

Interventional highlights for children with disabilities and their families

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Abstract: *The family, the social group “whose members are related through ratios of age, marriage or adoption and live together, cooperate under the economic report and take care of their children” (Chişea, 2000), is the most important institution in every society, from the ancient till our days.*

he family, in Romania, is one of the most important institution for the good existence of the society, in general, as well of each person, both being in relationship and influenced one from another. From the functionalist point of view, family has very important roles, being a very significant factor in every country, the importance of his existence and functionality being many times observed in crisis situations or when one of his member has a special problem or need. In children with special needs cases, family has a major importance, family being influenced by the children’s problems, on the mental, emotional, economic and social plane, and, at the same time, remaining the only or the most important support for their children.

That is why it is very useful to identify some strategies to improve children with special needs and their families’ situations, with therapeutically methods, as music, dance and movement ones, the results being much more improved, and, at the same time, the implication of the family helping the growth of their subjective and objective well-being.

We want to highlight the benefits of some different methods of therapy using music and movement for children with special needs and their families, as methods for developing the individual and family’s well-being, the subjective and the objective one.

Keywords: *children with special needs, families, subjective well –being, objective well-being, quality of life, music therapy, dance and movement therapy.*

1. Introduction

Wellbeing a good life, with good conditions and a positive perspective of it has always been a demanding goal of humanity. Today, more and more people, common ones and specialists, fights for a better life, better conditions for every human being, especially for children and their families, even it is very difficult to obtain it for more than a minority and even harder to sustain it.

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Children with difficulties, with health problems, medical disorders, disabilities and their families have some specific needs, the economical, mental and social support being very important for their life. It is very important, referring at this category of people, to talk about this kind of support, the social one. This category of children have special needs and they have to be sustained in all aspects of life. Their problems affects the members of their families, too, in all aspects of their existence. Family is very important, being, in most of the cases, the only support for these children, and, at the same time, the most affected one by their problems.

Speaking of intervention and supporting children with special needs, we can mention different type of them, from the individual one, to family, community and society. All of them are very important and affects the quality of this children's life, their subjective and objective well-being.

The profile of children with disabilities is changing all over the world, their needs too, and the difficulties of families with a disabled child are severe, unfortunately. This situation can be improved, including in our country, if the governmental and non-governmental health and social services will be improved, to give them better support.

Many of families with disabled children have major problems, most of them been described as "the poorest of the poor" (Prescott-Allen, 2001). These families have specific constrained financial circumstances to meet costs sustaining the special needs of their disabled child, in many cases several times more than supporting a non-disabled one.

The child with special needs has multiple appointments with healthcare professionals, which can affect parents' ability to work. At the same time, especially mothers with disabled children are much less likely to have paid employment than others mothers. Many of families with children with special needs are dependent on reliant on benefits.

Parents and members of disabled children families have higher levels of stress and lower levels of wellbeing than the one of the non-disabled children. All of their problems, mental, physical, emotional and behavior ones, influence levels of these families stress, many parents being affected by them.

The social support is very important in these cases; disabled children and their families often need living in suitable housing and having appropriate equipment to assist with activities of daily living, suitable local leisure facilities and accessible transport, not to face hostile attitudes of staff and members of the public, special interventional programs which can improve their medical and emotional situation. All of these kind of support are very important for their well-being and can be offered by the governmental and non-governmental institutes, even in our country. Psychological interventions are one of the most important kind of strategies that can improve the disabled children and their families' situation, influencing their subjective and objective well-being. In these area, it is very important that social and community major factors to support these children and their families access to this

type of intervention, from the information about these kind of services to offering the financial support, where it is necessary and all of kind of support they need.

It is very important for a child with special needs and his family to be involved in this type of interventions, which can improve their situation and can give them a real support for understanding, facing and, in some cases, improving their states.

Music therapy, the science of using music to improve the mental, emotional and physical states of children, is today more and more used for children with disabilities or special needs, obtaining encouraging results in all levels harmonization, some physical and emotional trauma deblocation, reducing stress and anxiety. More and more specialists, psychologists, therapists and pedagogues, use today this kind of therapy, as well as dance and movement therapy successfully, even in our country, as a self-one or a part in a bigger intervention. It is very important that this is a natural intervention, soft but with important beneficial results for children and their families.

For state and non-governmental institutions is crucial to offer the supports, economical and technological, so that children with special needs and their families can have the access to these kind of interventions. They are not very expensive, but it is very important to involve very good specialists and support, because the obtained results are beneficial and can improve these people well- being (Sloper, 2006).

Even it is a new area, it is very important that we can work directly with the body and the emotions of children and the members of their families, because in that way we can have direct access to their subconstient and all of the baggage kept there, this one being very important for the therapeutically work, allowing specialists to access not only the mental level, children being capable to remodelate directly different mental, emotional or physical aspects of them, facing their problems and receiving solutions not from imagination, but from their reactions and feelings.

A lot of specialists, even in our country, discuss about certain evidences and measurements for attesting the beneficial influences of musical and movements therapies, so they can be used as scientifically methods for recuperation and sustaining children with special needs and their families.

It is very important to point out this kind of interventions can be made only with the children, as well as with their members of families. These therapies are more effective when they are made with some members of the families, not only with the children in case. That is why it is very important for them to have the economic and social support so they can be involved in such programs.

From the medicine mind-body perspective, some musical frequencies can be used to redirecting and transform energies from one part of the body to another, deblocating and healing some parts of the people, maybe inaccessible in other way. Other than smell, music is the most quickly method of the mind restart, in a natural way, without any medication, with immediate effects.

On the other hand, we can notice music, dance and body therapies, manifests in the last decades a very powerful developing tendency, obtaining significant results, the most important aspect being the fact they work directly with our bodies, with the body modelation, expressing different emotions and vision of life, like the metaphors.

Like other children with disabilities, the one with autism have very special difficulties to integrate and related with the others, from their families to all the people around them. Sometimes, it is very difficult to understand and be in contact with these children, but music can be a very successful way to do this. The structured musical activities, some movements and improvisations with music and dance or the uses of instruments can be very effective to develop abilities to these children, especially for the improvement of their capacity to listening and paying attention, for their capacity of non-verbal communication-which is a very important one especially at these children, as well as for their abilities of communicate in general, their self-confidence, for their social accommodation and integration, their capacity to face the world and to express themselves.

In many cases, music is used as a better way of communicating with these children, who are very sensitive and need to be understand and related in a special way.

I used music and movement therapy with several children with autism, to prove the power of these kind of interventions and to demonstrate the needs that social institutions give them and their families all the supports they need to take part in such programs.

2. Case study

V. is a 10 years old boy, with autism. He has, fortunately, a family which support and understand him, parents and a 12 years old sister. He has been integrated in a complex psychological program two years ago, and in the last six month in a therapy with music and movement.

His evolution is a positive one, and we noticed very good results in his cognitive, emotional and relational development, as well in his motricity abilities.

Now, V. is implicated in sessions of speech therapy, psychical and psychological sessions, and therapy with music, dance and movement. It is very important to notice from the beginning that V. has a family which understand, support, want and have the economic resources for all of these interventions which can improve his medical conditions and can facilitate reaching at a good well-being state. Parents want their son can be involved in all kind of programs to help his situation, they are involved in a non-governmental organization in Brasov which offer support for children with disabilities, especially with autism, and their families. This case is an example on how good strategies, together with a good family, social,

economic and organizations' support can contribute to raise the objective and subjective well-being in an autism children case.

About his medical condition, this case was a difficult one for a year, because he was diagnosticated with neurodegenerative problems, epilepsy, mental retard and autism, the last one being confirmed and proved by all the medical and psychological tests.

2.1. Musical and movement therapy sessions

These sessions began six months ago, two sessions beginning with 10-15 minutes each, one only with the boy and one together with his family, sometimes only with one member and sometimes with all. The benefits were bigger because of this strategy, the support and communication with the other members of the family being a very good start for developing self-confidence, integration and social skills.

Now the sessions last for about one hour, which is a very good progress for us, as specialists, but, the most important, for the boy and his family. The boy can be more careful at his and other's needs, which is a very important step for his social integration and communication, is more relaxed, his sleep is improved after all of these sessions and he is happy to take part at these kind of intervention. It is a big step for him, this boy being before this therapy very agitated and sometimes having convulsive episodes, which are more rarely now, after all these sessions with music and movement. In all of the sessions, we use therapy with music and movement together with a psychologist, who can have interventions when it is necessary and can pay attention and notice all the major progress or important aspects that can appear.

2.2. Methods

We used in almost all sessions musical instruments, especially percussion ones, being known they have the most beneficial results in autism interventions (in this case we used maracas, bells, different type of drums), to obtain a constant and progressive development). All of these instruments helped V. to reestablish a good contact with the reality, the therapists and with the other members of his family, they forced his brain to explore as much as he could and in that way, the boy developed different important abilities.

At the same time, we used the voice in a creative way and in all kind of improvising exercises, to stimulate emotional reacts and answers, to encourage the boy to express himself and for words articulation and pronunciation. In that way, V began to have a visual contact with everyone involved in the exercises, and, very important, with the specialists, who were strange persons for him at the beginning, beginning a non-verbal interaction with us. In the last 5 sessions, he began to use his voice for expressing his feelings and emotions, which is a very good acquisition for him and everybody.

After the movement sessions, in which we used some specific exercises for coordination and equilibrium, V achieved and improved his capacity of coordinating his movements in a more fluent manner. Even so, the child still has some special emotional moods during the sessions, which makes the therapeutically intervention difficult. Of course it is very important for everybody to continue the interventions, to point out the benefits and to insist in a way which proved its benefits.

The sessions begins, almost in all cases, with a welcome song which makes V to be aware of the musical session's beginning and all the activities involved in it—playing with instruments and singing with the voice. This is very important, because in that way we can obtain and sustain an interaction, which was difficult at the beginning. Another relevant aspect is that during the session, the boy can rest and have moments of himself, he even can not to take part for the session, for a period of time, if he feels so. We noticed that this strategy is very important, because the boy needs sometimes to be alone and we do not want to force him, but only to help him and create a feeling of security and true support. It was very interesting to notice the boy involved by himself in some moments of sessions in which he was not forced to do that, when we worked only with other members of his family or, in single sessions, we sang a song or played at an instrument. That was another proof of his implication and of the benefits of using music in this kind of interventions. The most important aspect of the therapy, we think, is this kind of relationship we could developed using music, dance and movement, based on confidence, love and respect.

Specialists are not specialists, family is not only a family, music and dance are not only music and dance, everyone and everything is there for him, a little boy who wants to express himself, to be understand and to understand, to be loved and accepted. We noticed all the progress were made with that kind of attitude and this is a very important aspect in all human, individual and social communication and interactions.

We used familiar songs for the boy, so he can express himself, some little songs from Bossinger therapy, especially when we worked with the other members of his family, so we encouraged the boy expressing himself, discovering and externalizing his emotions, on a hand, and to harmonize and to consolidate his relations with the others. We build in that way some musical and dance skills for the boy, in a safe place for exploration, and in that way, using songs, body percussion, drumming and rhythmic movements, we supported some important emotional, mental, individual and social achievements for the boy.

We noticed all the progress V. made during these session, in a scientifically way, using observation, questionnaire, and interviews with the boy and his family. We applied to the boy an questionnaire with 50 items at the beginning and the end of this period of interventions, and we noticed some encouraging results, such as: an increasing result at attention (20%), social behavior (13%), focusing (15%), non-verbal communication (25%), verbal communication (10%), using instruments for

communication (30%), using his voice for interaction (15%), integration and relationating with others (13%), self-confidence(12%).

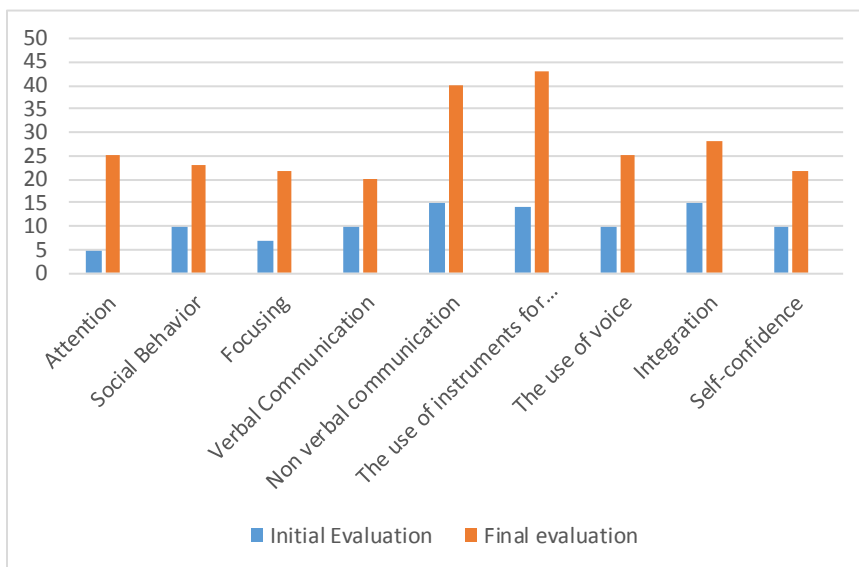


Table 1. *General behavior evaluation*

2.3. Limits of the study and suggestions

Of course, this study has a lot of limits, beginning with the short period of time in which it was realized, the limited experience of the therapist in musical and movement intervention, but it is very important for us to sustain the benefits of these kind of interventional strategies, as a support for children with special needs, in our case with autism, and for the family involved. It is a way of improving the well-being state of these children and can be encouraged in more cases, helping children and people with real problems to achieve better conditions for their lives.

3. A therapeutically research on children with special needs

Using same therapeutically methods of therapy with music and movement, we made a research on a lot of 35 children with special needs ,for three months, 5-15 years old, 10 from rural and 25 from urban. We cannot use the results to make scientifically valid prediction and explanations about the situation of children with autism in our country and the strategies we can use for improving their mental,

emotional, social situation. The only reason we made the research was to obtain some results which can prove the benefits of these kind of intervention, using music and dance.

The hypothesis from where we started the research was that therapy with music and movement can improve many aspects of these children and their families' lives, increasing their quality of life, in that way their subjective and objective well-being.

We used observation, interviews and questionnaire with the children and their families and we can say our hypothesis was validated, in all cases the therapeutically method using music and movement bringing major benefits for the quality of life of the children involved in the study and their families.

We used some sociological indicators, such as socio-demographic structure (masculine gender 57% and feminine 43%), the access at education (75% integrated in a form of formal education, 25 % non-integrated), the access at social services (45% with access and using social services, 15% with access but without to use them, 40% without access), the financial situation of the families, the communication and social skills and integration. In all cases, we obtained a positive significant correlation between the use of music and dance therapy and some new achieves and skills developed at these children, which can improve their well-being, mental, medical, emotional and social functioning.

We used, for example, an 60 items questionnaire, whose most important results are: the increasing of self-confidence with 15%, capacity of verbal communication with 10%, of non-verbal communication with 25%, social skills with 13%, desire of integration with 20%, better relationship with other members of their families with 30%, with strange people with 15 %, focusing with 15% and attention with 23%.

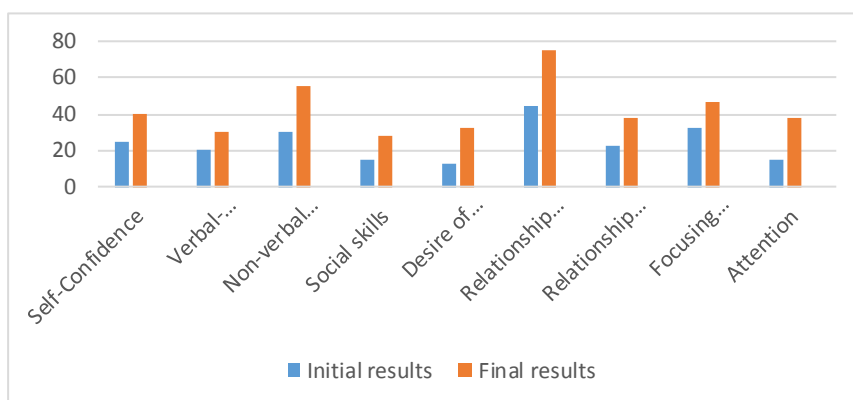


Table 2. General individual and social skills progress at children with special needs

4. Conclusions and recommendations

Therapy with music, dance and movement, as our study and research proved, is very efficient for children with disabilities and their families and can be used with many benefits in this cases, and that is why, is one important strategy we can use with success for development of a high subjective and objective well-being of these children and their families 'members, in our country too.

Of course, it is very important for the specialist to come with certain scientifically researches, but, at the same time, it is crucial the state and non-governmental organizations to give these families all the support they need to have the access to all of these services.

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