

**TITLE OF THESIS:** DO YOU HEAR THE PEOPLE SING?

THE IMPACT OF A COMMUNITY CHOIR IN A FORENSIC SETTING

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Professional Doctorate of Health Sciences, Queen Margaret University*

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This study considers the health benefits that may be experienced by patients and staff in a medium secure forensic setting when singing in a choir. It also investigates how shared participation in choral experiences might influence the relationships between patients and staff. In addition, framed within the context of Community Music Therapy (Pavlicevic and Ansdell 2004; Stige et al. 2010; Stige and Aarø 2012), this study explores how – and to what extent – the researcher’s identity as a music therapist may be altered as a result of including a community-based approach to his work in addition to a clinically-oriented model.

The investigation was undertaken throughout a six-month period in which weekly rehearsals comprising up to eight patients and six members of staff were held; a short performance was arranged at the culmination of the project. Whilst studies exploring the use of choral singing in music therapy for people with chronic mental illness have been undertaken (Eyre 2011), there would appear to be a dearth of literature specifically investigating the potential benefits of this intervention with patients in a medium secure forensic setting. A qualitative methodological stance was adopted. Data were collected and analysed using Participatory Action Research (Stige 2005a; Elefant 2010) and key principles of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967).

Findings suggest that people may experience overall feelings of wellbeing such as enjoyment, warm-heartedness, excitement and fun as well as an increased awareness of posture and breathing. A sense of belonging, hope and contributing to a group may similarly be felt. In addition, opportunities for learning are provided and a sense of empathy towards others may be fostered. The results also suggest that shared participation in choral experiences can positively influence the relationships between patients and staff through feelings of benevolence for each other, a removal of boundaries and a deeper realisation of being a person in one’s own right. Finally, results indicate that the researcher’s identity as a music therapist is altered through the inclusion of a more didactic approach, a conscious working towards musical outcomes and a heightened sensitivity regarding the needs and abilities of service-providers as well as service-users.

**Keywords:** *Community music therapy, choral singing, forensic, medium secure, health, wellbeing.*