Hi, I am Rosie Dempsey and I'm the Deputy Lead for the Children, Young People, Families and Education team at RNIB.

Music therapy is an allied health profession, similar to speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, or physiotherapy. And it really is a medium for children to develop their skills, whether those are cognitive skills, physical skills, emotional skills, or communication skills. Music therapy can be a way of helping them to do that.

We found from engaging music therapy services in the past, that they've made a very positive impact for children, young people, and families, where the child has a vision impairment and complex needs.

Hi, My name is Shane and I'm a music therapist and music therapists are trained and fully qualified health care professionals that work with a great variety of patient populations.

So I, myself, have been working as a music therapist with the RNIB since 2012 to help children with visual impairment and complex needs.

On referral to music therapy and on meeting the child, usually over three sessions, we do an assessment and then at the end of the assessment, we'll set goals to help address the child's needs. And for a child with sight loss, typical music therapy goals can include improving their communication, developing their physical skills, enhancing concentration, and supporting skills of interaction and emotional wellbeing.

As an example, for a child at a certain stage of their development, who may not have developed speech, music can provide a successful means of encouraging the child to express their own voice and explore it.

(guitar playing)

So making music together with the child, that can create quite an enjoyable and natural space where the child, over

time, can feel confident to begin to express themselves vocally.

"More"

"More"

In the past, I have also worked with speech and language therapists, and in one instance with the child, the speech and language therapist's focus was encouraging the child to improve their articulation.

And this is through working on drilling specific sounds. This is work that can be quite repetitive in nature. With the speech and language therapist, I collaborated in creating a song which framed the sounds and we found that through the song, the child's engagement with the task

of drilling their sounds greatly improved.

"Aaron. Aaron. Welcome to music, it's music time."

So this an example of how the melody, rhythm, and harmony of music can bring much needed variety to a process where there's a lot of repetition and it can make it motivational and enjoyable in helping a child reach their communication goals. In terms of length of interventions, in my experience, each intervention is unique to the individual needs of every child and every child is different.

My name's Lisa and my husband's John, and we have a daughter called Rebecca and Aaron, who has down syndrome. When Aaron was born, he was taken immediately to neonatal and my husband went up to check and see how things were and we were told then that he had cataracts.

We actually didn't understand how much his sight would even have an impact on his physical development. You know, down syndrome is one thing, low muscle tone, but his sight also has an impact.

So we didn't really understand when we were going to physio and stuff, the other children were just sailing along and physically coming along amazingly where Aaron just didn't seem to want to cooperate. And it was only, we were watching Children In Need one day. And we seen Angel Eyes and it was the in tune music session, and I remember thinking, God, Aaron would love something like that. You know, I never knew it even existed.

So I contacted them and then the next day, we were invited along to the time to play. And that's when we met Charlene from RNIB. We were lucky enough to avail of music therapy from Shane Harvey.

Shane came out to the home and did ten sessions with Aaron and at that stage, Aaron wasn't really properly crawling yet. You know, his wee tone was so low and knowing now, what I know now, you know, the developmental difference, you know, from a child with down syndrome to a child with down syndrome and visual impairments. So just all those sensory needs together really had an impact on his physical development.

What Shane did was he got in touch with physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech and language. He got in contact with them all, asked what their goals were, what they wanted for Aaron, and he worked on every single goal. So by the end of the ten weeks, Shane had Aaron crawling properly. He had him cruising the furniture.

He had him signing, I'm going to cry, sorry, I get emotional. He had him signing, he had him responding to the music. You know, it was just, it was amazing, like, it was definitely what we needed.

“Good boy”.

(guitar strumming)

Through the EA, we're trying to get Aaron music therapy. He was initially turned down. He was turned down for a reassessment of his needs, for his statement does not meet his needs at all.

The school do, don't get me wrong, but if he was to suddenly move school, or a new teacher was to come in, his statement doesn't reflect really who he is. So we have been getting help from Angel Eyes from Karen.

Karen has come along to Aaron's parents meetings and his IEP meetings to try and be a voice for us and try and support us, she's been supporting us with the EA to try and get him the music therapy.

So it's ongoing at the minute, but without her advice and her support, and even her going through his statement with a fine tooth comb, I wouldn't have understood, you know, fully, how much his statement didn't meet his needs.

Only for Angel Eyes and RNIB to bring that up and say, you know, why don't you try and get music therapy, you know, try and get it as part of his education plan, which I do feel it should be available.It speaks for itself how amazing it is. I've worked in both mainstream school and special school settings as a music therapist.

For me, I definitely think there is scope for music therapy to play a positive role in the education setting, as well as working alongside other allied healthcare professions music therapists, could work alongside educators to enhance the child's overall learning experience.

My name is Karen Wilson and I'm the education advocate in Family Insight Project. We know that early intervention is really important for children. To date very few children have music therapy as part of the provision within their statement for SEN. That is something for the future that we would like to see changed. We know it is possible.

We know the therapies out there, we know the research to back it up for educational progress is there. So it's just a case of hopefully moving forward with this and seeing a change. Transdisciplinary working is extremely important.

We know through the Children's Co Operation Service Act, that voluntary organisations, as well as statutory bodies, it is important for them all to come together and work collaboratively for the better outcome of the child.

Quite often, the voluntary org can be the expert in certain specific niche areas. So for us to be able to work along with schools, it really is for the better outcome of the child, helping make that link between home and school.

And also, it allows us to use the resources that we have to support the resources that they have. The current landscape of music therapy in Northern Ireland is quite inconsistent. And the reason for that is that there's a lack of awareness about the role that music therapy can play in the health service.

As a consequence of that, it means that services aren't always commissioned and funded for music therapy. And that in turn means that music therapists can't share the good outcomes that they have for the children and young people that they support.

We also note that there isn't a music therapy training course in Northern Ireland, which means that there could be difficulty in bringing people into the profession.

We would like to see music therapy recognised as a profession within the mainstream health service and subsequently funded as part of that service.

That would mean that multidisciplinary teams could open up to music therapists, joining them and adding to the good outcomes that there are for families in education and health.

Funded by the National Lottery Community Fund.

Family Insight is a five-year project led by RNIB, Northern Ireland, working in partnership with Angel Eyes NI.

Supporting families in living and learning.