

Laurence Marie



[Laurence Marie - New Brunswick, Canada](#)

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My Info

Name: Laurence Marie

Position titles: Certified Therapeutic Harp Practitioner, Certified Vibroacoustic Harp Practitioner, studied Nursing, Naturotherapy, Homeopathy and has a degree in Music from the Univ. of Moncton

Kind of Facility: Private Office working with children with special needs and adults in private and/or in groups

How many hours do you work a week or month? 15-20/week

Are you paid? 1) Yes

Is it a fair pay? Yes

Benefits? No

Do you have more than one facility? Yes

If so, what kinds? In addition to my private office, I go to client's homes. I also go to Hospice

Are you volunteering? Yes at Hospice - 2-5 hours a week

Interest story:

THERAPEUTIC HARP REACHES NEUROLOGICALLY CHALLENGED CHILDREN IN CANADA

Thanks to the Chocolate River Conservatory of Music (CRCM), which opened its doors in Dieppe, NB, Canada, a few months ago, I have had the opportunity to use my skills as a therapeutic harp practitioner.

I am breaking new grounds:

I am the only harp practitioner east of Ontario and there are no Therapeutic Musicians in New Brunswick. I have been working with a few children with various neurological problems and with some elderly patients with Alzheimer's disease.

Let me relate here my experience with two of the children. R. is an 11-year-old boy with Cerebral Palsy. He is an intelligent, pleasant boy with a great smile.

When I met him, last October, he was non-verbal, despite years of speech therapy, had a very short attention span, poor coordination, poor muscle tone (chiefly in his left arm and leg) and was very frustrated at not being able to communicate. R. has been coming for weekly 45-minute sessions. I do a variety of activities with him: singing, making up songs, clapping rhythms, movement, etc. and, of course, playing the harp.

After a few short weeks R. showed remarkable progress. He started saying words and sentences; when, I or anyone else understands him, his face lights up. His coordination and muscle tone have improved tremendously: from initially yanking at the strings, he can now pluck them gently with his index fingers. At first his left hand and arm were so weak, he could hardly hold them up long enough to pluck a string. Now he can pluck each string alternatively without missing any, using alternate hands, while keeping both arms up! He can reproduce simple rhythms on the drum. I can hold his attention for at least 30 minutes. He can multi task: sing, listen to the melody I play on the harp, and play the drum.

For the first time in his young life he had a small role in a Christmas pageant. He was so excited to tell me about it. Teachers at school have noticed the change and this is what his mother wrote: "The Conservatory has opened a new window in my son's life. A window that enabled him to see his capabilities, new ones, that seemed, three months ago, impossible to imagine. Eleven years had passed and R. had said very little. When he did have something to say, many did not understand him. With loving and skilled therapy from Laurence Marie of CRCM, his words have become purposeful and a joy to listen to. Harp therapy not only helped add speech to R.'s life but also has increased his self-confidence and self-esteem. He no longer has to wait till someone understands him, he smiles when he's understood the first time. R. enjoys his lessons, it's work but he finds it fun. There are no pressures or expectations. Laurence uses the skills R. has and builds on them, enabling him to be successful in his efforts and work." R. resumed the "lessons" after Christmas and soon he will have a harp to take home. It will be interesting to see where our journey takes us.

E. is a nine-year-old autistic little boy with a beautiful face and great big blue eyes. When I met him, he was non-verbal, could get very upset, waved his hands non-stop or repetitively hit the wall or other objects. I worked with him from early October until Christmas, once a week for 30-minute sessions. The therapy room is a large room and just on entering it, there are a few steps. The first few sessions E. spent the entire session on the steps. I would bring him various instruments including the harp. He would arrange balls (with bells inside) or drum sticks on a step. If I threw a ball at him sometimes he would throw it back. Occasionally and very briefly he would make eye contact or touch me. If he got agitated I would improvise on the harp, and he would calm down within a few minutes. Otherwise I played various genres of music on the harp: children's tunes, but also melodies from the classical music repertory. He also

responded to the cymbals and liked to hit his head on a drum. Perhaps he wanted to feel the vibrations?

As the weeks went by E. liked to share the harp, looking at me through the strings, running his fingers on the strings. He started coming up the steps to explore the room and the various instruments (glockenspiel, triangle, cymbals, wooden rattle, drums, rain stick etc...). He would initiate activities like making music or dancing, and invite me to join in. If I stopped he would take my hand so I'd carry on. He would play something and cue me to respond musically and vice versa. This was very exciting! He started showing emotions with his face and gestures to certain pieces of music I played on the harp, started laughing out loud, humming, and vocalizing. He began hugging me, cuddling up to me and looking at me straight in the eyes with a big smile.

E.'s father told me he had improved at home, at school and when they were out. He sang a lot, vocalized a lot, and seemed much happier and calmer. Unfortunately E. did not come back after Christmas. His parents enrolled him in a behavioral program, so I won't know the end of that story.

"Music and health have played major roles in Laurence Marie's life. Prior to coming to Canada, she completed her nursing studies and worked in the field in both England and France. She also holds a music degree. Through various losses and battles with health issues including cancer, she began her search for healing through alternative means, a quest which led her to study naturopathy and homeopathy. While the facilitator for "Virage," a cancer support group, and a volunteer at the Oncology department, she became inspired to explore ways to combine healing and music which led her to the International Harp Therapy Program in San Diego, CA. In 2001 she graduated as a Certified Therapeutic Harp Practitioner."

This article was originally published in the summer 2005 issue of The Harp Therapy Journal.

VAHT PRESENTATION ENLIGHTENS COUNSELORS

I was invited to give a presentation about harp therapy and VAHT in June at the annual conference of the National School Counselors Association.

The conference was being held in Bouctouche, New Brunswick, a small Acadian village situated on the Northumberland Strait. The location for the conference was « Le vieux presbytère », the old presbytery that was converted years ago into an Inn and Restaurant. From its promontory, the presbytery looks down on the Bouctouche Bay and is surrounded by beautiful grounds all the way down to the water.

I was to do my presentation in the upstairs room, which used to be the chapel: a nice large oblong room with vaulted ceiling, windows all around letting the

natural sunlight in and incredible acoustics. I was so warmly welcomed by the innkeeper, the coordinator of the conference and the participants, about two-third of whom were women and one-third men, that all anxiety that usually accompanies me dissipated.

This conference was really a retreat for those counselors. They came to resource themselves, receive a little therapy after a year's worth of counseling others. Keeping that in mind I had decided I would curtail my talk, keep to the essential and have each one participate in various experiences rather than have just a few "guinea pigs". So after introducing myself, scanning through the historic of Harp Therapy and explaining briefly about vibrations, resonance and entrainment, we got down to experimentation. We all put our hands behind our necks and we sounded out vowels which bounced off the walls beautifully. Out of 16 participants, only one did not feel the vibrations. I explained how our bones are the sound boxes of our body. Next, I got each one to lean their back and head against the harp column as I played a different tune for each one, which made them feel special. Each felt the vibrations, some of them down to their toes and fingers! Some were astounded, amazed and some were emotionally moved. By then, they were more than eager to try the Somatron™ Mat. Just to give them an idea, each had a turn lying down on it and I played a few short minutes on my 36 string harp. Well, the responses were beyond my expectations. Some people felt the vibrations above the usual "cut off mark" of A above middle C up to top C. They all expressed positive experiences such as feeling more relaxed, feelings of well-being or less pain. One lady said she had never experienced anything so powerful in her life! One man wondered why he felt the vibrations on the left side of his chest? Upon questioning him, I find out he is susceptible to pneumonias and bronchitis. His last bout was last fall, but the change of season affects him sometimes so may be he had a little congestion. I suggested he consults his medical doctor.

The most amazing testimonial though was from a man of about 45 years of age. After he had laid down on the mat, I started plucking the strings one at a time and straight away I felt something was happening. Then when I started playing it became more obvious but I was not sure so I kept a close eye on him. When he started getting emotional, I stopped not knowing why and not wanting the situation to get out of hand. I gave him time to collect himself then he sat up wiping tears from his face! I asked him what had happened? As a child he had been involved in an accident and even though his right leg was functional it had been numb for all these years. On the mat, for the first time since childhood, he felt sensations in his leg! None of us could believe what we were hearing, what we had been witnessing!

During both the experiencing of the harp column vibrations and the mat, some participants mentioned how my playing for someone else affected them, they now knew about resonance. Some also noted how some people's eyelids for instance or respiratory rate matched the tempo of the music, they had learned about entrainment. I closed my presentation by telling them about the various applications and benefits of Harp Therapy, I did not need to expand on that!

This was by far my best presentation because of the hands-on experiences for each individual, but also I had a very sensitive, open group, great location and great venue. Each participant did not just hear about “another therapy”. Each experienced the power of healing music and went home transformed by it and will no doubt share with others. I was invited to come back the next day to give private sessions, and I did. As for myself, I came away feeling elated and also more convinced still about my work and journey in harp music.

This article was originally published in the autumn 2007 issue of The Harp Therapy Journal.

<http://www.harpsylon.ca/>

A child's musical journey From Chrysalis to a Beautiful Butterfly!

I have now been working primarily with Special Need Children for 6 years as a Therapeutic Harp Practitioner. These children have various conditions: Cerebral Palsy, Down Syndrome, Erchern-Wolf Syndrome, Williams Syndrome, Angelman's Syndrome to name a few and Autism. Consistently more than half of the children I see are autistic, which is why I decided to do this article on my experience with autism. Because of the numbers I keep informed about the condition: special TV programs, articles, books by professionals and also books written by autistic people, a major eye opener for my approach.

Working with children who are not bedridden or wheelchair bound, bedside harp was not appropriate. Even though they have special needs, they also have energy, are curious and just playing for them was not going to be enough and therefore I needed to modify the approach taught to us in the IHTP program. William Jackson, the Music Therapist my class of 2000 had the privilege to have, was an inspiration but there again not enough information so I had to come up with ideas. Having had four children of my own helped some, having taught in an alternative school long ago where most of the children attended because they did not fit in the system for one reason or another helped also and so did my experience as a youth group facilitator. I had learnt from those experiences that each child has « special needs » and it is up to the adult involved to figure out ways so that each child can learn, can deal with an emotional issue, can sort out a problem etc.

The children I work with presently are more challenged, that is true, but they are still individuals so I still need to get to know them as individuals, and devise musical activities for each of them depending on their very special needs so that music can transform them, heal them. I do use the harp; it is very much

part of the sessions and all the children love it. The harp seems to be a magnet, they are attracted to it and run towards it as soon as they come in the room. But I also use small percussive instruments for variety, rhythm, communication, dexterity. We also sing, make up songs, which encourage the children to communicate verbally, increases their vocabulary and we also improvise. I might create a song around sounds a child has difficulty with. We also dance and move to music for the development of gross motor skills, coordination and pleasure. We tell stories incorporating the harp and other instruments. In my part of the country, we have a Francophone community and an Anglophone one: my children come from both so that means double the work! The sessions vary from 1/2h to 1h depending on different factors, age being the obvious one, once a week. Sessions run from mid-September to mid-June, also in the summer but on a more flexible schedule. The sessions are framed by a « hello song » and a « goodbye song ». The « hello song » is followed by a « sound massage » which consists of rolled chords accompanying a song that utilizes all 7 notes of the scale, then various activities start. Before the goodbye song, some children like to lie down on a blanket while I play for them.

Once the child has developed a solid relationship with me through the music which can take anywhere from a few weeks to a few months depending on their personal circumstance, he/she takes part in a monthly group session while still coming for individual weekly sessions.

Parents sometimes pull their children out too quickly, not realizing miracles do not happen overnight or because of financial reasons or because the goal they had for their child has been achieved.

I should also say that I am registered with the Department of Social Development, a government agency, and it pays for some of the children based on various criteria. Another government program, Respite Care gives some financial assistance to some families. It doesn't cover my fees entirely so a portion of my work is volunteered which is fine with me. Families who do not have access to these programs pay me directly and I issue them with a receipt for income tax return purposes.

Generally, I find the younger the autistic child is the easier it is to reach them and get results. With older children, it takes much longer to get results and those are not so miraculous. Those children have been in their « bubble » as I call it for so long it is harder to reach and touch them and bring them out. Even though I don't just use the harp, I do follow the therapeutic music philosophy. I always watch for « what is willing to meet me » so sometimes what I thought was a great idea has to be abandoned because the child does not bite or other times the child gives me some signal, a cue and I go with it.

For ease of telling my experience with autistic children, I have chosen a child's story in particular. But all stories are similar in the way they develop even

if the activities and the journey are different which they are. The goal is to get them in a place where they can express themselves verbally, emotionally and can interact with their peers and the adults in their lives.

S. was 3 1/2 years old when he first came to me. This was in July 05. He had been diagnosed at age 3. He was verbal but with echolalia and often his language was off, out of context, not connected to what I had said, did or played; he spoke in the 3rd person and talked more to himself rather than to me. He did not respond when I talked to him. He was in his « bubble ». He was very hyper and could not concentrate at all. There was no eye contact, no physical contact. He would get over stimulated very easily so I had to introduce the small percussive instruments, one at a time. He did not like loud sounds either, he would cover his ears. He mixed what, why, when, who, which. He could not tell his mother if he was hungry, thirsty, cold, hot and never showed emotions of any kind. But he was enchanted by the harp and liked playing glissandi, was excited by the sounds. By the end of the first session I managed to get him to throw a ball (with a bell inside) back at me just the once but I figured, that was communication!

The second time he came to see me, he marched right in. Played with the harp, the ball, took my cues: rolling, throwing, catching, and kicking the ball. He looked at me through the strings and tried to say my name! By August his attention span has definitely improved and he enjoyed us playing the harp together. He had a good sense of rhythm and could reproduce patterns very easily. By the end of September he responded well to cues, made eye contact on a regular basis, tried to learn songs, had a sweet voice and sang in tune. He initiated activities, gave me cues for a change, offered me his cheek for me to kiss! The very last session of September 05, as he entered the Conservatory he saw me and yelled « here she is » and run to me, took my hand and said: « lets go in here » (meaning the music room). When he left that day he told his mum my name was « Laurence » and he said it better than a lot of adults!! S. was obviously relating to me by then...only 3 months had gone by since he had started. By November he participated in story telling with the harp.

All of the activities we did were musical, a lot with the harp, making stories where the strings would come alive: hungry teddies, big dancing bears, small birds chirping, all geared to get him to express himself verbally better, to show his emotions...we also sang and danced, made up songs. I also used the resonator bars, one at a time then 2 or 3. S. played them and I harmonized on the harp and S. was aware of what I was doing and was watching me. We played the drum; he imitated various rhythm combinations. By mid December he did not speak through the various characters of our stories anymore but addressed me directly. He also let me give him a goodbye hug.

In February 06, 7 months since starting Harp Therapy, he joined the group lesson, once a month with other children but still came for the weekly sessions. At first he is not so sure because he has to share me and because he is not used to being with other children « that's MY Laurence! ». But he learns to share the

instruments, understands taking turn, points out when it is so and so's turn, thanks a child for giving him an instrument and he sings with them. The other kids are somewhat older, one is non-verbal, the other has CP and even though he is now verbal, it is still difficult to understand him so Steven finds it a little disconcerting.

After the summer break, individual and group sessions resume for S. The group sessions are more satisfying this time: he is with two other autistic kids around the same age and at the same level of development. They will have a great time together, becoming close friends not just during the group but also outside of therapy. The 3 mothers have become friends and get together with the children during the week. During that Fall 06, S. notices the Instruments of the Orchestra poster on the wall. He keeps going to it and eventually asks me what they are. So I am thinking, does that still fall under Harp Therapy? The immediate answer is NO but then I hear « What is willing to meet me? » ... I decide the answer to be YES instead!! so I asked him would he like to learn their name? he does. Within 3 weeks (3 sessions) S. knows the names of all the instruments and then he wants to know how they sound!! So I make a CD compilation and the following week we start listening as we look at the picture of each instrument...well it only took another 3 weeks (3 sessions) for him to master that feat!! He is 4 ½ years old! So to carry on this trend I decide to bring Benjamin Britten's Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra CD. We listen to each instrument and then to the final Fugue when all instruments play together. His face was priceless, he was so taken by it, his eyes and ears were wide open...the music finally stopped and S. is silent for a few seconds, still wide eyed as if in a trance then turns to me and says: « Laurence, I WANT to give you a hug! » And that little guy puts his arms around me and squeezed me so hard and so long, I had tears in my eyes...it doesn't get any better than that! What a gift! From here on S. was able to express his wants and needs, his feelings. He was able to transfer his newly found ability to connect to his friends in the group, to his mum and dad and other family members. Mid-June 2007, S. said goodbye for the summer. His mum was pretty elated by her son's progress. She felt that he would be able to not only integrate kindergarten in the Fall but function well.

In September, S. came back as planned but I did not recognize him! He had regressed!! I just did not understand so I asked his mother for an explanation: during the summer the parents had separated and as planned S. had started Kindergarten 2 weeks prior and both these events had set him back. I was devastated, after all the work I had done and the progress S. had made. But this was not about me. I figured if I had been able to bring him out of his autism once, I should be able to do it again...and indeed after a few weeks, S. was back on track and we had a marvelous year together. It was to be our last. S. entered grade one in the Fall 2008. I recently had news from his mum that he is doing well. During that last year with me, he was able to transfer what he had learned in the monthly group sessions to the playground and the classroom. He could actually approach another child and asked if he would play with him!

I have been on this journey many times with different children enough to give me the confidence to know that I can help autistic children. The journey might vary: different music, different songs, different dances, stories but the intention is the same, the love is the same. What is willing to meet me sooner or later lets a beautiful child emerge from his « bubble ». In conclusion I shall quote S.'s mother: « Music with Laurence has allowed S. to just be - to live fully in the moment. He has grown in confidence and self-esteem, has become more focused and aware of his surroundings. Music has become for S. a tool to make meaningful connections with one adult as well as with his peers. S. has learned to express love and affection. Harp Therapy has made real my hopes for my son to be the loving and affectionate person that I knew he always was ».

I would like to thank Christina Tourin from the IHTP program and Sarajane Williams from the VAHT program for all they have given me. Their gifts have allowed me to bring some light in people's lives...

In June of this year, I was invited by the National School Counselors Association at their annual conference to present Harp Therapy and VAHT. The conference was being held in Bouctouche, NB, a small Acadian village situated on the Northumberland Strait. The location for the conference was "Le vieux presbytère", the old presbytery that was converted years ago into an Inn and Restaurant. From its promontory, the presbytery looks down on the Bouctouche Bay and is surrounded by beautiful grounds all the way down to the water.

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This conference was really a retreat for those counselors. They came to resource themselves, receive a little therapy after a year's worth of counseling others. Keeping that in mind I had decided I would curtail my talk, keep to the essential and have each one participate in various experiences rather than have just a few guinea pigs. So after introducing myself, scanning through the historic of Harp Therapy and explaining briefly about vibrations, resonance and entrainment, we got down to the first experimentation: we all put our hands behind our necks and we sounded out vowels which bounced off the walls

beautifully. Out of 16 participants, only one did not feel the vibrations. I explained how our bones are the sound boxes of our body. Next, I got each one to lean their back and head against the harp column as I played a different tune for each one, which made them feel special. Each felt the vibrations, some of them down to their toes and fingers! Some were astounded, amazed, some were emotionally moved. By then, they were more than eager to try the Somatron Mat so each had a turn lying down on it and I played a few short minutes on my 36 string harp, just to give them an idea. Well, the responses were beyond my expectations:

-Some people felt the vibrations above the usual cut off mark of A above middle C up to top C!

-They all had positive experiences such as more relaxed, feeling of well-being, less pain...

-One lady said she had never experienced anything so powerful in her life!

-One man wondered why he felt the vibrations on the left side of his chest? On questioning him, I find out he is susceptible to pneumonias and bronchitis. His last bout was last fall, but the change of season affects him sometimes so may be he had a little congestion. I suggested he consults his medical doctor.

-The most amazing testimonial though was from a man of about 45 years of age. He lay down on the mat, I started plucking the strings one at a time and straight away I felt something was happening then, when I started playing, it became more obvious but I was not sure so I kept a close eye on him. When he started getting emotional, I stopped not knowing why and not wanting the situation to get out of hand. I gave him time to collect himself then he sat up wiping tears from his face! I asked him what happened? As a child he had been involved in an accident and even though his right leg was functional it had been numb for all these years. On the mat, for the first time since childhood, he felt sensations in his leg! None of us could believe what we were hearing, what we had been witnessing!

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P.S. I was invited to come back the next day to give private sessions, and I did.