

PMLD LINK

sharing ideas and information

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Rhythmerside at Riverside School

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Riverside School is a specialist school serving children with severe and complex learning difficulties in the London Borough of Bromley. We currently have 360 pupils, aged 3-19, based over four sites and spanning five different curriculum pathways.

The Rhythmerside Approach is a music and movement-based programme designed for children and young people (movement partners) with profound and multiple learning difficulties to enable a dynamic movement experience and sensory awakening. The programme includes bespoke soundscapes, focusing on movement of different body parts, and aims to facilitate movement, proprioceptive awareness and kinaesthetic learning through rhythm, touch and sensory stimulation.

In the Rhythmerside Approach, movement partners are invited to develop their physical literacy and movement to music, helping to build muscle memory and enhancing both gross and fine motor control. Massage, stretches and positional changes are incorporated to loosen muscles, ease stiffness, improve body awareness, develop the proprioceptive sense and improve comfort and engagement for overall wellbeing. It has been created using bespoke compositional music, crafted visuals and guidance notes to take participants and their supporting adult on a meaningful physical journey. We have consulted with our vision team, physiotherapists, specialist teachers and staff teams to create Rhythmerside in a user-centred way, easily transferable

to a range of settings. We are indebted to the pupils who contributed to the research and development of the programme.

The Rhythmerside approach is split into 13 sections of body awareness including:

- Hello Song - to transition and ground
- Warm Up Song - to awaken
- Massage Song - creating body part awareness
- Body Awareness Song - whooshing and gliding motions
- Grounding Song - giving dedicated time for independent movement
- Feet and Legs Song - releasing tension through rhythmical patterns
- Arms and Shoulders Song - massage working down shoulders to forearms
- Grounding Song 2 - time for mindfulness
- Massage Song 2 - back of torso stimulation
- Rolling Song - vestibular input
- Head Song - focusing the senses and breath awareness
- Energiser Song - to celebrate together
- Goodbye Song - to conclude and transition



Case study A

Aled is a confident young man who loves to explore his environment independently, particularly when he has free movement on the mats. He has very limited sensation from his hips down to his feet but is able to move himself effectively across the floor by using his arms to manoeuvre his body. Aled can present as tactile defensive and is protective of his personal space. Through the Rhythmerside approach, he has built and developed trusting relationships with his supporting adults, allowing them into his personal space to share the experiences presented within the session. The uniquely composed songs in Rhythmerside have helped him to develop a greater awareness of his legs in relation to his body. Rhythmerside has had a positive impact on pupil A's wellbeing and this is evident through his smiles, clapping and happy vocalisations. This has led him to extend his learning in line with his EHCP targets, using his body part symbols on his communication chart to direct his supporting adults. This has had a huge impact on encouraging his independence, promoting his wellbeing and widening his world.



Case study B

During a period of long-term recovery after a double hip surgery, Billy's parents and carers have been accessing the Rhythmerside approach as part of Riverside School's home learning offer. Billy's parents explain how easily accessible the session is to them at home and how it has been more than just physical movement for their child.

They describe the programme as "a journey of the senses and a powerful way to enable my child to access his learning and maintain engagement in his curriculum whilst recovering at home. The inclusion of the captivating visuals alongside the music composition and movement direction help to provide a dynamic input for my child who has a visual impairment".

Impact

To date, the impact of Rhythmerside has been far reaching. It has supported many different aspects of the daily life of pupils with PMLD. The pace, pitch and ambience of the session has aided an increase in wellbeing and comfort, evidenced in the following ways:

- During days where pupils have had heightened dystonia, Rhythmerside has supported them to return to a more relaxed and comfortable state.
- Pupils have developed a stronger sense of spatial awareness, interoception, proprioception and their senses.
- Pupils with limited mobility have shown increased physical responses through repeated and familiar movement patterns.
- Pupils have accessed the different areas of the Engagement Model (the assessment for pupils working below the standard of English national curriculum assessments and not engaged in subject-specific study) such as anticipation and initiation by physically moving the body part in response to known songs.

The thirty-minute programme is available on YouTube and requires only a device to play the programme, bubbles, torches and adult support, making it a highly accessible resource for anyone working with children and young people with PMLD. Our ambition is to extend Rhythmerside's reach and we hope that the programme provides more children and young people with PMLD and their families with a new way to explore, share and connect. So go on, Join the Rhythmerside Revolution!

Further information

Instruction booklet:
CE4D3D86DE9783B855FBFA0326E62A9D.pdf
Youtube link: Rhythmerside - Join the Rhythm Revolution - YouTube

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Note that the pupils' names have been changed to protect their identity.

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