

Sensory Ways of Being: stories of connection with young adults who don't use spoken words

The Prince and Princess of Wales Hospice currently serves a population of 36 Young Adults with life-limiting complex who have neurological and genetic conditions. Many of this group communicate in rich and unique ways that are not based in spoken language nor are they language-bound. They participate in weekly immersive sensory and music-based sessions at our Young Adult Living Well Hub.



We wondered, how can we support this group to express their 'stories'? How can we create the best conditions for stories set free from words to emerge and unfold?

We engaged with the senses to support creative autonomy. 2-1 immersive sensory sessions included: field recordings, deep-listening, breath and vocal sounds, projected light and shadows, textured objects, movement.



We developed and adapted music therapy activities. Music based sessions included: exploring sound through play, movement, tempo and dynamics, vocalisation, choice boards, 'this is my sound' songwriting techniques.



We learned the value of listening to the richness of our sensory world - unhindered by spoken words. We realised people don't know enough about the lived experience of young people with life-limiting illness who communicate so richly yet don't use spoken language. We realised the necessity of supporting the creative autonomy of this group more widely.



How can we challenge unconscious ableism, make our interactions more equitable and inclusive, and connect with people who communicate clearly, unrestricted by spoken language.



"He loves the light & the noises. It's great the way the artists work around his preferences to do what he likes. I always hear laughter coming from the room, which is great." parent of young adult



"I was brought to tears seeing the young people's reactions. Each engaged in different ways & Calum led the session adapting to each individual's needs. It truly was magical. Our son really enjoys these sessions." parent of young adult

"They appeared engaged from the outset, opening their mouth fully in vibrated silence. Strong eye contact and connection. Slow blinking & relaxed body posture. Their gaze moving towards & between the sounds, the movement, & the visual elements. Expressive face, wide smiles, emotional eyes." extract from notes made by artists



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Abstract



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