



**RETT SYNDROME ASSOCIATION UK**

**113 Friern Barnet Road, London N11 3EU**

**Tel: 0870 770 3266 Fax: 0870 770 3265**

**Local Callers Tel: 020 8361 5161 Fax 020 8368 6123**

**E-mail: [info@rettsyndrome.org.uk](mailto:info@rettsyndrome.org.uk)**

**[www.rettsyndrome.org.uk](http://www.rettsyndrome.org.uk)**

**STATEMENT FROM PROFESSOR TONY WIGRAM  
ON THE IMPORTANCE OF MUSIC THERAPY  
FOR PEOPLE WITH RETT SYNDROME**

I have been actively working in music therapy with girls and women who have Rett Syndrome over the last eight years. For many of these years I have been involved in a clinic which assesses the therapeutic needs of girls and women with Rett syndrome, using both music therapy and vibroacoustic therapy.

Almost all of the clients I have seen have responded very positively to music therapy and it has been significantly helpful to them in the following areas:-

**ATTENTION AND GENERAL  
MOTIVATION**

Music is a very strong and motivating stimulus. Children and adults who have Rett syndrome, despite serious physical difficulties, are often motivated to try to use their hands and their vocal skills to respond to music. There have been many occasions when girls and women have focussed and responded for long periods of time to musical activities and it is a way of developing their attention and their concentration.

**GROSS AND FINE MOTOR SKILLS**

Children and adults with Rett Syndrome can be significantly disabled. Experience in music therapy has shown that hand stereotypies can be reduced and active functional use of their hands can be developed. This is closely connected to their motivation, as the desire to play instruments or hold objects such as sticks or beaters to play instruments, even at a simple, improvisational level, provides a strong motivation. Balance and posture are also improved by the person's active participation in music making.

**NON-VERBAL INTERACTION -  
COMMUNICATION SKILLS**

Music making provides a medium for communication in the hands of the skilled music therapist. Music can act as a language and the development of vocal inflection and a wide range of expressive skills through musical sound is important to a child who has very limited possibilities in communication. Non-verbal interaction such as gesture, eye contact and particularly the dynamic use of musical elements such as volume, timbre and frequency can provide a child or adult with Rett syndrome with a means of expression.

**EMOTIONAL OUTLET**

Music provides a medium for emotional expression. People with Rett syndrome can often be miserable, unhappy, frustrated, anxious and hypertense. Music making and the ability to vocalize or create simple sounds on large instruments gives people with these problems a wonderful and meaningful way of expressing their feelings. A skilled music therapist will be able to create a framework through which a person with these disabilities can communicate her anxiety, her fear, her happiness and joy.

**RELAXATION**

Children and adults with Rett syndrome are very typically tense and anxious. They hyperventilate, they have hand stereotypies and they are generally in a state of arousal. Music used in a sedative and calming way can effect a relaxation in the person and facilitate their ability to respond.

## **SUMMARY**

Music therapy is effective with children and adults who have Rett syndrome at a physiological, psychological and emotional level. All the references to music therapy in the literature have indicated its effectiveness for people with this profound disability. In clinical work, music therapy provides an overview of the client as it is a holistic approach and it has proved to be a very dynamic way of reaching and drawing out children and adults who have this particular disorder. It should be on the Statement of Special Educational Needs of every child with Rett syndrome and it should be continued as a therapy treatment for this client group for as long as possible.

**Please feel free to contact me for further information.**

## **TONY WIGRAM**

Professor and Head of PhD studies in Music Therapy - University of Aalborg, Denmark  
Head Music Therapist - Harper House  
Children's Service, Radlett

April 2002

Professor Wigram can be reached c/o Harper House Children's Service, Harper Lane, Radlett, Herts. WD7 7HU

Rett2/information/music therapy statmt