

Singapore

Ng Wang Feng,

MMT, MT-BC

Music Therapist
Singapore

Snapshot

Area

710,3 square kilometers (Statistics Singapore, 2009)

Population

4,987,600 (Statistics Singapore, 2009)

Official Language

English, Chinese, Malay, Tamil (Statistics Singapore, 2000)

Ethnic Groups

74.2% Chinese, 13.4% Malay, 9.2% Indian, Others 3.2% (Statistics Singapore, 2009)

Median Age

36.9 years old (Statistics Singapore, 2009)

Children under 5

4% (UNICEF, 2009)

Source

See References



**"I like to sing Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star"
– My Client**

Demographics

Since the 1980s, music therapists in Singapore have traditionally served at voluntary welfare organizations (VWOs) aimed at helping children with special needs. Children under the age of five (attending special education programs) have thus benefited from music therapy, albeit at only a few facilities over the past three decades, due to the lack of trained professionals. In 2010, out of the twelve music therapists based in Singapore, six (50%) serve children under the age of 5. One continues to serve at an early intervention center. The other five are based at hospitals or centers which cater to a range of clients, including children with special needs, with those under five years old making up a portion of their total caseload. With the introduction of a locally-based accredited training program in 2011, we hope to have a larger pool of music therapists working in Singapore in the future.

Background Information

In Singapore, children enter primary school the year they turn seven. Kindergartens and childcare center cater to the education and development of children under seven. The two government bodies involved are the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the Ministry of Community

Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS). Kindergartens are registered with the MOE while childcare centers are licensed by the MCYS (Ministry of Education, 2010). The MCYS has increased subsidies for center-based infant- and childcare (Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports, n.d.). The MCYS has advocated for higher quality early childhood education by raising minimum academic and professional qualifications for all new childcare center supervisors and child care teachers, and awarding scholarships to child care teachers to pursue degrees and diplomas in early childhood education in 2009 (Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports, March 10, 2010).

Music therapy services have only been provided for targeted children with special needs who are enrolled in special education programs at schools for children with Special Needs, early intervention programs, and private businesses. At programs run by VWOs, funding for music therapy services may come from MOE, MCYS and donations channeled from the National Council of Social Services' fundraising arm: The Community Chest of Singapore. The VWOs also get financial support and donations from corporations and the public. Service provision in private settings has not been sustained in general, largely due to the scarcity of free-lance professionals working with this population.

The Singapore Ministry of Health (MOH) recently published the *Academy of Medicine, Singapore (AMS)-MOH Clinical Practice Guidelines for Pre-School Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders*. This document concluded that “Music therapy is not recommended in the *routine management* [italics added] of children with ASD because of inconclusive evidence” (Ministry of Health, March, 2010, p. 71). Its review of literature included eight published sources, including a Cochrane review, and one article from the *Journal of Music Therapy*. As music therapy is hardly a “routine,” one-size-fits-all treatment modality, this recommendation (or lack thereof) may lead to reduced funding for music therapy services at organizations serving young children with ASD. At the time of this writing, the Association for Music Therapy (Singapore) (AMTS) is drafting a response to the Ministry of Health to clarify and educate this body about music therapy. AMTS continues to raise awareness of music therapy in the country.

Common Approaches

Approaches used by music therapists often depend on their training. Behavioral, client-centered, eclectic, and psychodynamic, as well as improvisation-based, interactive and experiential practices are widely used in the music therapy treatment process. In special education settings, music therapists have incorporated the curriculum (as adapted by the facility) in their therapy work, e.g. the Treatment and Education of Autistic and Communication Handicapped Children (TEACCH) model, the Assessment, Evaluation, and Programming System (AEPS), and related methods, such as the Picture Exchange Communication

System (PECS) and Augmentative Alternative Communication (AAC).

Prominent Publications

- Cheng, L. S. C. (1989). Music therapy in action: A case study of a brain-damaged teenager. *Singapore Journal of Education*, 10, 2, 77-85.
- Ruyters-Lim, A. (1997). Music therapy. In K. Lyen, E. H. Lee & J. S. Y. Tham-Toh, (Eds.), *Rainbow dreams: How to help your child with developmental delay* (pp. 266-284). Singapore: Armour Publishing Pte Ltd.

Visit the Blog of the of the Association for Music Therapy (Singapore) at <http://singaporemusictherapy.wordpress.com>



About the Author

Ng Wang Feng has worked in Singapore as a music therapist since 2005. Her focus has been with children and youth with special needs, at-risk youth, and more recently, individuals with muscular dystrophy. She also has been teaching music therapy electives at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts since 2006. She is the founding President of the Association for Music Therapy (Singapore), established in 2007.

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