



Special issue

**Music therapy in Europe:  
Paths of professional development**

in partnership with the  
European Music Therapy Confederation



## ICELAND

### Country report on professional recognition of music therapy

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#### HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

In Iceland, music therapy was first introduced in 1970 by Eyjólfur Melsted. He graduated from the Hochschule für Music und Darstellende Kunst in Vienna, Austria and practised music therapy at Kópavogshælið, a residential institution for the severely disabled from 1970 to 1973; and at Safamýrarskóli, a special school for the disabled from 1983 to 1987.

Presently, and to the best of our knowledge, 15 Icelanders have degrees in music therapy. However, for the past 44 years, only one to seven music therapists have been practising at any given time. They have been employed by the State, worked as contractors or private practitioners.

Music therapists in Iceland have worked in residential institutions for the severely disabled and in special schools with disabled children. The School for the Deaf employed a music therapist in the 1990-1991 school year. From 1987 to 2000, the Reykjavik Children's Music School ran a department to serve children with special needs. The State University Hospital child psychiatric ward paid for music therapy services on an hourly basis from 1987 to 2009. Although limited in scope, music therapy served an assessment function in the interdisciplinary team at this hospital. One music therapist worked on an acute adult psychiatric ward at the State University Hospital from 2009 to 2014. Tónstofa Valgerðar, a private music therapy clinic, was established in 1987. Today, Tónstofan is run as a special music school and a private music therapy practice where more than 100 students/clients attend weekly sessions. Two music therapists hold full-time positions, and one full-time position is occupied by a special music teacher. The students/clients vary in age from kindergarten age to adults, and their disabilities span a broad spectrum. One music therapist works in a Waldorf elementary school at Lækjarbotnum.

In connection with Master's research projects at Aalborg University (Denmark), Icelandic music therapists have worked at the State University Hospital, department of geriatrics, palliative care, paediatrics and adult psychiatry. Besides the aforementioned settings, Icelandic music therapists also work in their private practice with diverse clientele.

Music therapy has been introduced to healthcare professionals and the general public through personal endeavours since 1970. In 1986, an introductory newsletter on music therapy was distributed, and since then, articles on music therapy have been published in several national newspapers and magazines and some professional international journals. A couple of radio programmes on music therapy have also been broadcast by the National Broadcasting Service. Besides annual workshops and lectures given at various institutions, schools and associations, occasionally Icelanders have had the opportunity to attend seminars and experiential workshops given by renowned music therapists from abroad. Music therapy is thus relatively well known to parents' associations and various healthcare professionals.

#### Education

No music therapy training courses or academic programmes are available in Iceland. Icelandic music therapists are educated abroad and have graduated from at least eight different academic institutions in the USA, Europe and the Nordic countries. Music therapy in Iceland reflects the different backgrounds, schooling, and experiences of its practitioners. Practices are eclectic in nature and characterised by a variety of opinions, methods, techniques and philosophies without any single one prevailing.

Four master's research projects have been undertaken by Icelandic music therapy students graduating from Aalborg University in Denmark. The client groups focused on in these projects are: patients with Alzheimer's disease, cancer patients, hospitalised children and adult psychiatric clientele. One Icelandic music therapist, Valgerður Jónsdóttir, has graduated from Aalborg University with a PhD degree. Her PhD project, '*Music-Caring within the Framework of Early Intervention*', focused on the lived experience of seven mothers having infants with special needs participating in a music therapy group. The study '*The Relative Effect of Short Term Interpersonal Cognitive Problem Solving Therapy with Young Children*' was conducted by Lilja Ósk Úlfarsdóttir, a music therapist finishing her doctoral degree in psychology from the University of Leicester in England.

#### The Association of Music Therapists in Iceland

In 1997, the Association of Music Therapists in Iceland (Físmús) was formed. Its main purpose is to support and to encourage the development of the profession in Iceland. The association has developed a code of ethics

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and standards of practice. If requested, the association verifies the professionalism of its members with a signed document. Físmús does not have a webpage but shares information on Facebook.

Current members of our small association, as well as active clinicians and/or educators are:

- ❑ President: Jóna Þórsdóttir, [jonathor@hive.is](mailto:jonathor@hive.is)
- ❑ Secretary: Inga Björk Ingadóttir, [inga.bjork.inga@gmail.com](mailto:inga.bjork.inga@gmail.com)
- ❑ Treasurer: Soffía Friðbjarnardóttir, [soffiahuld@gmail.com](mailto:soffiahuld@gmail.com)
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## RECOGNITION AND APPROVAL

The campaign for recognition of our profession started in 2000 and had an unsuccessful closure in the year of 2004. In 2013, the campaign resumed and is still in progress. In this campaign, music therapists have joined forces with other fine art therapists in Iceland. The latest news from the Ministry of Health is that a special committee is working towards assessing the need for new professions within the healthcare system.

Without standards of proficiency and professional regulation, without registration and licensure to practice, and without national academic backing, the development of music therapy in Iceland will continue its slow development. A few devoted therapists have struggled to maintain its existence within the national health service, the social service or the educational system, and new job opportunities are created by private endeavours.

What has kept Icelandic music therapists inspired and ongoing despite all odds is professional contact with colleagues from abroad. Through quality education, conferences, the availability of research journals, books, and the World Wide Web we have managed to maintain the love of our profession, to build our self-esteem and our identity as a knowledgeable and important profession.

## SELECTED LINKS

- ❑ Físmús: [www.facebook.com/FismusFelagmusikmedferdarfraedingaalslandi](https://www.facebook.com/FismusFelagmusikmedferdarfraedingaalslandi)
- ❑ Hljóma músíkmeðferð: <http://hljoma.weebly.com/>
- ❑ Músíkmeðferðarstofan: [www.facebook.com/musikmedferdarstofan](https://www.facebook.com/musikmedferdarstofan)
- ❑ Tónstofa Valgerðar: [www.facebook.com/tonstofavalgerdar](https://www.facebook.com/tonstofavalgerdar)  
<http://tonstofan.is/>

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