**Music therapy with girls with autism. A new understanding and its implications for music therapy clinical work and service development**

**Interim report for The Music Therapy Charity - March 2020**

**Study aims**

This study aims to develop our understanding of the needs of girls with a diagnosis of autism and to investigate how music therapy can support their development.

This was initially planned to be a 6 month project (April – September 2019). The timescale of the project has been altered for a number of reasons. It wasn’t possible to confirm funding in the time originally thought and also there were a number of unforeseen staff changes in our service meaning that additional time that had been planned to focus on research projects needed to be put on hold for a short time. It then became possible to start the project in September 2019 and it is anticipated that we will finish in April/May 2020.

**Project progress**

Initially individual interviews with parents were planned in order to gather information on the study aims. However we wanted to develop the project with relevance to our service’s current context, which offers various collaborative means (such as parent workshops) to gather feedback and support families. Therefore a focus group model was developed to provide a more dynamic and time-effective way of gathering information, as well as having the parallel aim of providing a useful forum for parents to meet and share experiences.

A focus group was designed with the following core questions:

* What can we learn from parents about the needs of pre-school autistic girls.
* How can music therapy support their development in the pre-school years.

A focus group structure was formulated. Two parents of autistic girls were then involved in redrafting the structure (one parent with experience of music therapy in our service and one with no experience).

Initially 7 parents were recruited. In the process of setting up the focus group, one parent withdrew. An initial focus group was arranged but couldn’t run due to non-availability of parents. A second group was set up and ran successfully with 3 parents attending.

The 3 parents who hadn’t been able to attend expressed a wish for continued involvement. Phone interviews were offered instead and all of these 3 parents participated in a scheduled phone call. The phone interviews were not recorded but notes taken by the interviewer have been written up as records of the conversations. The focus group has also been transcribed.

The grant has been vital in providing our service with the additional time needed to dedicate resources to the project so far. The next step of the project is to analyse the focus group transcription along with the phone interview notes. These findings will then be written up and presented to colleagues and the profession in various ways.