

## Esther Thane Pt.1 | Discover Stories Episode 65

### **Sponsor Message** 0:11

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](http://www.makeitfable.com/community).

### **Noah Stolte** 1:11

Yeah, thanks for joining me on the podcast here. Oh, sorry, did you say something?

### **Esther Thane** 1:16

Oh, sorry, I just said happy to be here.

### **Noah Stolte** 1:18

Oh, awesome. Yeah, thank you. We can get started then. So you are Esther Thane, am I pronouncing that right?

### **Esther Thane** 1:25

Yeah, hard "T" on Esther

### **Noah Stolte** 1:28

Okay, Esther Thane, all right, and you are a music therapist?

### **Esther Thane** 1:34

Correct.

### **Noah Stolte** 1:35

Awesome. Where do you work, exactly?

### **Esther Thane** 1:39

I have a practice called ET Music Therapy. It's a company that's been specializing in neurodiversity and other diverse needs clients since 1996.

**Noah Stolte** 1:54

Awesome. Okay, that's great. Very cool. Yeah. And then I'm Noah Stolte, the VAMS Program Assistant interviewing you today. Yeah, we kind of have an interesting overlap in our two organizations, but they are definitely different, but similar. So that's cool.

**Esther Thane** 2:14

Yeah, I think we do because you know what we do, kind of one of the things about music therapy that I think really parallels well with what you guys are doing at VAMS is we're working on process, and you guys are working, maybe also on product, on music products. So I think the two are really important in the whole creation of music and wellbeing for individuals.

**Noah Stolte** 2:41

Yeah, totally. That's very well said. As concisely as possible, can you define the practice of music therapy? What does it look like and what does it mean?

**Esther Thane** 2:51

So, music therapy, in its most simplistic definition, is that we work on musical goals. Sorry. Scratch that, ignore that, take that off the record. We work on non-musical goals through music. So that's really the base of music therapy. We're targeting all goals when we talk about goals for self growth and development, from social skills to physical skills, communication, cognitive skills, emotional and even spiritual skills as well. So we really kind of access the development of all of those areas, or the maintenance of those areas through a wide variety of different musical experiences, and that will look different based on the different types of individuals you work with and their ages.

**Noah Stolte** 3:52

Yeah, cool. Yeah. It's like vehicles. I mean, sorry, music is more like the vehicle to reach your goals.

**Esther Thane** 3:59

Exactly.

**Noah Stolte** 4:00

That's very cool. All right, and what does your clientele look like? What kinds of people? What kinds of things are they dealing with?

**Esther Thane** 4:12

Well, you really can work, you really can do music therapy and work with the entire age span, from infants, from neonatal infants, all the way up to end of life. So, you know, that's a very loaded question, because we could be here for hours discussing the different conditions, but you know, for instance, they have, I'll just kind of give you a few examples. So we've got music therapists working in NICU units and hospitals helping premature babies thrive, and they've actually founded a lot of research that applying very specific music techniques, lullabies and music, to the even the very, very premature infant. It actually helps them thrive, gain weight and work on their sucking ability, etc., and, of course, create the bond with mom and the child

**Noah Stolte 5:17**

That's interesting.

**Esther Thane 5:17**

And then we go all the way through the age span when we're talking about neurodiverse clients, to any clients with other diverse needs or disabilities, mental health, those with substance disorders all the way through to stroke, brain injury recovery, Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, you name it. At our practice at ET Music Therapy, we focus more so on neurodiverse clients, from young kids, from like two to three years old, all the way I think our oldest client is in their 90s. But we also work with anybody who has any other types of diverse needs when it comes to anxiety, also any brain injury, Down syndrome, ADHD, you name it. So we kind of, again, work with a whole spectrum.

**Noah Stolte 6:20**

Yeah, that sounds like pretty much anything is possible then with music therapy, yeah? So what kind of challenges do these clients face that you work with?

**Esther Thane 6:33**

So for instance, if we're talking about older individuals with Alzheimer's, they might really face challenges of regulating or reducing their anxiety, being able to sleep, being able to communicate with their loved ones, and they've found that playing familiar songs from their early childhood allows even those individuals who have lost their their speech be able to sing songs from their childhood. When we're talking about stroke rehabilitation or brain injury, music can be applied in a very systematic way for working on gait. So when we're talking about gait. You know, we're talking about walking prosody, and when you apply certain rhythmic beats and techniques, you can actually increase a person's ability to regain their ability to walk and talk as well. And for neurodiverse kids, for instance, which is something that we target a lot at ET Music Therapy, is social communication, the ability for

them to control their impulses, to have self regulation and to feel confident exploring and interacting and engaging with another individual within the music environment. So in general, music is a non-threatening language. And we know it's also very universal. It's universal in all cultures. There's very few people in the world that don't like music. So everyone associates memories and has preferred music. And that's a huge principle of music therapy, is that we're using, when possible, music that is client-preferred, that's always going to increase the ability for somebody to integrate skills at a deeper level. So if they love country music, we use country music. If they love heavy metal and rap, that's what we use. So it's really all about connecting with the client through what lights up their brains. There's actually been a lot of research that showed that individuals brains know what they prefer to listen to when it comes to music too. So you know, if you don't like classical music, but you love rap or hip-hop, that's what's going to light up all the areas of the brain and stimulate your development, whether it's emotional development or physical development. It really, you know, music crosses over every single area of the brain, so it's accessing all of these skills simultaneously and one of the only activities in the world that can do that.

**Noah Stolte** 9:34

Yeah, that's cool. You must have encountered some pretty like, niche music tastes over the years.

**Esther Thane** 9:42

Oh yeah, oh yeah. For sure, we have some clients that will only listen to Taylor Swift, or they only like video game music

**Noah Stolte** 9:52

Yeah, yeah.

**Esther Thane** 9:53

Or just the sounds. I once had a client who actually was a real challenge, because he didn't like music, but he liked the sound of when you turn the radio dial from station to station. So, yeah, it really challenges you as the music therapist to be creative and be able to meet the client where they're at.

**Noah Stolte** 10:21

It's an avant-garde, sort of modern classical music type thing, listening to the sound of the radio turning, it's very experimental. Yeah, that's cool, though. That's very cool. About you a

little bit here. What sort of got you into music and sort of drew you into this career as a music therapist?

**Esther Thane** 10:46

Well, I think that most music therapists, they obviously start as musicians, you know, and they can be very classically trained. They could be folk trained. They could have received lessons all their lives. Or they could also be self taught musicians that you know have kind of run the lounge and bar circuits or cruise ships. I mean, it's really, we come from all walks of life. But certainly, I think music is our substance and sustenance. And so for me, at a very early age, I was always involved in music. It was something my parents did for both my sister and I, it was really important to them that we were in piano lessons and voice lessons and choir and band and all of these things. And those were really mostly our extracurricular activities. When I graduated high school, I realized I didn't really know how to do much else, because I had dedicated most of my childhood to music. So it was almost a foregone conclusion that my career path was going to include the essence of music in some shape or form. My sister is a concert pianist, and I watched her practice diligently for hours a day, and I knew that that was not going to be my path. That wasn't my jam.

**Noah Stolte** 12:19

The keyword watched her practice. [Laughs]

**Esther Thane** 12:21

Yeah. I mean, you know, of course, musicians have to practice. You can't get around that. But I knew that wasn't going to be my shtick. So and at the same time, I also knew I wasn't really motivated to teach ukulele and recorder in schools and become a music teacher at school or an instructor. So it was actually just suggested to me randomly, "You know, what about music therapy?" And something about those two words felt right to me because it was pairing my love of music for the ability to help other individuals and use it in a proactive way to make change totally and help other people reach their fullest potential. So I kind of looked into it. I didn't know very much about it, but I kind of just jumped in, leapt in, really, two feet forward and joined, you know, applied for a Bachelor of Music Therapy program and got in. And I really sat that first day of class, not really knowing what music therapy really entailed, but my gut was telling me it was the right thing to do, and yeah, almost 30 years later, never really looked back. There's just so many so much potential out there of different avenues that you can take music, whether it's for songwriting or improv, improvising or doing more structured music activities. Again, it's about the process. But yeah, we do have product often at the end of the day, or, you know.

**Noah Stolte** 14:13

Yeah, probably depending on how just whatever direction the client themselves wants to take, it probably right?

**Esther Thane** 14:20

Exactly. And their age level, etc., and what their challenges are, you know? So some people really want to be able to, you know, feel confident to record an album and, but, you know, or they want to be able to learn an instrument. Some people really want to be able to connect with another and increase their self esteem, their self worth, their self identity. So again, it really depends. Music therapy looks completely different when you look at a session working with kids than adults, than infants with you know, everything looks quite different.

**Noah Stolte** 15:04

Yeah, I can imagine, yeah, especially when you've described how diverse your clientele is, it's definitely, I can imagine that.