

LEARNING FROM SERVICE EVALUATION: IDENTIFYING 'IMPACT AREAS' OF MUSIC THERAPY SERVICES

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Introduction

In recent years, there has been an increased demand for evaluating music therapy services not only within large service providers, but also as a professional requirement for individual music therapists.

Typically, service evaluations are associated with pragmatic functions (including service review, development, and funding) and their outcomes often remain unpublished, internal organizational reports. In addition, service evaluation outcomes are not widely considered within the research communities, perhaps in part because of their context-specificity (Tsiris, Spiro & Pavlicevic, 2015).

Given the amount and kinds of information collected in such service evaluation projects from practitioners, service-users and those around them, such projects constitute a hidden treasure trove of information particularly about the perceived impact of music therapy services.

Learning from service evaluation

In an attempt to gain further knowledge from service evaluation, we carried out a review

project. Drawing from work at Nordoff Robbins England and Wales (see also Tsiris, Spiro & Pavlicevic, 2017), this review included: (a) retrospective analysis of 27 evaluation reports of music therapy services provided in diverse settings and with a range of client groups, and (b) an online survey of music therapists who co-led these evaluation projects. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and coding.

The reports that were included in this review shared an evaluative approach that considers the potential impact of music therapy not only on clients (service-users), but also on their families, carers, staff and the whole worksite (Tsiris, Pavlicevic & Farrant, 2014). This approach is in line with socio-cultural epistemologies underpinning contemporary music therapy practices (Pavlicevic et al., 2015; Procter, 2013).

Identifying 'impact areas'

Through exploration of patterns and potential commonalities across the different evaluation reports, this review revealed a number of 'impact areas' of music therapy services. These refer to perceived impact areas that music therapy is reported to have (in varying degrees) across different settings

and client groups. Areas of impact, in line with the evaluative approach, related to four groups: service-users, families, carers and friends, staff, and the organization as a whole.

Implications

The findings show that service evaluation, and the identified 'impact areas', can contribute to practice, assessment and research initiatives (Spiro & Tsiris, 2016; Tsiris, Spiro & Pavlicevic, 2017). The context-sensitive nature of such evaluations enables the identification of areas of impact that can feed back into practice and also generate research questions. While acknowledging its limitations, we consider what service evaluation can offer and how it can be re-positioned in relation to the broader knowledge base in music therapy.

References

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