

The carbon footprint and impact upon biodiversity of the music therapy profession

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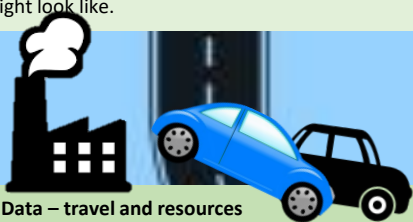
Introduction

The world is facing a Climate Emergency. At the moment the impact is being felt primarily by those who are contributing least to climate breakdown through carbon footprint and resource use, but 'climate change is recognised as the most significant threat to the health of humanity on a global scale' (NHS Wales p.6). A wide range of organisations, including those focussing on the arts, healthcare and education are working towards sustainability goals. These are being actioned by identifying key areas to investigate and cut carbon footprints (Badiali et. al. 2019; PHW, (n.d.); USW 2020). Individual choices also make an impact and taking bold action can influence others to make changes themselves (Westlake 2019). This poster seeks to explore aspects of music therapy practice, drawing to the attention of the profession changes that can be made to reduce the carbon footprint of music therapy.



Literature

At present, there are few publications in our profession that directly address issues of sustainability in music therapy practice. Seabrook (2020) has provided the first such peer-reviewed paper to offer multiple ways in which the music therapy profession can engage with Climate Emergency. They suggest that there may be a need to address this in work with clients, through our professional associations and at a disciplinary level. Personal responsibility and individual choices regarding aspects of practice can begin to provide a paradigm through which music therapy can contribute to reducing carbon footprints. They remind us that contemporary music therapy practice has begun to broaden the lenses it uses to develop practice. Feminist and queer theory (Curtis 2013; Bain, Grzanka & Crowe 2016) and anti-oppressive practice (Baines 2013) are increasingly visible in practice and research. Seabrook offers the term 'eco music therapy' to encompass what music therapy using this paradigm might look like.



Preliminary Data – travel and resources

A small research project was undertaken at USW exploring issues that would come under aspects of Seabrook's 'eco music therapy' in members of the British Association for Music Therapy in Wales. Limitations of the survey were the short period of time the survey was open (10 days) and the relatively low number of music therapists included in the group, although around 20% of those eligible to participate (n=12) did respond. Of these 75% used a car to travel to work, citing issues such as amount of equipment, moving between settings in the same day and rural areas poorly served by public transport. Others used bus or train. When looking at instrument purchase, 66% said they would first look at secondhand options, with 50% looking for locally produced instruments. Sustainable wood was something that 33% considered in their instrument purchases. Others said the sound quality of the instrument was paramount with cost also playing an important role. This overrode green considerations. It was interesting to learn also that when asked what they did with broken instruments, 50% of respondents described different ways of reusing parts or creating new instruments. Others disposed of them at a recycling centre with only one using general rubbish facilities. This small research project showed an encouraging awareness of eco music therapy issues, although transportation remains a difficult area in which to effect change.

Behaviour change

It has been widely cited that it takes just 3.5% of people to make a change in their behaviour to influence others (Chenoweth & Stephen 2011). Currently 74% of adults want to reduce their impact on the environment and nature by a large amount (Globescan 2020), and 81% adults have reported making small or significant changes to their lifestyle (ONS 2021). We suggest that making changes in your music therapy practice to be more environmentally friendly could be part of a movement that will influence others to do the same. Changes could include:

Investing in some second-hand instruments. Leave them at your workplace and try cycling or getting public transport to work - Travelling 2 miles by car emits 0.88 kg CO₂, A bike equals 0.17kg (Globe.gov).

Attending a conference online rather than in person. An in-person conference for 1000 people results in 568,315kg CO₂ whereas a virtual event would produce 3492kg CO₂ (based on air travel, land travel, and food waste) (KUDO 2021).

Switching to an ethical pension and current account. Many pension providers and bank accounts invest in fossil fuels and other environmentally damaging enterprises with your money (Timperley 2021).

Conclusions

Music Therapists are aware of the potential for their practice to reduce carbon footprint. There is an appetite within the profession and general population to adopt sustainable practices and do things differently. As individual practitioners each one of us must challenge ourselves, our colleagues and our employers to closely look at the environmental impact we make with our working practices and lifestyles. We must dare to make radical changes that reduce the damage we cause our planet. As Seabrook states 'music therapists [must] do the urgent work of first educating ourselves about the climate crisis and then addressing it - in our daily lives, with and clients, in our professional associations and as contributors to multidisciplinary initiatives'.

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