



112 Broad Lane, Hampton, TW12 3BW (for correspondence only)
Tel: 07435 062212 email: info@okmtrust.org.uk www.okmtrust.org.uk

Otakar Kraus Music Trust – VSC report for Marble Hill Playcentres

The proposed community hub at Marble Hill Playcentres provides a unique opportunity to protect the long-term viability of The Otakar Kraus Music Trust, and to enable OKMT to extend the reach and impact of its services. This briefing note sets out who we are, what we do and the measurable outcomes that we deliver to the most disadvantaged members of our local community. It explains why OKMT desperately requires a new home and why without Marble Hill Playcentres, OKMT may not have a long-term future. It describes why this proposal is so well suited to meeting our needs as well as the unsuccessful attempts we have made over the past 5 years to find a more suitable premise and base.

Who we are? What we do? Why we matter?

The Otakar Kraus Music Trust is a music therapy charity that works with clients of all ages and needs who come to us from across the borough, and a few from further afield. It was established nearly 30 years ago by Dr Margaret Lobo and until recently operated from a purpose-built studio at the rear of her garden.

Our work makes a tangible difference to people whose challenges are difficult and for many where other approaches have often been unsuccessful. Music therapy is the clinical and evidence-based use of music interventions to accomplish individualised goals within a therapeutic relationship. It is particularly effective for those who find it difficult to communicate verbally because it does not rely on an ability to speak in order to be accessible. Music and rhythm are processed in different areas across the brain which means that Music Therapy is a unique tool that can be used to access, restore and connect function in parts of the brain.

During 2019 OKMT provided over 3,000 individual and group sessions, for over 300 clients, helping them to communicate, concentrate, gain confidence, develop friendships, and take part with pride in community activities. During 2020 we were able to adapt most of our services to run online and despite the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, we provided music therapy or lessons for over 300 people of all ages, around 265 of them online.

In October 2019, our Founder downsized and sold her house, and so we had to move from our large purpose-built music therapy studio in Twining Avenue in Twickenham. We now run our one to one and small group Music Therapy sessions from Hanworth Methodist Church. We use three sites for our OK Music School: Hanworth Methodist Church, United Reformed Church on Twickenham Green and Heatham House in Twickenham. We also work in various schools and care homes and work with partners in the local community to run specially devised music therapy projects including:

- OK Music Club - for babies and children who have additional needs at Skylarks
- Neurological Music Therapy for clients at Integrated Neurological Services, working with clients with neurological conditions including Stroke, Parkinson's and Multiple Sclerosis.

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- OK Music Group for young people with mental health problems with Richmond Borough Mind
- OK Music Harmony - for elderly people at Homelink Respite Centre who are diagnosed memory problems
- OK Youth Choir established for all abilities of SEN and their siblings was launched in 2018. Two choirs meet weekly on Saturday mornings.

(The appendix to this document provides case studies from Music Therapy, OK Music School and OK Music Club).

Music Therapy is very effective as an early-stage intervention, as it builds a closer connection and engagement with young people who otherwise can feel very isolated and frustrated. Through its use we can help prevent or reduce behavioural issues and severe anxiety. For example, through Music Therapy we have worked with non-verbal autistic young children and helped them connect with others and, quite literally, find their voice.

Music therapy can help children and young people with a wide range of developmental and emotional needs including:

- Communication difficulties, including non-verbal
- Autistic Spectrum Disorder
- Cerebral palsy
- Down's Syndrome
- ADHD
- Hearing or visual impairment
- Global developmental delay
- Mental health problems, including anxiety and depression
- Behavioural difficulties
- Neurological conditions
- Aggressive behavioural issues due to trauma

Music therapy can help with and facilitate the following aspects of development in children and young people in a clinical setting.

- Quality of life
- Social skills
- Cognitive skills
- Motor skills
- Speech & Communication
- Emotional well-being
- Confidence

OK Music School

OKMT realised there was a huge need for wider musical support for children with additional needs due to our many years working in the community. Parents were desperate for help as music was one of the few things their children would respond to and many showed a natural aptitude, but mainstream groups were not suitable for their needs.

In our survey of 50 families, 75% said their children could not attend mainstream

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music groups as they were highly anxious, could not focus or follow instructions. As one parent said, 'My daughter is not able to cope as they are unable to meet her needs - she had to leave every activity we tried'. OK Music School was set up to meet this need and gives children and young people with disabilities the opportunity to learn to play an instrument or sing and perform in public. Our Pupils perform in 2 public OKMT concerts per year and some have even passed music exams. Over 65 pupils currently attend OK Music School and demand is constant with a current waiting list of 20.

Why OKMT needs a new home?

Since our founder sold her house (and studio) we have been working on a temporary basis from various locations to run our services. These are largely informal arrangements where the Trust is reliant on the good will of third parties and which could be stopped at short notice. At the same time the Trust does not have an office for its operational staff, all of whom have to work from home.

As we are renting space in other people's buildings it means that we do not have facilities that have been designed with our needs in mind, consequently they do not:

- Meet the complex needs of many of our students e.g. physical disabilities, autism, learning difficulties
- Allow us to make noise, and for this not to affect others in nearby locations
- Enable us to manage staff/therapists
- Provide us with a facility to store our musical instruments such as keyboards and drums, in the place where they will be used

In addition, OKMT has to bear the ongoing operational cost of renting space, and the upward pressure this places on our fees.

Why this space at Marble Hill Playcentres and not other options?

The Marble Hill Playcentres Scheme is well suited for our needs, as it will be purpose built to meet both the requirements of our clients and the delivery of our services (sound-proofing). We have explored multiple other options and for a variety of reasons none of these have been either appropriate or affordable. As a result, we believe MHPC is a once in a lifetime opportunity to enable OKMT to survive, flourish and grow.

For the past 5 years trustees and staff at OKMT have been investigating new premises for the Trust. In general, the average cost of renting a property is in the region of £40k to £50k per annum which would make our services unaffordable if we passed on this cost to our clients. Even taking this cost into account we have struggled to find any property that would satisfactorily meet our needs because of the varied and complex conditions of many of our clients. For example, we need safe parking, full wheelchair accessibility throughout, the ability to run more than one session concurrently and to be able to manage noise levels and not disturb other tenants. We also need storage for our musical instruments and a suitable setting for a grand piano which was donated to us.

To date our contact with local councillors – Cllr Clare Head and more recently Cllr Geoff Acton and Cllr Nancy Baldwin – have shown us that unused council buildings are being kept for commercial sale and after multiple attempts, we have decided this

is not a route to investigate further. Our commercial property searches with Snellers Commercial, Levene, Cattaneo Commercial, Michael Rogers, Featherstone Leigh, Milestone Residential and Martin Campbell have not been successful (despite many visits to possible buildings).

Why this proposal is so compelling?

The Marble Hill Playcentres Hub is a custom-built structure for everyone's needs. The plans proposed provide OKMT with space for four/five music therapy studio/OK Music School lesson spaces and one larger shared space for our OK Music School band practices, OK Youth Choir rehearsals and music therapy workshops. The space available would enable us to grow in size and work with all of the children on our Music School waiting list. We hope that by 2021 we would be able to work with approximately 200 clients per week at the new Hub.

It would provide good accessibility for all our clients, particularly those who come in a wheelchair (c. 5% of the total amount of our clients). It would also provide us with office and meeting space. Having a waiting area for parents and carers would also help reduce feelings of isolation, as in the communal space they could meet and chat to others. Its location in the borough is ideal and the parking and public transport access perfect for our users. Our noise making has been taken into consideration and we would not disturb other organisations and neighbours.

We feel we match very well with the other two charities that we would be sharing the Hub with. We have significant overlaps with clients we work with. In fact, we have been running a joint project, Music Club, with Skylarks for 13 years. These are small group sessions for children with disabilities and their siblings to help them interact with others, communicate and develop creativity. This activity would now take place at the new Centre without the need for transporting heavy djembe drums, keyboards and other instruments.

APPENDIX

Case Studies from Music Therapy sessions:

A is a 7-year-old girl, who was unable to communicate verbally. During sessions she would play, tap and wait for response, and make increased eye contact. She then was able to make choices with picture symbols, which progressed from pointing to vocalising or verbalising. She began to interact more with the therapist and repeat back phrases. Her mother reports she is saying words outside of the sessions now.

F is a 6-year-old boy with Autism and ADHD. He was scared of new things, cried when he first came in, but when the therapist played the piano he stopped and listened. He then started to love the sessions, running to get in. At first, he would not respond verbally, but gradually began to respond and was able to sing about his feelings. His communication skills progressed massively, and his parents are seeking avenues to continue the music therapy sessions.

G is a 9-year-old boy who suffers stress and anxiety leading to defiant behaviour due to early traumatic events. At the music therapy sessions, he was able to make connections between music and emotions and gradually became confident to express himself freely. He used songwriting to explore more "scary" feelings and events. He is motivated and proud of what he has written. G has used music and song writing to explore events to help him deal with his early trauma. This is highly valued by both the school and parents, and they now incorporate musical strategies to support him on more difficult days.

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Information about Music Club:

Around 65 children attend Music Club each year. At small group sessions, held at Skylarks, children are encouraged to develop essential non-verbal communication such as turn taking, eye contact, awareness of self and others. They are helped to learn to listen, focus and follow instructions. The group is continually helping to improve emotional well-being and confidence. One part of the session is to learn to stop and start whilst playing an instrument. Some non-verbal children have gone on to say 'stop' and 'start' in a session and verbalise them in other situations.

Music Club quotes:

"It is child-led which is fantastic – the therapist responds to their needs, and how they want to participate and respond during the session."

"It is a small group activity which gives one to one time for each child which is what our son needs. The sessions are not too fast allowing everyone to participate."

"He is really good at waiting for his turn now and listening and following instructions."

"Our son just loves the whole session and asks to come each week."

"He takes great pleasure from the sounds that he hears. He likes to move his hands to the lights that are projected on to the walls and loves it when the therapist says 'pause' and everything stops."

"After a music session he always seems in a brilliant mood. The therapist is able to adapt to each individual's needs. It has shown us how much he enjoys music, and that we can use it at home too."

Information about OK Music School:

OK Music School uses specialist teaching techniques suitable for children and young people with additional needs to learn the basics of playing music. It has been highly successful with 2 public concerts each year where more than 40 pupils perform. Pupils have previously performed with Richmond Orchestra, at Langdon Down Centre, and at community fundraising events such as our 2018 Music Marathon. These community performances help to encourage inclusivity and diversity and change public attitudes. 15 pupils have even passed Royal School of Music exams. Pupils gain confidence, communication skills, focus, self-esteem and pride. Their isolation is reduced, and they make friends with peers. Our specific aims for children and young people coming to our OK Music School are to:

- Improve their emotional well-being
- Increase their confidence and pride
- Improve their communication and listening skills
- Reduce their social isolation and help them make friends
- Help them feel part of the community as they perform in public with others
- Encourage inclusivity and diversity and help change public attitudes about disability

Quotes from Music School:

Pupils:

"It makes me feel good about myself - I can do something well!"

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"I love music because it gives me confidence and it takes me away from the pressures of real life. I make more friends here than anywhere else."

Parents:

"E has blossomed, she had very low self-esteem when we started as she was unable to attend school due to her severe anxieties. It has been a Godsend for her mental health."

"Being part of the Christmas concert is really a very special feeling. To see what children with special needs are capable of is brilliant and should be celebrated!"

Case studies from Music School:

K:

K is globally developmentally delayed having been born with ventriculomegaly and hydrocephalus, with limited vision and moderate hearing loss. She started at Music Club when she was 1, and after one year finally struck her first note on the keyboard. 3 years later, K joined OK Music School, she can now play with 2 hands and find notes on the keyboard. She has performed with the therapist at several of our public concerts. Her mother said:

"She is a much more confident child - it is an amazing transformation! Music School has helped her express herself and interact with others. It has greatly enhanced her quality of life"

S:

S is 10 years old and started receiving music therapy at 3 years old. She has a genetic condition called Williams Syndrome which causes global developmental delay. When she was born she didn't have a voice and when we first met her at 3 years old, she was barely able to speak. We helped her learn to speak by using the song Twinkle Twinkle Little Star, as one of a number of therapeutic techniques.

When she was 5, S joined OK Music School. She has gained a lot of confidence as a result and is unstoppably enthusiastic in her singing. She loves performing in our concerts and has sung on the BBC and for the Mayor of LBRuT, and recently was overjoyed to pass her Grade 1 Singing exam.

G:

G is aged 8 and has autism. Since he joined OK Music School he has shown great focus. He is learning piano and has learnt to read music and has played his own compositions as duets with the therapist. The therapist also encouraged G to use his voice to sing with power and he is now a confident singer, who recently passed his Grade 1 singing exam. As G himself says,

"Music makes me smile and makes me feel happy"

He has also turned his talent for music to art and had two exhibitions featuring his paintings of SpongeBob SquarePants! His mother is so proud that G has found his talent and that it makes him so happy.