

Esther Thane Pt. 2 | Discover Stories Episode 66

Sponsor Message 0:00

Steve, thanks for tuning in to Discover Stories on Re-Imagine Radio. Before we get started, here's a word from our sponsor: Do you wish you had a voice in making some of the world's most popular websites more accessible? Fable is recruiting a community of paid assistive technology users who work from home to test websites and provide feedback on how they can be improved. We're currently recruiting testers who use Dragon voice control, eye tracking, switch controls and head mice. No resume, no cover letter and no experience with user testing is required. Learn more and apply at www.makeitfable.com/community.

Noah Stolte 1:02

Is there a specific story that you have of, I don't know, like a standout moment that you would like to share from a session or two?

Esther Thane 1:16

Well, more so, not not a specific session, but just an overarching progress that I saw in one of my clients years ago. He was diagnosed with autism when he was about two years old, and he came into the music therapy studio, into one of our studios with ET Music Therapy. We have a studio in North Vancouver, we have a studio in Richmond, we go into schools, we work with high risk youth, we go into group homes, we're all over the place. But we do have two actual studio locations here in the Lower Mainland. And when he walked through the door when he was two and a half, he was screaming, pretty much just screaming all the time, very anxious, very dysregulated, and the only thing that really calmed him down was the drum. And we have this drum that is about four feet long, and it's kind of one of those tone drums, like a slit drum, where you've got like, four to eight different tones that kind of look like diving boards from the swimming pool, and you hit the different tones. And this particular tone drum that we have, you can turn on its side and have the individual lie on top of the drum, and then the therapist is playing the side of the drum, so you get all of this deep vibrational input into the body, and that really helps kind of calm them, because they're getting all this proprioceptive input. Okay, so this, this awareness of feeling their joints and body and space, and it really helped himself regulate. And for probably the first oh gosh, at least three to six months, he would come through the door, dysregulated, screaming his head off and run straight towards the drum and lie down, and that was the only thing that worked. And I would play while he was lying down on the drum for almost the entire hour. And he would just get you could almost see his anxiety and his body and

his muscle tension just melt away. And by the end of the session, he was really calm, engaged, was looking at me, was vocalizing along with the music. He was nonverbal at that point, and through the years, he started to be more receptive to different music experiences, where we could engage together. We could vocalize. He began to speak, and now he's a very like regular speaker. He can talk. He can hold conversations with you. He's mostly regulated. And believe it or not, he still comes and does music therapy. He's 20 now.

Noah Stolte 4:27

Oh, wow.

Esther Thane 4:28

And now again, kind of going back to this whole music therapy works on the process, not on a product, whereas music education works more on a product. However, we've actually evolved into that side of things. So now his sessions are mostly guitar lessons. They're adapted guitar lessons. So he's learning how to play the guitar. He's learning how to sing his favorite songs and it's a really beautiful journey to have been honoured to be a part of to see this evolution from a little boy who could not even relate or engage in any environment to somebody who can, you know, come to our sessions independently. Yeah, and who can you know, walk around the community independently and goes and does work at different establishments and helps out and has more independence and more skills of self worth.

Noah Stolte 5:38

Yeah. That's amazing. Yeah. That must be very encouraging as well for you to every new client who comes in, you can say, "Who knows where this is going to go and how much good we can do in this situation." So that's very cool.

Esther Thane 5:53

Yeah, every every individual is different, right? Even if you're working with kids with autism, every single person is different. And so every person is a challenge to see what's going to work for them, what their jam is, and how you can help best support them in where they want to go and where their potential is.

Noah Stolte 6:18

Yeah, that's very cool. Yeah. I work at a school, actually, part time, and one of the students there has autism, but he's a phenomenal piano player. It's just, it's very cool.

Esther Thane 6:31

And that's a very interesting thing too, is, you know, kids with autism have, like, huge memory recall, and they really, again, gravitate towards the medium of music because of this non-threatening language and just the the format of music, and so a lot of kids can really excel in in the music environment.

Noah Stolte 6:56

Yeah, that's very cool. Very cool. Awesome. You mentioned earlier how the sound of rhythm can like, I guess, encourage the brain to, I don't know how to say it.

Esther Thane 7:12

Organize.

Noah Stolte 7:13

Yeah, organize, and then allow someone to actually like, begin walking when they weren't able to before, which is incredible. Do you have any other, I don't know, just like, cool stories similar to that, where music has really, sort of, reached parts of the brain that were thought to be sort of unreachable?

Esther Thane 7:37

Yeah, well, very much like, you know, working on walking and adding rhythms, you're essentially organizing the brain so the brain starts to anticipate the beats of the music, and it's almost like when you think about, when you go down a set of stairs, your brain actually organizes the depth of each step, and after about the third or fourth one, it's kind of memorized the distance, and that's why we don't need to think about it. And if someone's going to trip and fall, if every single step was a different depth and a different width than the other ones, that's harder for the brain to organize. So that's the same thing when we're talking about teaching somebody with, you know, who's recovering from a stroke or who has Parkinson's to have this consistent ability to put one foot in front of another. It's a rhythmic activity. Really, when we walk down the street, it's rhythmic. When we clap our hands, that's rhythmic, right? People don't clap sporadically, you know, really fast and then slow, we clap at usually the same kind of speed. So, yeah, there's a lot of things that stimulate the brain to just organize itself into patterns. Another example was many years ago, there was a U.S., I think she was a senator, named Gabby Giffords, and she actually was involved in a traumatic, violent episode where she was shot in the head, and she completely lost her sense of speech. But prior to this traumatic experience happening, she was an avid lover of show tunes and Broadway, so the majority of her rehabilitation was done by a music therapist who worked on a technique, it's a very kind of a specialized music therapy technique called Melodic Intonation Therapy. And the music therapist used,

because she knew these songs, they were familiar to her before, she had memorized all the lyrics, she knew the words and she loved the music, so it was very motivating and familiar to her brain and body. This music therapist used specific strategies within MIT, Melodic Intonation Therapy, to get her to learn to speak again, and it was all done through singing. So they would sing phrases of these well known tunes that she loved, and then it slowly generalized over into the speaking voice. Wow, so now she's just as fluent and eloquent as she ever was.

Noah Stolte 10:43

That's amazing.

Esther Thane 10:43

Um, as an individual, and all that rehab was really mostly done through music.

Noah Stolte 10:50

Wow, because the songs are just like so deeply ingrained.

Esther Thane 10:54

Exactly, yes

Noah Stolte 10:55

Wow, that is, that's amazing. Yeah, awesome. Thanks for sharing that. Um, one last question here, are there any sort of common misconceptions about music therapy, or anything you'd want people to know about music therapy?

Esther Thane 11:12

Yeah, there's a couple of common misconceptions. One is, some people will call it musical therapy, as opposed to music therapy. Music therapy is a very established profession in, you know, over 100 countries in the world for many, many, many decades. So a lot of people think that as music therapists, we're just entertainers. And although we can be entertaining, and music is certainly entertaining as an art form and engaging, there is real therapy and research that is behind it. Music therapists have to receive at least a Bachelor's of Music Therapy. We have to sit for board certification exams to become certified. There's a lot of, yeah, there's a lot of training that goes into it. We have practicums, we have internships, we're taking medical courses, psychology courses, disabling conditions of childhood and adulthood courses. So, yeah we're not just doing, you know, sing alongs or entertaining or being hired to do birthday parties. And, you know, I think sometimes, for the onlooker, it looks like we're just jamming and having a good time

with clients, making music, which is, of course, what we certainly are doing. However, we're very we're intuiting different things. We're always observing the client, their physiological affect, their emotional affect. We're pacing. We're doing session planning, right? We're being very deliberate about everything that we're all the choices that we're making to help support the individual, all the way from what key signature to the type of music to the tempo to how we speak with them. So everything is very deliberate, and even how we work with the music when we're improvising with the client. Which instruments do we choose if we've got, you know, a client who maybe has cerebral palsy and has limited movement of their left arm or their left hand? We will do things that will, you know, encourage that strength and ability in the left side of their body, but at the same time, we need to balance it out with the right because that is successful, and we want people to really when people gain confidence, and you know, self ability and their love for themselves, that they can make that leap to marching activities that we can help support with so it's a balancing act oftentimes that we do as music therapists.

Noah Stolte 14:31

Okay, yeah, thanks for saying that. Though that deserves to be said about how much intentionality is going into to every aspect of what you're doing. I like what you said that even like the tempo and the instruments matter. I didn't really think of it like that, but it makes sense, if music means that much to somebody, then of course, all those little things working together need to be nearly perfect for it to work.

Esther Thane 15:00

Absolutely.

Noah Stolte 15:01

Okay, very cool. Is there any last thing you might want to say about music therapy? I guess you sort of just did, but maybe about ET therapy? Is there anything you want to speak on?

Esther Thane 15:16

Yeah, absolutely, if you're interested, if you've got a loved one, a child, a parent, a brother, a sister, anybody that you think you'd like to explore a different avenue or an alternative type of therapy with them. You can check us out on our website. We have tons of different videos that really help demonstrate the understanding of what music therapy is. So you can go to etmusictherapy.com and check us out, and if you're interested, reach out to us. There's a contact us form that you can fill out, and we can set up a time to chat about your loved one or your friend and see if music therapy might be a good fit for them.

Noah Stolte 16:08

That's awesome. All right, I think we can even link it in our post on YouTube as well. So we could probably put a link to your site there at the bottom.

Esther Thane 16:18

Sounds great. That would be greatly appreciated.

Noah Stolte 16:21

Awesome. Well, we are running out of time, but thanks so much for chatting with me today. It's been awesome. I definitely feel like I learned a bunch about what music therapy is.

Esther Thane 16:32

Yeah, my pleasure, Noah, and thanks for all you're doing at VAMS.

Noah Stolte 16:36

Yeah, yeah, no problem. It's fun to think about how the two sort of compliment each other in terms of reaching people who love music. So yeah, great. All right, yeah, goodbye and thank you very much again.

Esther Thane 16:52

Thanks so much. Noah, reach out anytime.

Noah Stolte 16:56

Awesome, bye.

Esther Thane 16:57

Bye, bye.