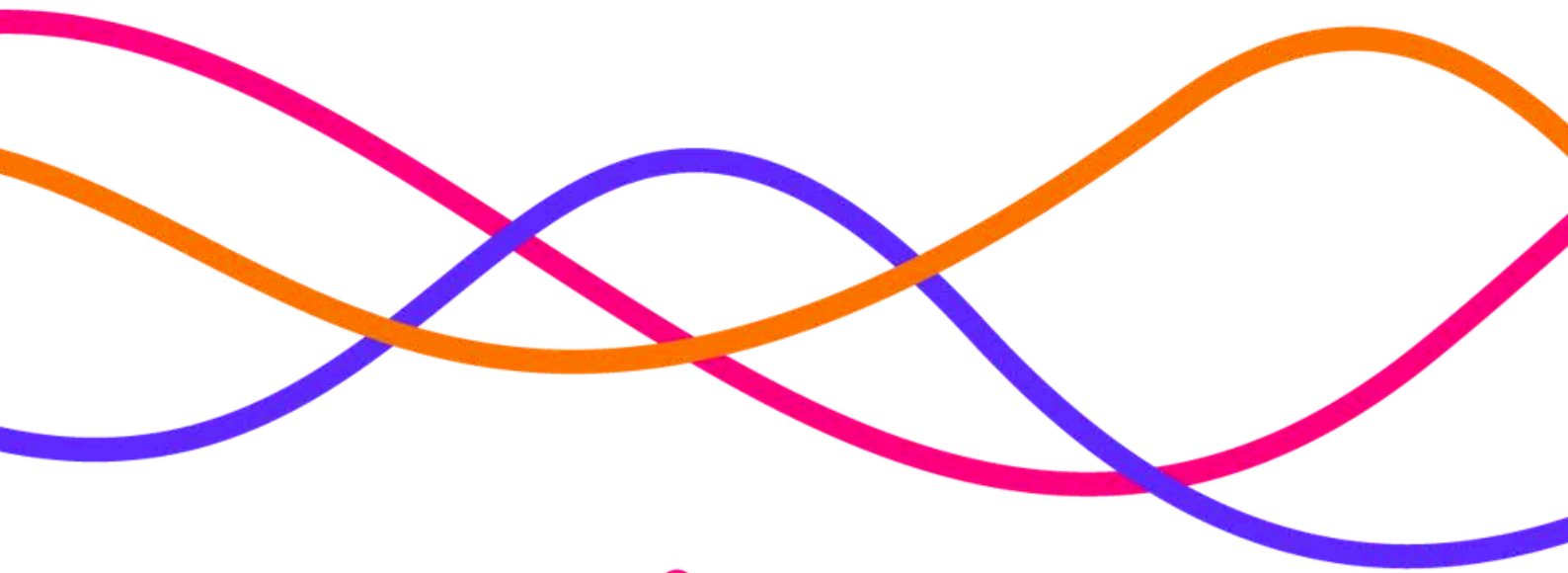


Transforming lives through music: support for children and adults with disabilities

Year 2 Grant Report: The Lord Leonard and Lady Estelle Wolfson Foundation and the Woosnam Foundation



**NORDOFF & ROBBINS
MUSIC THERAPY**

May 2026

Summary

Everyone at Nordoff and Robbins Music Therapy extends our sincere thanks to the Lord Leonard and Lady Estelle Wolfson Foundation and the Woosnam Foundation for a second year of partnership. Together, your joint commitment is helping to improve the lives of children and adults with learning disabilities and special educational needs across Greater London and the home counties.

This Year 2 update outlines the delivery and impact your support has made possible over the past year, enabling music therapy to reach some of London's most isolated and vulnerable residents.

Through your shared investment, our Health and Care Professions Council accredited music therapists delivered **2,334 music therapy sessions** across 13 specialist schools, hospital schools, hospitals and academies, supporting **355** children and adults in need to thrive, while also benefiting families, carers and staff.

Delivery Update

"Using feedback from the music therapist... staff have gained an insight on pupils that is not evident in the classroom. This knowledge has led to a greater understanding of some pupils. It is so beneficial that through music pupils are able to express their thoughts and feelings" - Staff member at a partner special educational needs school

Across the year we delivered **2,334 music therapy sessions to 355 adults and children in need** - 56% of our clients were adults and 44% were children. This exceeded our commitment to deliver at least 2,600 music therapy sessions per year to positively impact 320 adults and children with learning disabilities and special educational needs.

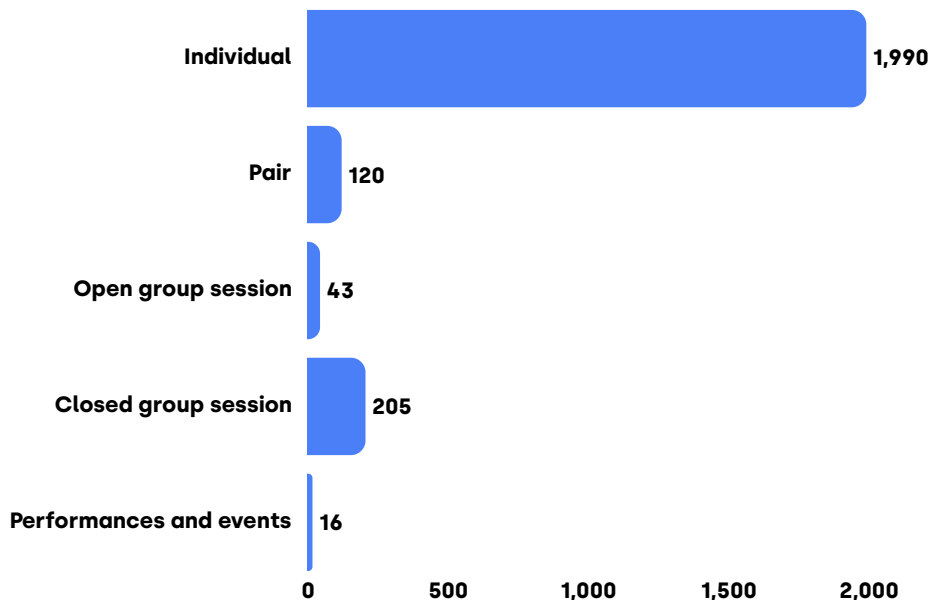
Beneficiaries we work with can have a range of challenges due to learning disabilities and often profound and multiple complex needs, such as difficulties comprehending or processing information, and with communication, memory, attention and focus.

Over the past year, with your generous support, our skilled music therapists have worked in **partnership with 13 specialist organisations** in Greater London and the home counties for one, two or three days a week, to support adults and children in need through music therapy. Our partner organisations have included special educational needs primary and secondary schools, day centres for adults with learning disabilities and hospital rehabilitation centres for people with brain injuries.

Our music therapists work flexibly to create a **tailored music therapy** programme in each setting, which includes a mix of one to one, small and large group sessions. In sessions, participants can sing, write songs, play many different musical instruments, and explore music technology. The focus is not on musical skill but on **self-expression, connection, and wellbeing**.

Our therapists use our distinct Nordoff-Robbins approach where the individual and therapist co-create the music together, with clients often leading the sessions. One-to-one sessions offer the opportunity for a more tailored approach and tend to lead to improvement in verbal and non-verbal communication, while group sessions build the clients' social skills and interactions, for example through turn taking. We also arrange performances and special showcases events to bring the communities together - **16 performances and events** happened over the last year.

Types of music therapy sessions delivered



We have supported more clients than planned due to the balance between session types. Group sessions enable us to reach more clients and sessions are for a longer period typically. Due to the needs of our clients, most of the sessions we deliver are individual.

The difference we make

“Staff understand and recognise the positive impact of the [music] therapy on young people...sessions where discussion around young people and their progress takes place is hugely valued and becomes a highlight of the staff CPD calendar across the year. Staff very much feel that hearing and seeing pupils in a different setting aids professional well-being” - partner organisation staff member

Over the last year, we have undertaken service evaluations in six our partner organisations in London and the home counties for children and adults with learning disabilities and special educational needs. In the partner organisations we evaluated, surveys reveal:

- **96%** of respondents agree music therapy develops improved **speech, language and communication skills** of beneficiaries.
- **97%** said it has **increased relaxation** and led to **better mental health**.
- **96%** of individuals said that music therapy enhanced their **quality of life**.
- **95%** of said that music therapy helped them better develop their **social skills and interactions**.

In addition to positive impacts on our beneficiaries, family members and staff have also been impacted through a 'ripple effect' – wider impact which reflects to the person receiving music therapy, improving the benefits for everyone affected:

- 92% of family members agree it has improved communication with the beneficiary and between the family has a whole.
- 96% of staff in partner organisations agreed that it is a creative experience that improves their relationship with beneficiaries.
- 100% report that music therapy has a positive impact on the atmosphere of the whole organisation.

Case Studies

Meet Hannah

"Music makes her calm - especially when she's angry" - Hannah's mother

Hannah is 11 years old and has a diagnosis of ASD (autistic spectrum disorder), attending a school in London for children with severe learning disabilities and complex needs.

Though Hannah has limited language, she does understand instructions and presents as a very social person. She is generally very happy and jovial, and will sing small musical phrases to herself which she has learned from music she has heard on YouTube. Her mother says that she loves to watch musical performances online, and specifically enjoys Tom and Jerry's performance of Franz Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsody no. 2 in the cartoon The Cat Concerto. Having received music lessons in her previous school, Hannah has experience of playing the piano, and knows a few chords and musical phrases which she regularly plays in our sessions. One such musical phrase is the beginning of the aforementioned Hungarian Rhapsody no. 2.

Hannah uses musical spaces as environments for exploration and communication, and this is clearly evident within our sessions. Much of Hannah's music is played at the piano, she enjoys playing pieces of music which she has learned in the past. When in sessions, I aim to support these moments by repeating what she has played, or providing a musical foundation for Hannah to perform over. Hannah seems to find great satisfaction in hearing her music repeated back to her, and seems to use these moments as points of connection and communication.

Hannah also enjoys exploring the use of the variety of hand percussion instruments kept at the school. In these moments of our sessions, I am given the opportunity to follow Hannah's movements and exploration of these instruments in more free and open improvisations. Here we find very close moments of connection, as I believe Hannah may feel most represented in music.

As Hannah does not have access to music lessons or a piano at home, I believe that the time we spend making music together is essential to her musical experience. Music therapy offers Hannah access to an environment that she can shape according to her expressive needs, and a space where she is free to communicate in a unique way. She is evidently a very musical person, and for Hannah to have a place where she is free to explore that musicianship seems to me to be essential to her developing personality and expression of self. Case study prepared by Hannah's music therapist.

Meet Zaid

When I started working with Zaid he was 9 years old. He is Autistic and has a learning disability. He has a good vocabulary but speaks rarely, often only using his voice to express what he needs in one word. He struggles being around other students and is normally found in a separate room/space accompanied by two teaching assistants. He can become distressed when people play with or take items that he views as his, or if they disrupt him while he is focused on a task.



Ziad playing in his music therapy session

He is calmest when playing on his own; he particularly enjoys building the letters of the alphabet with Lego and listening to/making music. He was referred to music therapy with the aim of offering him opportunities for social interaction and shared experience with a new adult, whilst also developing his communication skills and expressive abilities.

In our first few sessions, it quickly became apparent that Zaid found it very difficult to share instruments. He would take them from me as soon as I entered the room and became distressed if I held onto them or tried to pick them up again. This led to me using purely my voice and body percussion. Zaid struggled when I sat near to him, and when the music I made was noticeably linked to what he was offering, possibly finding it too directly invasive of his personal bubble; he either would tell me to stop, withdraw, or ask me to leave the room. I decided a more passive approach might be needed. The first time I tried this (sitting further from him, facing away, humming gently and less directly mirroring his musical offerings), he ceased telling me to stop and strummed the Ukulele gently while I sang.

When I felt Zaid was comfortable in this new musical relationship, I gradually started to respond to small motifs that he would present on the Ukulele or Glockenspiel by offering a subtle responding phrase, still making sure I wasn't echoing or mirroring. A significant moment comes to mind; we had been in music together for 10 minutes without him asking me to stop. He looked up at me and sang the short theme we had been passing between my voice and his Ukulele, clearly signalling his awareness of our musical relationship. In subsequent sessions his connection with me in the music increased little by little. He started making much more eye contact with me, allowed me to sing songs he enjoys with him, showed me tunes he had worked out on the glockenspiel and created musical dialogue in our Ukulele and vocal duets.

For Zaid to allow shared play with another adult and communication of musical ideas, creating dialogue in the music with another person, was a brilliant achievement for him, highlighting that when supported in a way that worked for him, he was very willing to enter into shared interaction and seek human connection.

Case study prepared by music therapist.

Organisational highlights

At Nordoff and Robbins Music Therapy, we use music to transform lives across the UK. From an adult living with dementia reconnecting with their family to a child with autism finding their voice, music can be profoundly life-changing.

In 2025, we supported 15,540 people through our open-access centres and our work with 309 partner organisations, extending our reach to some of the most vulnerable individuals and communities. We embarked on a new organisational strategy, reaffirming our commitment to our three core missions: the delivery of high-quality music therapy services, music therapy education, and research.

We successfully completed a rigorous revalidation of our Master of Music Therapy course with Goldsmiths (University of London), securing a further five years of validation from January 2026, ensuring the continued excellence of our professional training.

Research continues to underpin our practice, with our music therapists contributing to national and international learning on music and health. This included presentations at the 2025 European Music Therapy Conference in Hamburg. Current research projects include a study exploring the impact of music therapy on rehabilitation outcomes in partnership with the National Hospital for Neurology and Neurosurgery (UCLH), and research into music therapy's role in dementia care.

We also welcomed our new Chief Executive, Maria Neophytou, in March 2026

Thank you

We hope this update report has provided a useful insight into some of the positive and life-changing impacts your support enables. We are deeply grateful for your continued partnership, which allows us to sustain and develop access to music therapy for those who can benefit the most, particularly in the context of ongoing cost pressures across the sector.

As ever, we would be delighted to welcome you to visit our work in action, and we look forward to sharing more about our long-term strategy with you in due course.

Contact

If you have any questions or need any further information, please get in touch:

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