

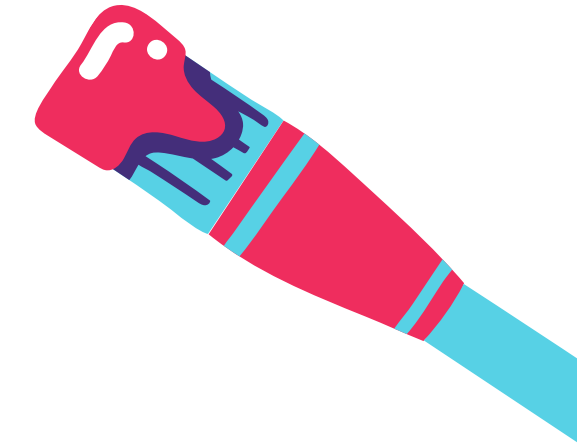
**Communicating effectively with patients and families**

**Public Health Agency NI**

**Engaging the voices of children and young people with complex and profound disabilities**

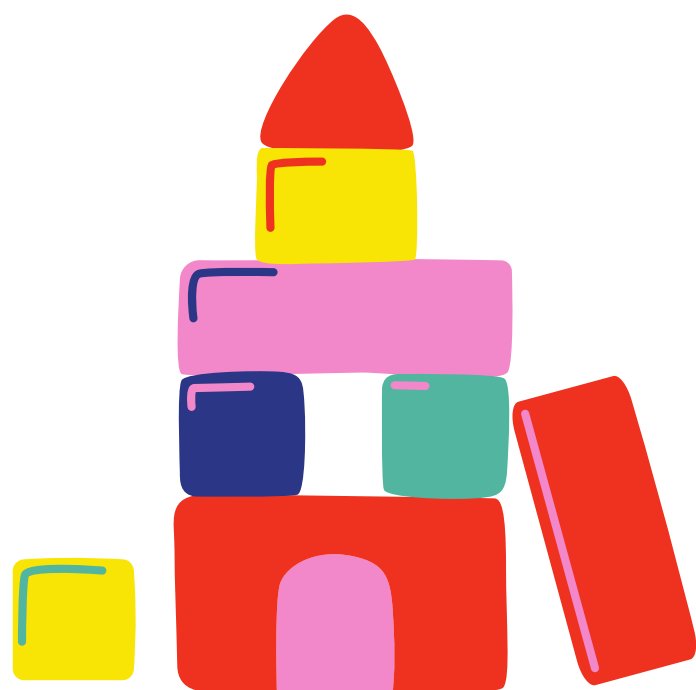
**PENNA - October 2024**





**“We observed what you could only describe as moments of pure joy and happiness, which created the most wonderful atmosphere within our classroom and let each and every one of our amazing children shine in their own individual special way.”**

**Classroom Assistant**





# What we set out to do

- **Hear and understand the voices of children with profound and complex disabilities**
  - **Provide a space for the children to express themselves and improve their wellbeing**
- 



# How we did it

- **Exploring alternative methods of communication with children who are not able to easily communicate verbally**
- **Using creative mediums - music, art, play**



## Play Therapy

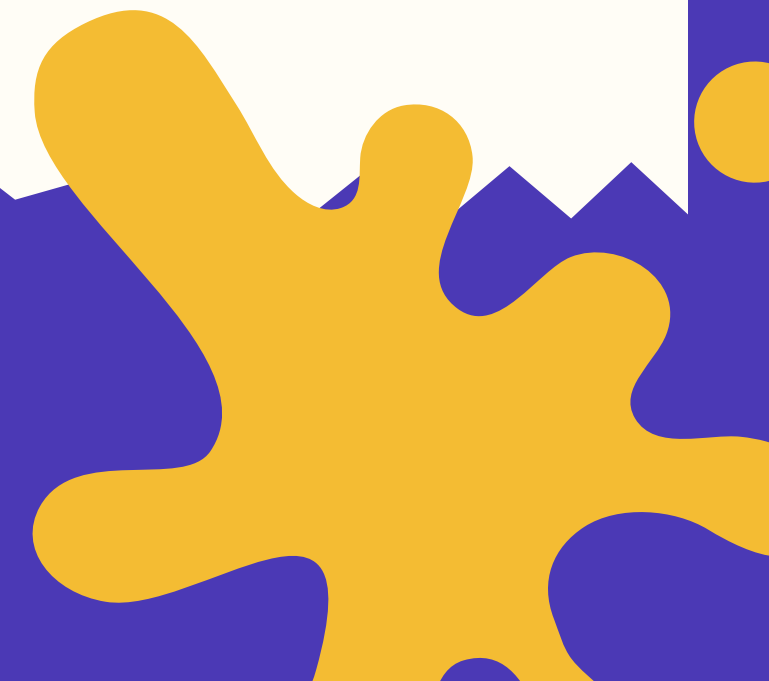
Using play in therapy helps people to express themselves in their own way, especially if they are struggling to understand how they are feeling or to put experiences into words.

## Music Therapy

In Music Therapy sounds and music-based activities are used within a therapeutic relationship to support emotional, mental, physical and social outcomes.

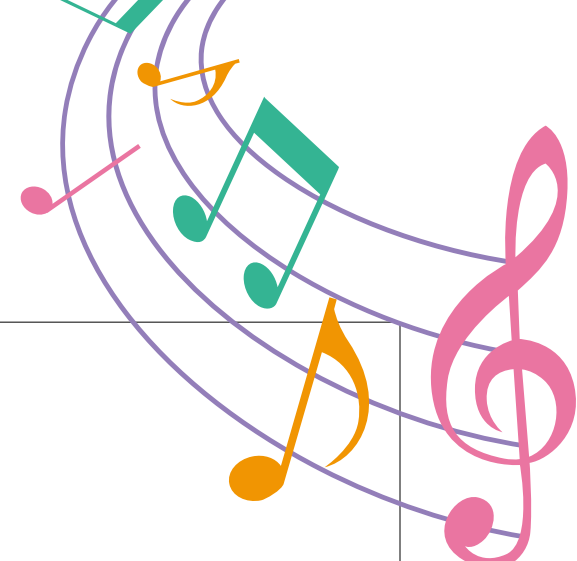


## Art Therapy

Art Therapy uses the medium of visual art to improve social, emotional and mental health by promoting communication and self-expression, insight, and a sense of agency.




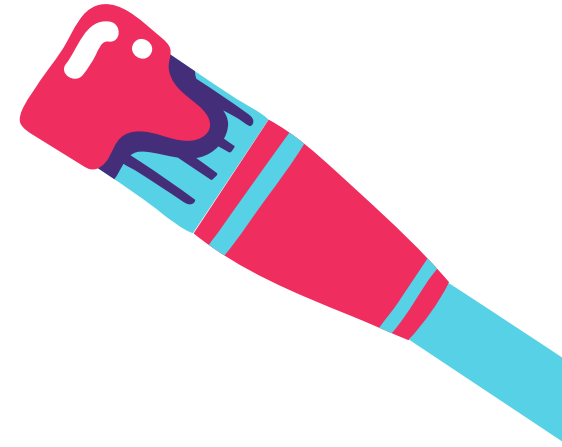
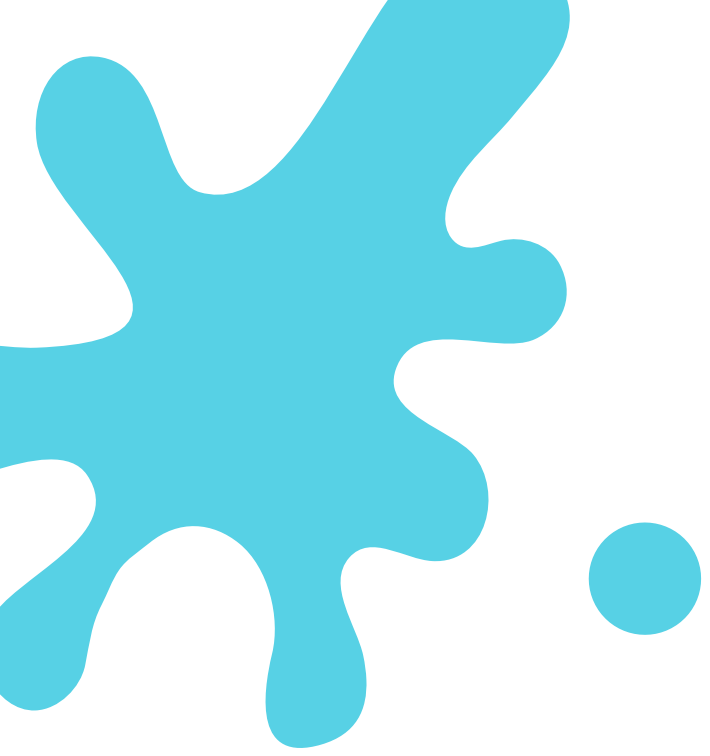
# Methodology

- **We supported Special Schools to engage Art, Music and Play Therapists to use creative and alternative ways to communicate effectively with 80 CYP for whom traditional verbal methods are not accessible.**
- **We facilitated collaboration between therapists, school staff, parents and other AHPs to ensure a truly child-centred approach, understand their needs and plan the conversation.**
- **The therapists worked with the children consistently for a period of 20 weeks to allow space for the therapist and pupil to develop their relationship.**



**We should never underestimate the huge impact of being able to notice and interpret the most subtle, intentional, small movement, gesture or sound intended to communicate something.**





# What our children and young people said





# Home

My family  
Pets and toys  
Tropical fish tank  
Teddy bear  
Interactive toys  
Outside  
Trampoline  
A swing set  
A fishing game  
A book

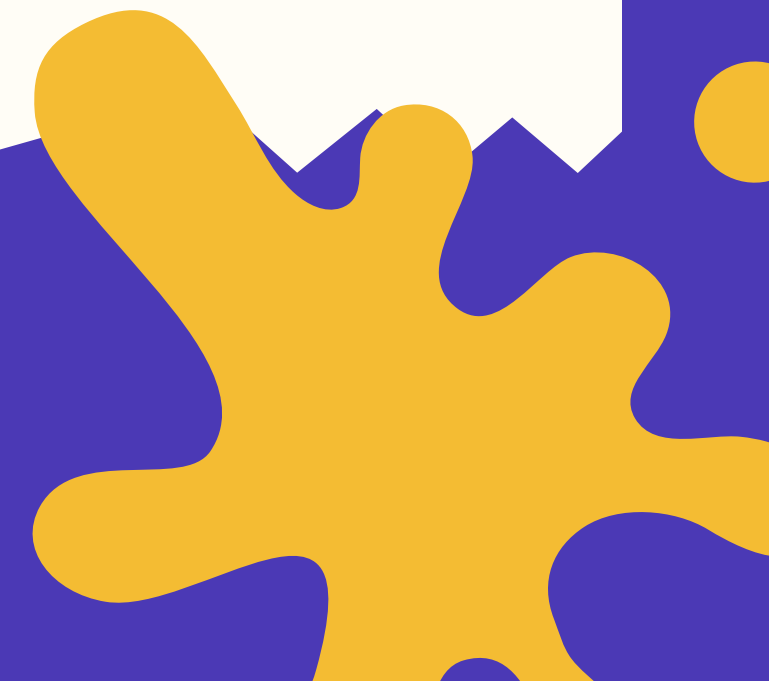


# School

My teacher  
Other staff  
Throwing a ball  
Sound  
Interactive books  
Soft play  
Walk: movement break  
Sensory room  
Listening to music  
Going on a walk  
Going to the supermarket  
Water play

# Community

Soft play  
Country walks  
Walking the dogs  
Play park  
Respite centre  
Visit the donkeys  
The library  
Adventure Centre  
Beach



# What We Learned

We need to enable a space and environment to allow the children and young people space to have a conversation in their own time and on their own terms.

Young people portrayed isolation from opportunities outside the school environment. It is important that environments in the community are well-planned to provide an inclusive mixture of both stimulating and calming experiences.

Young people expressed love for families and pets and expressed the need for security and routine.

Collaboration has delivered greater insights and an enhanced understanding of the needs of the children and young people involved.

# How we have responded

The voices of the children and young people will be heard at a joint Health/Education conference on 16th October which will be attended by the NI Ministers for Health and Education and a range of stakeholders.

The children and young people's voices will be embedded in the development of 3-year action plans for the Special School Partnerships.

We have completed an evaluation to share widely and bid for future resources.



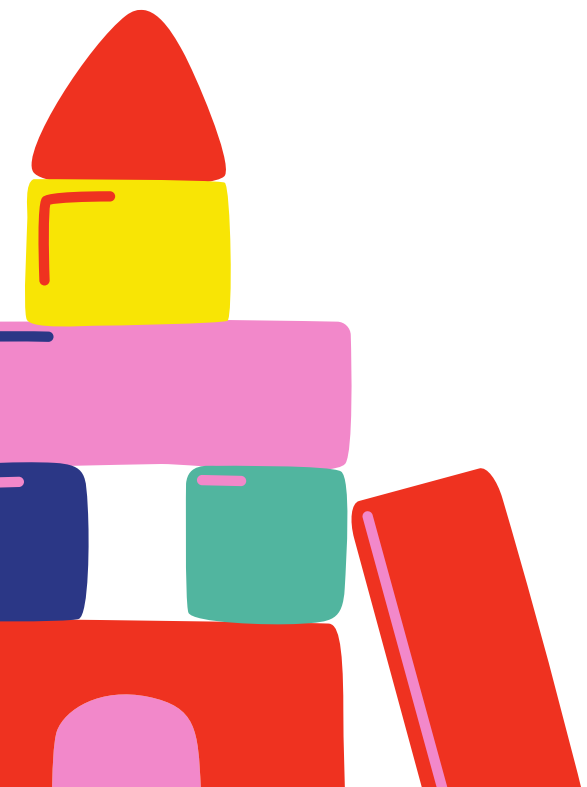
This project has led to other  
positive outcomes

- **Supported emotional health and wellbeing**
- **Improved engagement in the school environment**
- **Supported communication skills at home**
- **Provided school staff with additional tools and skills to implement on a day-to-day basis**





**This initiative could also be replicated across a range of other settings, combining involvement of groups who have difficulty communicating with the integration of creative therapeutic approaches.**





# GALLERY







# Thank you for listening



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