

“As Jo grew older and more confident he was able to play, take turns and tease us – keeping us in suspense until he brought down his arm on a tambourine to continue the music”

Jane Hughes on the remarkable benefits of music therapy

Jo Nelson was 18 months old when his mother, Helen, first noticed that he was beating his tiny hands in time to music. It was one of his first purposeful movements, recalls Helen, a special needs teacher. Until then, Jo, who is severely physically disabled and has profound learning disabilities, had shown little awareness of the world around him, beyond beginning to smile and occasionally grasping people's fingers.

Jo had spent much of his first few months in and out of hospital with recurring bouts of pneumonia. His body was often curled into a little ball and his fists were constantly clenched. It was difficult for anyone to know what was going on inside his head. Yet his ability to follow music showed that he was sensitive to sound and rhythm. Jo's hospital offered a music therapy service and his paediatrician suggested that this might give Jo a means of communication and self-expression that didn't rely on words.

Music therapist Sarah Hadley began working with Jo on a weekly basis and was immediately struck by his enthusiasm and responsiveness. "At

the start of each session, Jo would go completely quiet and still as he began to process the sounds around him," she says. "He used to make spontaneous high-pitched vocalisations, which I reflected on the piano. As his natural responses were acknowledged, he began to have an awareness of connecting and that often made him laugh."

The two – with Helen present to support Jo – rapidly developed a rapport through musical interaction. Sarah encouraged Jo to lead the way, picking up his sounds and the movements of his hands, knees and feet so that he could have a musical experience of himself.

Sarah's improvisation worked at a sensory level, connecting to Jo through his hearing, sight, movement, touch and feelings. It soon became obvious that Jo's social and emotional intelligence was more developed than people had imagined, given the severity of his condition.

"Jo was socially aware of how people behaved around him," says Sarah. "As he grew older and more confident he was able to play, take

turns and tease us – keeping us in suspense, for example, until he brought down his arm on a tambourine to continue the music."

Without a means to express and work through the emotions he was feeling, Jo could have become introverted and increasingly frustrated. Much of his life is spent on the receiving end – being fed, dressed and moved around in his wheelchair. Music therapy was one place where he could have satisfying experiences through new challenges that encouraged him to lead and take control.

While Jo's mobility is very limited – both his hips and his left shoulder are dislocated – he uses the small amount of movement he has to the full. His hands became very important tools as he learnt to scratch or pat on a tambourine. "Only 30 per cent of communication is expressed through words," says Sarah. A much greater part of social contact, she argues, is the way we relate through body

language and expression, particularly eye contact. And while Jo wasn't able to communicate through words, he could develop relationships through music.

Music therapy works on the principle that every individual has an innate sense

of rhythm (movement in the body, heartbeat and breathing), melody (the pitch and inflection of the voice) and harmony (relating to feeling), which enables them to respond to music. There are several state-registered schools of music therapy, although nationally, the level of service is patchy. Yet for autistic children, those with emotional difficulties, or those who have experienced emotional trauma through abuse or neglect, music therapy is a tool that allows them to work at the level of feelings, rather than struggling to put their experience into words.

Jo is now 13 and pushing himself as hard as ever in the work with Sarah. "She is the only person he



Jo Nelson, 13, with his father, Trevor

PHOBIA OF THE WEEK: **KATHISOPHOBIA**
The fear of sitting down Don't stand for it

always greets with a smile and a giggle," says Helen. Each session is customised to suit Jo's mood. Sarah will wait for Jo's first response and work with that. When he was younger, Sarah would build the music and Jo would laugh and laugh until he lost control and began to cry. Now, she says, he can follow through an emotion in a more mature way, though he will often move rapidly from anger to sadness to laughter.

Jo's head is quite floppy and "windsweeps" to the left. It requires a huge effort for him to lift it, but he does this often during a session, to have eye contact. "He loves music and has perfect pitch," says Helen. "If Sarah changes a semitone, he will do the same. The music, and the confidence it has given him, is a real gift. I couldn't believe it when, a few months ago, he started softly singing along with Sarah." ●

For information on music therapy, e-mail the British Society of Music Therapy at info@bsmt.org or write to the Association of Professional Music Therapists, 26 Hamlyn Road, Glastonbury, Somerset BA6 8HT



JON BUCKLE/EMPIOS

REGIMEN

Richard Faulds, 25, Olympic Double Trap Shooter

Weight: 13st
Height: 6ft

What sort of training makes an Olympic gold shooting star?

I train at Bisley shooting ground, Surrey, and at home, where my father has built me a range, two or three days per week for one hour per day. Training depends on the weather because the targets in double trap shooting are affected by the wind. Also it is not easy to shoot when you are very cold.

How fit do you have to be to shoot?

You need to be in good condition, especially

your upper body – the movement of the gun from one target to the next can be very tiring. It pays to spend a few hours a week in the gym.

What about your vision, has it always been 20-20?

No, I overcame a problem of a weak left eye when I was quite small and, with the help of my mother, spent one hour every day doing dot-to-dot exercises, as I was too young to read.

How much is it a case of being a good natural shooter and how much learnt technique?

Having natural ability with timing and accuracy is 75 per cent of the

battle, but you also need to perfect technique in the various disciplines by using correct gun mounting and footwork.

How important is your diet and weight?

I try to stick to a healthy diet. Any marked change in weight, up or down, may affect the way the gun fits, for example, into my cheek or shoulder.

Who or what helps you to keep your nerve in competitions?

My coach and psychologist understand exactly what makes me tick – if I told you, I'd have to shoot you.

Have you suffered any setbacks as a result of

the legislation in the wake of Dunblane?

Only the public's attitude towards shooters. No one can legislate for lunatics. Most criminal acts with guns are committed with illegally held firearms, and the confiscation of all pistol shooters' weapons has made no difference.

Are you on target for gold at Manchester?

The fact that the Commonwealth shooting is to be held at Bisley, my local ground, is an obvious confidence booster. Having said that, when I won in Sydney I beat Russell Mark who was on home turf. ●

Nick Wyke

The Commonwealth Games shooting begins today

5 MINUTE FIX

Try counting your steps: you should aim for 10,000 a day