

Mylandra Zielinski-Douglas Pt. 1 | Discover Stories Episode 70

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Tanya Griffiths 00:54

Hello, and thank you for tuning in to Discover Stories on Re-imagine Radio. My name is Tanya Griffiths, your host and a student intern with VAMS while completing my social justice practicum. Today, we have the privilege of talking with Mylandra Zielinski-Douglas. Since graduating from the Capilano University Bachelors of Music Therapy program in 2020, Mylandra has been working as a music therapist, she began her career working with seniors at a care home in West Vancouver, and has since relocated to the prairies. Mylandra has worked with a variety of ages and populations, using music to connect with and support each individual she encounters. Hi, Mylandra, thank you for joining us today.

Mylandra Zielinski-Douglas 01:41

Hello.

Tanya Griffiths 01:42

How are you?

Mylandra Zielinski-Douglas 01:44

Good. Good. It's a beautiful sunny day here. So, we love some sunshine.

Tanya Griffiths 01:51

Yeah, does it finally feel like spring for you?

Mylandra Zielinski-Douglas 01:54

Oh, for sure. Things are like really melting and extra muddy and wet.

Tanya Griffiths 02:00

Haha! Yeah, it's that transition phase.

Mylandra Zielinski-Douglas 02:05

Exactly.

Tanya Griffiths 02:06

Amazing. So you're actually my first guest. So this is a very exciting episode for me. And I'm wondering if we can start off with you sharing what music therapy means to you and what it looks like for you.

Mylandra Zielinski-Douglas 02:22

For sure. Well, I mean, there's a million definitions for music therapy, therapy. And I think, even as a music therapist, and other music therapists will have different ways to convey, I think what it means. But for me, I think it really is using music as the medium or the method for therapy. So it's that point of connection, but it's also the cofacilitator of, of the therapy. So it's up to the music therapists to do the assessments, of course, and up to person's personal preference as well of what they enjoy and what will best serve them. But it's really using the music is is the main source for for everything. So what that looks like is different for everybody. But it's that purposeful use of music within a therapeutic relationship.

Tanya Griffiths 03:18

Hmm. Oh, wow, that's really beautiful. I haven't actually seen what music therapy looks like. But the way you explain it, I can almost see it. Yeah, how you would use music between you and your client or a patient, within that space. And would you say that the goals for that environment are almost the same with other counseling treatments?

Mylandra Zielinski-Douglas 03:53

Oh, for sure, I think you can use it among pretty much any of the domains that exist. So like the social, emotional, cognitive, physical, musical, spiritual, those are all things that can be catered to with music. So for example, if you have somebody who is socially isolated, who is not coming out into the world, or trying to be a part of anything, by including them in

a group, you're already including them in a social environment, which then will hopefully encourage by using music, maybe they will start singing or maybe they'll start tapping their toe and and next thing you know, there may be "Oh, I remember that song when I was a child" or "my grandma used to sing that to me" and, and I think that's the one beautiful thing about music is it's something outside of us that we all connect to. And so it really is, I think sometimes a safe way for people to engage with others and with themselves.

Tanya Griffiths 04:59

Yeah, oh, the way that you put that it's actually so beautiful. Because it's almost involuntarily just engaging with music, which as you put it is something that I think many people relate to, and find meaning in and find comfort in. And yeah, as you're sharing that example, perhaps that socially isolated person would be more open to being in a way vulnerable with others by just simply like tapping their foot to some beat.

Mylandra Zielinski-Douglas 05:37

Yeah, well, I'd really like that could be the 15th time you invite them, that could be in passing, that could be you know, it could really look like anything. But I think it's yeah, it sort of breaks a bit of a barrier for people in a way that maybe other things might be a little scary or maybe they wouldn't be willing to try but because music is familiar and music is so in robed in everything we do in every part of life. It I think it is a bit of a companion in a way to sort of help facilitate some things.

Tanya Griffiths 05:37

Yeah, it's safe. It's safe, and it's familiar. And it's not like using words or new vocabulary to explain one's you know, human experience. But yeah, just being in that space where music exists. And it does sound like music is so important to you. So how did you find your way into music therapy?

Mylandra Zielinski-Douglas 06:47

Well, it's kind of long story, but I'll try to keep it concise. But I kind of grew up with music around all the time. I grew up dancing, and I joined band as soon as I was old enough. So I started by playing flute, and I still actually get to play my flute every week, which is pretty, pretty lucky. And I get to be enjoying music in my own capacity. But yeah, so that has always been a part of my life. After I graduated from high school, though, I really thought I wanted to become a pilot. And I kind of followed that idea, dream, I don't know, direction, and wanted to fly for air ambulance, because I always knew that I wanted to help people in

some capacity. That's kind of something that I've always wanted, as far as, I guess, my purpose, or the thing that fills my cup, in a way. But I kind of, I found that it wasn't quite what I was hoping for. And that left to a lot of reconsidering priorities and all those things. And it was sort of a random search. I was looking through a university website at their psychology programs, and one of the related fields was music therapy. And I saw that combination of words. And I thought that that sounds like it. Yeah. And so I yeah, I looked into what it was, and I shadowed a music therapist in Saskatoon here. And yeah, it was pretty sold. And yeah, that led me to attending Capilano University in Vancouver. And yeah, learning from some incredible music therapists there.

Tanya Griffiths 08:41

Wow, yeah. So it wasn't a straight line for you. You had to go through the hard way a little bit and, like reach a wall and see that it isn't providing what you thought it would and and that's led you to your career now. And and that's amazing. It seems like it's a very fulfilling path for you too.

Mylandra Zielinski-Douglas 09:06

Oh, for sure. It's something about working with people. And I think if you work with people, you you know that right, like, you share your life with others. And yeah, we're all supposed to be in connection, I think. And so I'm just blessed that I get to do work where connection is is like, one of the priorities. One of the the joys and the honor of being part of somebody's life and their journey, and yeah, I can't imagine doing anything else now.

Tanya Griffiths 09:41

Oh, wow. Oh, thank you for sharing that. I see how it's embedded to your identity and to your core and, and that's a beautiful thing, being in this field and knowing that you're not only choosing to be here, but you also want to be here and you want to take this role of, yeah, almost being a companion alongside music to somebody's life.

Mylandra Zielinski-Douglas 10:12

Yeah, I like how you put that because I think really that is, what it is it's supporting people and what that looks like and, and sharing in, in this common language of music.

Tanya Griffiths 10:26

Oh, music is so powerful. And you've shared that you've worked in different settings during your career so far, and you've worked with many folks with different disabilities, you've

worked in long term care, working with people with mental and physical limitations, such as dementia and blindness in Vancouver, and you've also worked with kids with autism, traumatic brain injury and dialysis patients. Currently, you're working in end of life and palliative care in Saskatchewan. So how has it been for you to navigate and adapt to these spaces?

Mylandra Zielinski-Douglas 11:05

I think I think it's a difficult thing, being a newer music therapist in that, you know the music and you know what the music can do, but you don't necessarily know how it's going to be received or affect others. So I think it's been a wonderful growth period for me to be able to learn how to best serve different people, and different goals. So knowing the basics that you learn in university, but then transforming them for different peoples and population groups and, and kind of learning with your patients or your clients as well, alongside them, what what is best serving them. There are of course, methods that are evidence based that that get used for specific purposes. But I think sometimes in cases with like dementia, for example, there's a million different ways to do reminiscence or convey meaning for somebody, but it's finding that thing that unlocks it for them, or that song that unlocks it for them - that connection piece. So yeah, I think just sort of exploring, and knowing and having that foundation from my degree, but then also continually finding new research and finding new methods and speaking to people in the field and creating connections with other music therapists as well who can kind of help you grow in ways where you need to change or be more open minded to different techniques or trying different procedures, I guess, in in some ways I think each different population that I've worked with has taught me something new. Because I guess just like anything, if you have a sheet of check these boxes, in reality, that's not how things work, right? You go to do number one and you've got detoured, you're at number 10 all of a sudden, and then you're coming back. So I think yeah, it is, is being flexible, and learning and being open minded and, and falling back on that foundation.

Tanya Griffiths 13:46

Yeah, you've only been a music therapist for only, I think, four years. And within that, and within that span, you've worked with so many different populations. So I can see how every person that you work with also offers something new, and something new to work with, I guess, and also being in within the therapeutic setting and being in psychology as a field. It's a relatively new science compared to all other sciences. So yeah, I see this this parallel of like, also lifelong learning, which is something that I will also adapt within my career to as a psychotherapist. It is that openness, I guess to to learning too from from your clients.

Mylandra Zielinski-Douglas 14:48

Yeah, I think that's why I like to think of music as the cofacilitator and that I don't think I'm the first person that ever said that but I do really like that imagery because I feel like it is, as being a therapist, you're holding a space and you're opening up - hopefully a safe and grounded presence for your, your people. And so music is really the thing that is moving and uplifting and encouraging. And yes, I'm offering it, but it is through the music and the act of that and the meaning that that's making for somebody that's really, I guess, doing the work, so to speak.

Tanya Griffiths 15:34

Yeah, absolutely. That integration, because it is around music, as you said, music is the medium. And it's an important presence in that therapeutic relationship.