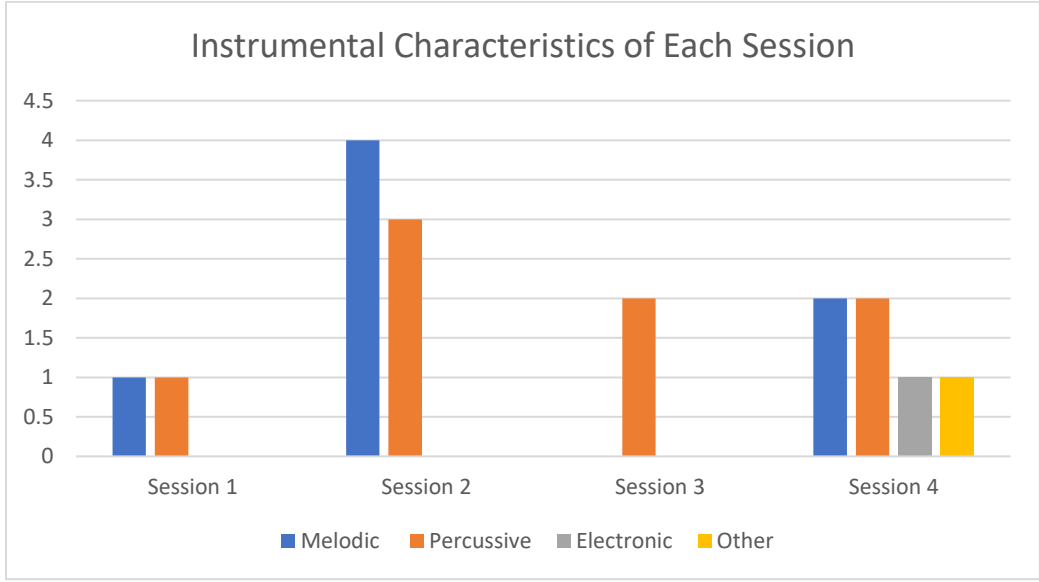
Session four began as a group but then moved into an individual session due to the needs of the individual client that I worked with, as well as the needs of the peers that were in the common room at the time. Because of this, the session was moved into the yoga room of the shelter, a room that is set up as a calming environment for youth to spend time in. After doing some improvisation on a variety of instruments, the client and I were able to spend time learning the basic melody for “For Elise”. While this activity was not improvisation based, improvisation did lead to it as the client had started to remember the melody after playing the keyboard for a while. Another well-known melody was brought by a client into the space. I reflected on how this session was completely different than the rest of them, but also served the same function as the other sessions for this youth. The youth was able to have creative expression in a voluntarily way while communicating trust and feeling safe in an emergency shelter. Free Play Music Therapy was able to do that for this youth, and engaging in this session was the last thing this youth did before being moved to a foster home.

Musical Reflection

At the end of the four-week period for the method, I created a musical replication of what music was created during the four sessions. This included melodies of “Twinkle Twinkle Little Star”, “Mary Had a Little Lamb” and “For Elise”. I also included the different instrumentation that was used by the client participants and I during the sessions as seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Instrumental Characteristics of Each Session



Analysis

I transcribed my verbal processing notes from each of the four sessions. I then completed a qualitative data analysis using the general thematic and inductive approach. I recorded common themes from each session in a notebook. After finding eighteen initial themes, I reduced them down to three main categories titled: The Music, The Place, and The Youth. As an integrative method, I finally created a visual artistic response that represented the major findings.

Table 1

The Major Themes from Each Session

Session One	Session Two	Session Three	Session Four
Play	Choice	Rapport	Safe Space
Normal	Energy	Engagement	Persistence
Resilience	Emotions	Acceptance	Connection
Limitless	Rapid Turnover		Proud
No Expectations	Familiar		
Creativity			

Table 2

Three Main Categories Across All Sessions

The Music	The Place	The Youth
Play	Rapport	Resilience
Creativity	Normal	Connection
Choice	Familiar	Energy
Engagement	Persistence	Emotions
No Expectations	Safe Space	Proud
Limitless	Rapid Turnover	Acceptance

Visual Artistic Responses

Figure 2

The Music



“The Music” aims to capture the fun, creative and childlike music that was created during the four sessions of my method. The bright colors and non-standard shapes speak to watching the clients engage in the music making and experiencing it for myself as well. I found the words “play, no expectations, and limitless” to be the most influential when creating this painting. I was always amazed at what music would be created each session.

Figure 3*The Place*

The emergency shelter can be both a safe haven and a non-preferred alternative for the youth who are placed there. The dark edges of this painting were to represent the dangers and unfortunate situations that the in between youth experience. The green circle with the gold dots is meant to represent the staff and the shelter itself. The staff and clinical team at the emergency shelter are the temporary protectors of the youth who are represented as the silver circles in the middle. While the youth are at the emergency shelter, they are safe. They are secure, and they are cared for. The free play music therapy method that I created wouldn't be possible without the

support of the shelter and the core values they hold to help youth and families in crisis and points of being in between.

Figure 4

The Youth



The youth who I was able to experience the four sessions with are represented with the different colored circles. There were nine youth total, and I added a circle for myself as I was lucky enough to go through this process with them. Each circle represents a whole person, with their own circumstances and experiences, and the ability to create improvised music with them

was an honor. I learned a great deal about myself as a music therapist, a clinician and as a human being by engaging with the youth in this way during their brief stay at the emergency shelter.

Discussion

The method created in this thesis project was intended to provide a therapeutic experience for in between youth in the emergency shelter. Due to the high turnover rate of youth, it is hard to establish long term groups. Providing a voluntary, low expectation, free play music therapy group to participate in during their time at the emergency shelter helps provide a place for healthy emotional regulation practice.

Integrating a similar approach as Juliette Alvin and her “free” improvisation allows the clients to have autonomy during the session (Bruscia, 1987). Due to the client’s creativity and comfort of the space they are in, the music created during the sessions was unique and client led.

Free Play and Normalizing Routines

Simmons-Horton, 2021 reported previous dual status youth indicated that there was an “absence of normalcy” during their time as dual status youth (Simmons-Horton, 2021). The free play group became a normal aspect of the routine on Friday afternoons at the emergency shelter. The youth grew to expect the group would happen. There are many factors that are involved in a in between youth’s situation. Having this method group in other emergency shelters could help reduce the absence of normalcy for these youth.

This group was not a requirement for youth to participate in. This factor outside of the four-week rotation presented in this thesis sometimes lead to low numbers of participation from the youth. While the group was not required, the youth were able to determine for themselves if they would like to engage and participate in the free play music therapy group. This provided the chance to speak and decide for themselves what will happen for them. Goldfarb et. al, 2021

stated choice and voice was important for youth in foster care and in between placements. Client choice also helped create a positive environment for those who want to participate instead of being forced or required to for programming.

Youth Choice and Control

By providing an array of instruments during each of the sessions, the youth were able to engage in a “musical relationship” with me and with their peers (Robbins, 2005). The youth’s autonomy was respected and encouraged. The “musical relationship” reduced the need for verbal processing and created an opportunity for connection determined by the youth themselves (Robbins, 2005).

The method, in its simple session design, makes way for repetition and routine. Youth in the emergency shelter go through many changes to their normal lives when they enter the shelter’s care. Similar to Weiss and Bensimon (2020) having each session mainly consist of improvisation allowed for the youth to know what to expect during the group. By both having the individual choice to engage in the session, and know what to generally expect each session, the youth are able to have control over their situation for at least an hour during the group.

Agency and Stories

Being in the emergency shelter is not normally a youth’s first choice in placement. While for some youth their own actions lead them to be at the shelter, for others that is not the case. A sense of agency is not always practiced or realized for youth in adolescence. For this method, it was explained to the youth that the groups were for a class of mine in graduate school. After explaining it was for school, and for future clients of music therapy, the youth were willing to participate. They understood that their actions and participation would influence this thesis project, as well as the method for other music therapists to use. The youth were still willing to

participate. Given the opportunity the in between youth were willing to help other youth in the future, similarly to how the participants in Tilton's 2013 study were by engaging in the process of examining the juvenile justice system and see how it could be better.

Chong and Yun 2020 shared in their article about the youth in the juvenile justice system willingly participating in the music therapy groups and the long term benefits the participants found by doing so. With improvisation being an aspect of those sessions, the youth in the article gained skills of independence, creativity, working in a group setting, as well as learning coping skills. Those youth were able to utilize music therapy to change their trajectory of their lives during their participation in the music therapy group. The youth in the emergency shelter have had their lives changed dramatically by being placed at the shelter. With this dramatic change, providing the in between youth with the opportunity to control a part of their story and stay at the shelter would be beneficial for this population.

Future Research

Further areas to be researched could include client's preference of instrument choice, improvisation on a specific topic related to the client's time being "in between" similar to Priestley's method (Cohen, 2017), and free play in a group verses individually and how in between youth engage. A broader research approach could include how often are youth in this population engaging in any form of creative arts therapies or in creative arts practice and how they are gaining access to these resources.

Limitations of study

Limitations of replicating this method could potentially include instrument access, programming requirements at different facilities that serve in between youth, as well as how frequent the music therapist would be interacting with youth for rapport building.

Conclusion

The creation of this method started in October of 2022 when I had noticed that the emergency shelter I had been interning at did not have steady therapeutic group offerings for the clients. Due to the high turnover rate of youth entering and leaving the shelter for various reasons, I could see how it would be hard to maintain progress in a verbal processing group when the group members were changing week to week. This fact and noticing how youth were already using the music they had access to in their rooms prompted me to bring some of my instruments to the shelter on a Friday afternoon to see what would happen. From there, the method turned into a four-week schedule to include different instrumentation and the chance to improvise with electronic music, as well as recording a client's improvisation if they wanted to. I wanted to provide the in between youth with a therapeutic experience that they could join at any time during their stay at the emergency shelter, making way for autonomy and choice, as well as a creative outlet to forget their situation for an hour and be a teenager getting to play music with peers and a listening adult. I hope that was accomplished, and this method can be molded to fit the needs of other in between youth that have the opportunity to experience music therapy during a time of uncertainty in their lives.

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THESIS APPROVAL FORM

**Lesley University
Graduate School of Arts & Social
Sciences Expressive Therapies
Division
Master of Arts in Clinical Mental Health Counseling: Music Therapy,
MA**

Student's Name: Rebecca Hoffschneider

Type of Project: Thesis

Title:

Free Play Music Therapy for “In Between” Youth in and Emergency Shelter Setting: Development of a Clinical Method

Date of Graduation: May 20th 2023

In the judgment of the following signatory this thesis meets the academic standards that have been established for the above degree.

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