

# LITTLE MUSICAL CARAVAN

Alison Talmage interviews Music Therapist Emily Hunt (at right)



## What is the Little Musical Caravan?

The Little Musical Caravan is a mobile music therapy service for pre-school and primary school aged children. Little Musical Caravan travels to mainstream schools, homes and other community settings in Porirua and the Greater Wellington region.

The concept of a mobile music studio began in 2019. I have a keen interest in providing inclusive music therapy within mainstream settings. There were barriers to this, such as a lack of a suitable space in schools. Where a space was available it was often a shared space with furniture that had to be rearranged or where there were likely to be interruptions. Instruments were limited by what could be carried safely from car to classroom, and my purpose and function within schools was not immediately obvious. A travelling and very visible music therapy space was a good solution.

At the beginning of 2020, I began the journey to renovate a retro 1960 caravan. You can follow the renovation journey on the Little Musical Caravan's Facebook page. The resulting space is quite unique. The caravan itself is sound and heat insulated, with attention given to the acoustic properties inside. The colours have been chosen from an autism-friendly palette, the LED lighting can be adjusted for colour and brightness and the interior design is simple to minimise sensory input. The caravan carries a wide range of instruments for children to explore, as well as sensory friendly items to stimulate or calm.

## What is your philosophy and approach, as a music therapist?

I am passionate about developing an inclusive practice, and this informs everything that I do. I am strongly child-led, and while I like to work closely with support teams, I lean towards a strengths-based approach. This means that I build on the existing strengths and interests of the children that I work with and I try to take a holistic approach to their growth and development. I try to move away from a medical model of "treatment" and focus on what a child actually needs and wants, rather than what society thinks they need to fit in. From my perspective, an important part of this is taking the surrounding social systems into consideration – whether that is the classroom, the wider school community, the home environment or another significant setting. I work to build connections within these social systems and regularly involve peers in music therapy sessions. Collaboration with parents, educators, SENCOs and other health professionals, such as speech-language therapists and occupational therapists, also has an important role in my work. I am very open to having these other team members participate in sessions where this feels appropriate for the child.

## What are your hopes for Little Musical Caravan's first five years?

I have so many ideas! I'm very excited about making it easier for children to access music therapy services. Providing a dedicated mobile space is an important first step. I would love to be able to reach more children in mainstream and community settings, especially those who are particularly vulnerable or for whom funding is a barrier. I wonder whether outreach projects might be a good way to approach this. I like team working, and would love to find a music therapist to work alongside me who shares my philosophy and passion. Longer term, it would be great to add an awning or create a space that can accommodate children with more severe mobility issues, and I like the idea of creating a second mobile space for older children.



## Do you have any advice for others setting up a private practice?

I believe that music therapy is a learning journey for new and experienced practitioners alike. My key advice for newly qualified music therapists would be:

- Follow your passion!
- Be open to continued learning and keep reflecting.
- Connect with other music therapists, and find a supervisor you connect with and who really understands your philosophy

## How can people contact you?

Website: <https://www.littlemusicalcaravan.co.nz>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/LittleMusicalCaravan>

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## Further information about music therapy

Music Therapy New Zealand: <https://www.musictherapy.org.nz>

Music therapy training: <https://www.wgtn.ac.nz/explore/postgraduate/programmes/master-of-music-therapy/overview>



**Alison Talmage** is a University of Auckland doctoral candidate, music therapist, teacher, and co-founder/leader of the CeleBRation Choir at the University of Auckland's Centre for Brain Research. She has worked with people with diverse needs across the lifetime, individually and in groups, in community, education and research settings. Her current doctoral research focuses on community singing/music therapy for adults with communication difficulties resulting from an acquired neurological condition. Alison is the editor of the New Zealand Journal of Music Therapy. She holds dual UK/NZ citizenship, originally from the UK (England, Wales, Cornwall) and has lived in Auckland since 1998.