



August 2026

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From the Chair

Tēnā tātou katoa

We are well into our countdown for our conference and AGM on 13 September in Auckland. It's great to see some many people interested in attending and which reflects well on the speaker lineup.



Image description: Profile picture
Stephen Guerin

We will have a new Board from the close of the AGM. I want to thank the outgoing Board, noting this represents a passing of the baton for our President, Linda Webb, and Rachel Austin as they have reached their maximum term. Other Board members retiring to focus on other commitments are Alison Talmage (who is taking up the reins as the Australasian Regional Representative on the World Federation of Music Therapy), Ella Polczyk and Sinead Hegarty. Our deep thanks go to all of the outgoing Board re their commitments to the governance of Music Therapy NZ.

It was great to see a number of our members attending and contributing to WFMT Congress in July and flying the flag for New Zealand.

I look forward to seeing many of you at conference.

Ngā mihi nui

Regards
Stephen Guerin

From the President

It has been an honour to be the President of MThNZ for six years and to work within teams of such dedicated people. It certainly is time to pass the baton on and I will remain available to support special projects as invited to do so. With the exciting addition of new Board members this organisation is well placed to continue to move positively into the future.



Image description: Profile picture
Linda Webb MNZM

Kindest regards to all

Linda Webb MNZM
MThNZ President





Image description: Music Therapy Te Poutama Hononga | Weaving Connections logo

Countdown to Conference 2026

Excitement is building for the 2026 Music Therapy New Zealand Conference September 12/13 at Waipapa Taumata Rau | University of Auckland. There's still time to register, here:

<https://events.humanitix.com/mthnz-conference-2026>

Join us for two full days of presentations and workshops showcasing the diversity of music therapy practice and research in Aotearoa and beyond. The Conference theme, Te Poutama Hononga: Weaving Connections, celebrates the art of weaving together people, stories, and music, creating patterns of understanding, and community. Both days feature inspirational keynote presentations: on Saturday, Katie Pureti (NZ RMTh, MMusTher, BMus, ATL) and Jan McConnell (MAAT, DTAA (Prof), ANZACATA, PNZ) will speak on Mauri Tui Tuia Creative Therapies New Zealand; on Sunday, Dr Waireti Roestenburg (Ngāti Kahungunu ki Wairoa, Ngāti Pāhauwera, Rongomaiwahine, Ngāpuhi nui- tonu, Dutch, Irish, English; PhD Psychology) will speak on Taonga Ihi Orooro - Māori Sacred Sound Healing.

Further information and the full programme can be accessed here: <https://www.musictherapy.org.nz/whats-happening/music-therapy-new-zealand-conference-2026/>.

Registered attendees are also invited by the Raukatauri Music Therapy Trust to a pre-conference evening reception on Friday 11th. Raukatauri are also offering a Friday afternoon pre-conference workshop for music therapists - contact info@rmtc.org.nz for more details, or register here: <https://tinyurl.com/yz5hph5d>.

If you need any further information, please contact Pam Watson (EO): info@musictherapy.org.nz

Alison Talmage
MThNZ Board Member and
Conference Convenor



MUSIC THERAPY
Te Poutama Hononga
Weaving Connections

Music Therapy New Zealand Conference 2026

12-13 September 2026

Auckland University



Te Poutama Hononga – Weaving Connections

Honouring our past, connecting in the present, weaving our future.

Register at www.musictherapy.org.nz



Image description: Graphic showing MThNZ Conference presenters, 2026

Promote our conference on social media using this graphic, available in a variety of formats [here](#). Include a link to our website for further information: www.musictherapy.org

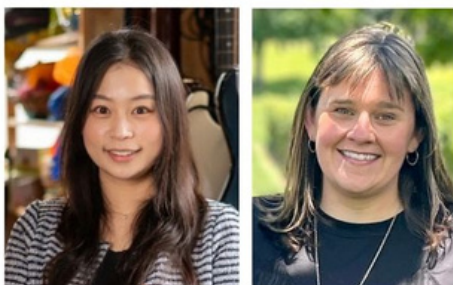


The New Zealand Journal of Music Therapy

New Zealand Journal of Music Therapy

The Editorial team of the New Zealand Journal of Music Therapy is pleased to announce the online publication of the first journal article for the 2026 edition of the Journal:

Establishing a Music Therapy Programme in a Specialist Children's Palliative Care Service in Aotearoa, New Zealand: Benefits and Challenges



Angela Jeong and Gemma Aburn

Published August 2026, vol 24 (2026)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.66180/CGGA5375>

The New Zealand Journal of Music Therapy welcomes submissions in a wide variety of genres, with submissions accepted throughout the year. Please refer to the [Journal webpage](#) for more information and to access the current Journal Guidelines: <https://www.musictherapy.org.nz/journal/>.

You are welcome to contact the editorial team for a preliminary discussion before submitting an article: journal@musictherapy.org.nz

WFMT Regional Liaison

The World Federation of Music Therapy (WFMT) held its General Business Meeting at its Congress in Bologna in July 2026. New office holders were elected, including, as President, Dr Mitsi Akoyunoglou (Greece).

The General Business meeting brings to an end Associate Professor Alison Short's term of office as Regional Liaison for Australia and New Zealand, a role that she has performed most ably. We thank Alison for her contribution in this role.

Dr Alison Talmage is the Music Therapy New Zealand and Australian Music Therapy Association's nominee for the Regional Liaison Australia / New Zealand role for the 2026 - 2029 term.



Image shows Associate Professor Alison Short



Image shows Dr Alison Talmage, MNZM

At the meeting, the WFMT adopted a new definition of music therapy:

“Music therapy is a professional discipline that uses music-based experiences, such as listening, singing, playing instruments or improvisation, to promote health, well-being, capacity, and development at a personal and social level.

It is delivered by trained professionals within a therapeutic relationship, and is an adaptable, inclusive, therapeutic modality that serves individuals, groups, and communities across clinical, educational, cultural and virtual settings.

Music therapy practice is research-based, shaped by professional education and clinical training, guided by ethical responsibility, and informed by social, cultural, and political context.”

See more about the WFMT at <https://www.wfmt.info/>

WFMT 2026 Congress, Bologna, Italy.

Kathryn's jottings

My recent travels took me to Europe, visiting cousins in Dusseldorf Germany, then on to Bologna, Italy to attend the WFMT International World Congress. After that I travelled in Italy with my sister who is currently living there. I had the most amazing time but for now will concentrate on my Congress experiences.

I cannot detail everything in this small summary, but will try to capture my overall observations and impressions, with a sprinkling of some highlights.

Three things stuck out to me at this International World Congress in Bologna, Italy.

1. The increase of technology and digitalization in therapy work
2. I felt like one of the older ones amongst the many younger professionals attending.
3. It was nice to see an increased male presence amongst the music therapists in a profession that previously seemed predominantly female.



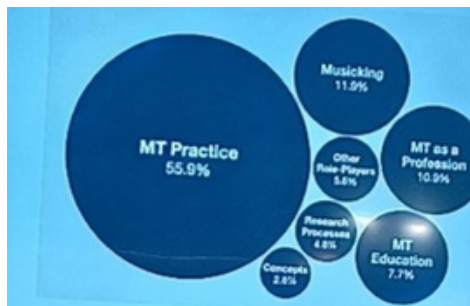
1. While I was not really surprised, it was interesting to note how many people included information about AI, digitalization, and the use of technology in their music therapy work. I know there are apps for example, that can create songs for you. You give AI a theme, words and musical style, and out comes a composed song. I personally feel this takes away from one of the many skills, that we as music therapists learn to use. I frequently do this myself without the use of an app. At the same time, if your clients are young teenagers who use garage-band on their I pads, using this technology they are very familiar with, might be more appropriate to use, than to take the (in their eyes) 'old fashioned' approach. However, this does not negate the need to learn the skills of making up impromptu songs to accompany a client's responses and needs.

2. I was definitely one of the older generation among the music therapy colleagues who attended the world Congress. I found it encouraging to see so many younger therapists attending, asking questions, and presenting. It doesn't seem that long ago that I sought out the many older/more mature music therapists I looked up to.

3 I've often viewed music therapy as being a female dominated profession much like nursing, or teaching. I saw more male therapists this time. It was encouraging for me to see so many men involved and active in music therapy.

This is partly due to the current generation seeking careers of their choice, rather than being dictated by gender.

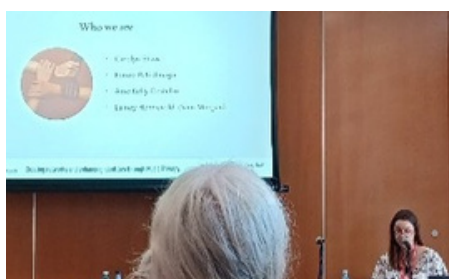
At this Congress, the choices were endless. It has to be the busiest conference I've ever attended. The first session each morning was 3 half-hour spotlight sessions in the main auditorium. For each hour after that, there were at least 12 sessions to choose from. Each oral presentation hour included three 15 minute talks plus 5 minutes for questions. Round tables, world cafés and workshops went from 1 -3 hours each. Many presenters shared details of their PhD topics, with some also including their results. It was encouraging to see so much research taking place.



I cannot remember all that I heard. A couple of presentations particularly ignited my interest. For example, research around what music therapy topics were focussed on for research. For example, MT Practice 55.9%, MT as a profession 10%, and concepts 2%. This interested me and caused me to wonder what area of MT research I might embark on.

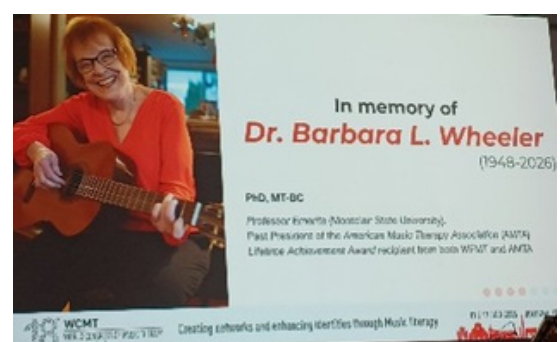
Another area that tickled my interest was around the use of AI, Chat gpt etc. As mentioned earlier, I hope AI does not take over our learned music therapist skills. I attended a few sessions on this topic. One presenter talked about what AI could do, and what it couldn't, for example, it could assist with scheduling clients' session times, summarising notes, but could not understand the intricacies of the therapeutic process. Unfortunately, I missed capturing a picture of her wonderfully descriptive last slide. Another presenter displayed the results of using AI as a tool to make a story for children, about what music therapy is.

S. Watson shared experiences of MTs in Northern Ireland, and how they went from being just a few, to now a flourishing group. He shared how they coped being a small geographical group by agreeing to put differences aside. I related to this as New Zealand can be quite insular in terms of size and location.



There were so many presentations, including from our own Kiwi colleagues. (The picture shows Carolyn Shaw presenting.)

I also noticed the people who weren't at Congress – including Barbara Wheeler, who was appropriately honoured during the opening ceremony. Ken Bruscia, Auriel Warrick. and Tony Wigram, to name a few, also noticeably absent.



Hey, we match!



Who was there. I enjoyed catching up with others we know, and meeting new people. Doug Keith is a colleague I knew from my time in New York – we hugged and he said “I thought I’d never see you again”.



I had the most amazing time and ate an Italian Gelato every day.

I’ll finish with a little story that featured on the social platform of the congress app:



Kathryn & Missy met at the opening by randomly choosing seats ending up sitting next to each other. They then discovered they had both held the same MT position at different times at Heartshare First Step Preschool, Queens, NY. What are the odds of that especially since Kathryn lives in NZ and Missy lives in Queens NY!

Kathryn Stevenson

Congratulations to our members who presented at the WFMT Congress 2026:

Carolyn Shaw; Esther Simpson; Penny Warren;
Renata Kuswanto and Hyunah Cho

How singing in a choir hits the right note for people living with brain conditions

Article published in The Conversation: August 5, 2026 12.30pm NZST



Image description: Picture showing Dr Alison Talmage and the CeleBration Choir
Image credit: Members of the CeleBration Choir, an initiative of the University of Auckland's Centre for Brain Research. Simon Young, CC BY-SA published in The Conversation

When people are first diagnosed with a brain condition, they may not consider joining a choir to improve their wellbeing and regain their voice.

But as University of Auckland research shows, there's a strong link between singing in a choir and self-reported quality of life for people with brain injuries and dementia – as high as for community choir members without communication disabilities.

The University of Auckland's Centre for Brain Research launched the CeleBration Choir almost two decades ago to help stroke survivors and adults with other brain conditions through voice exercises and singing of familiar songs.

Singing in this choir has helped people overcome difficulties with speech, language, voice and memory.

Read the full article in The Conversation here: <https://tinyurl.com/y57juemn>

Congratulations to Dr Alison Talmage on her award in the June 2026 King's Birthday Honours List as a Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit.





Music Therapy New Zealand Grants

Applications for the September round of Music Therapy New Zealand funding grants are now invited.

Applications open on the **1st September**, and close on the **1 October** 2026.

The grant application process has changed significantly from previous years and new Guidelines and forms were released earlier in the year. Applicants are advised to read the Guidelines carefully before applying.

The Guidelines can be downloaded [here](https://www.musictherapy.org.nz/grants/) or accessed on the website: <https://www.musictherapy.org.nz/grants/>

Group Music Therapy with Aim High Centre, Auckland

Supported by the Lindgren Fund through Music Therapy New Zealand, this project provided a vital lifeline for young adults who have graduated from school. For many of these individuals, some of whom live independently from their parents, opportunities for genuine social interaction and specialised therapeutic support were rare. The 60-minute group music therapy sessions at the Aim High Centre focused on a primary goal: maximising meaningful social interactions while boosting confidence, reducing anxiety, and supporting cognitive development through active music-making.

To foster connection through music-making, I introduced a vibrant collection of percussion instruments, including lollipop drums, cabasas, and handbells, alongside ribbon wands and colourful scarves for imaginative movements, such as emulating a whirling leaf while the therapist sang a song about “Falling Leaves” by Stephanie Leavell.

Initially, the challenge of addressing the diverse needs of the group required quick and adaptable changes to the environment. For example, highly percussive sounds proved overwhelming for certain clients, causing them to cover their ears. To mitigate this sensory barrier and maintain our focus on shared interaction, I substituted plastic egg shakers with softer wooden ones and changed turn-taking with various instruments to only one or two hand drums. Carefully managing the dynamics of the room created a predictable, safe environment where clients felt comfortable engaging throughout the entire session.

This project's positive outcomes are evident in fostering social interaction through music therapy. During the project's duration, both supporting staff and the NZ RMTh observed individuals who were once isolated transform into a cohesive and interactive group. Peer-to-peer engagement blossomed as participants began playing lollipop drums while facing each other, exchanging sustained eye contact and bright, spontaneous smiles.

Concurrently, those with more developed verbal communication skills started actively greeting their peers by name during our hello songs and sharing instruments during collaborative activities. A particularly touching milestone involved our participant, Ahad, who initially showed considerable distress and anxiety. Over time, Ahad was able to achieve extended periods of calm and joyful engagement. During a group drumming activity, instead of showing anxious behaviours or giving a sudden punch to someone's arm, Ahad reached out and gently held another peer, Min's fingers. This gentle contact highlighted a significant progression in emotional regulation and beautifully symbolised the development of a genuine, trusting friendship formed entirely through musical connection. These profound relational changes were consistently affirmed through structured feedback collected after each group session. Supporting staff completed a five-question evaluation, while the participants themselves reported their feelings using a visual, face-based Likert scale.

Staff members expressed great surprise at the participants' levels of involvement, which were unprecedented compared to other programmes such as dance, art, and educational activities.



Image description: Therapist and client group

Rebekah Kim and her client group at the Aim High Centre

Participants made consistent, measurable progress, advancing from struggling with basic rhythm sticks to playing happily on the beat, recalling lyrics, and playing the handbells with great enthusiasm.

Notably, Min delighted everyone by joyfully singing along to the Do-Re-Me song, and almost all participants consistently rated their experience as an enthusiastic "5 - Happy" on the Likert scale.

This project ultimately represents a wonderful collective accomplishment, made possible by a deeply dedicated community. I extend my sincerest gratitude to Music Therapy New Zealand for their generous Lindgren Fund, which has sustained this ongoing initiative and brought the life-changing power of music to these young adults. Deep thanks also go to Director Ok Kim of the Aim High Centre for her steadfast vision and open heart, as well as to our exceptional support carers for their daily dedication. Through music therapy, these young adults have truly discovered their voices, gained newfound confidence, and established invaluable social connections.

Rebekah Kim (NZ RMTh)



Image description: Therapist and client group

Staff and clients at the Aim High Centre

Research report

Co-design, Implementing, and Feasibility Evaluation of a Music Therapist-led Pilot Group Music Therapy Protocol within an Interdisciplinary Pain Management Programme for Adults with Chronic Non-Cancer Pain in Aotearoa New Zealand

My doctoral research aims to develop and pilot a group music therapy protocol delivered alongside an existing interdisciplinary Pain Management Programme (PMP). Through a co-design process with clinicians and people living with chronic pain, the study will explore the feasibility and acceptability of integrating music therapy into the existing programme to inform future service development.

My project commenced in December and is currently progressing through the preparation and recruitment stages. While the project experienced some initial delays due to the proposal being submitted through an incorrect department and requiring clarification regarding cross-department and external supervision arrangements, these processes have now been completed.

The support of a MThNZ grant has been invaluable, enabling me to focus on my studies and research without the added burden of financial pressures. This support has allowed me to dedicate time to project development, professional learning, and preparation for participant engagement.

To strengthen the cultural responsiveness of the project, I completed training in the Meihana Model, which enhanced my understanding of Māori health perspectives and holistic approaches to wellbeing. I also undertook Rhythm, Breath and Lullaby (RBL) training to further develop my skills in entrainment and therapeutic music practice. The RBL approach uses rhythmic entrainment, breathing regulation, and vocal interaction to support health and wellbeing, and aspects of this approach are reflected in the literature relevant to my research area.

As the project developed, the study design was refined to better reflect a real-world pragmatic research approach. While some aspects of the methodology were adjusted, the overall purpose and objectives of the study remain unchanged.

A significant milestone has recently been achieved with ethics approval. Recruitment of participants has now commenced, and the study is moving into the co-design phase. This stage will involve clinicians and participants contributing their experiences and perspectives to help shape the music therapy protocol and ensure it is relevant, meaningful, and responsive to community needs.

I look forward to sharing further developments and findings as the project progresses.

Coco Kho (NZ RMTh)



Notices

Memorial: Barbara Mabbett

The family of Barbara Mabbett have advised that a memorial family and friends reunion in honour of Barbara and Bill Mabbett will be held on April 1, 2027.

Venue - Wellington, to be advised

Those who knew Barbara well are invited - if you would like to attend, please let us know at info@musictherapy.org.nz, by 15 September 2026

Erratum:

In the publication *A History of Music Therapy New Zealand (1974-2023): Passionate People*, Madeline Maguire's name has been spelt incorrectly, as Madeline McGuire.

Music Therapy New Zealand and the author, Dr Daphne Rickson, apologise unreservedly for this error.

Acknowledgments

Must is a publication of Te Rōpū Puoro Whakaora O Aotearoa | Music Therapy New Zealand.

Music Therapy New Zealand is a registered charity in New Zealand. As a not-for-profit Music Therapy New Zealand relies on the generous support of donors and members to sustain its activities. A heartfelt thank you to the generous contributions of our friends, affiliates, corporate members and supporters upon which our organisation depends.

