

An example of my individualised approach, working 1:1 with a profoundly disabled adult on a secure Dementia unit. November 2022

Ms B is confined to her bed, silent, absent and immobile. I notice photos on her wall of a horse and rider, often show jumping.

I place myself carefully to be in Ms B's line of sight, although her focus remains lost in the middle distance, and search my mind for songs to evoke horses and riding. A sheet of paper above her bed lists her musical tastes, including Doris Day. Such a helpful clue! I begin singing "The Surrey with the Fringe on Top", giving special emphasis to phrases like "the team of snow white horses", "the high stepping trotters" and "the slow clip clop". The faintest glimmer of interest crosses her face, only hinted at in the slightest change in her gaze. What else can I try?

Now I feel she is comfortable with my presence I try something more energetic, a folksy song about galloping across the plains, racing in the moonlight, hoof beats pounding over the snow and all the sleigh bells ringing. Again a faint reaction. Following intuition, I change from singing to a companionable chatty approach. I grew up with horses so I have lived experiences to draw on.

For the next 10 mins or so I make up a story, in the first person, describing in detail, full of sensory images, going down to the stables to groom and saddle a familiar horse. Ms B shows faint signs of attentiveness. And then at particular moments, "cleaning out the near side fore, leaning against the horse's shoulder to shift its weight and lift its hoof" and again "deciding whether to plait or bandage the horse's tail, choosing a red bandage and wrapping it round tightly with the neat herringbone pattern down the centre" Ms B's eye brows raise, distinctly reacting. Now I have a way in.

What will we share together next visit? I never know in advance what will happen during my visits but I know from long experience that it'll be something special, with enough patience, empathy and imagination. In some cases, over the course of regular visits, residents have shown unexpected increases in engagement and interaction. At the heart of all my work is enabling people to express themselves, creatively, socially and emotionally, as valued and appreciated individuals.

When working 1:1 I spend an hour or more moving between residents, staying focused on them for as long as feels appropriate. We might share familiar songs, create new ones, improvise a non-verbal musical conversation, maybe with accessible instruments or sensory resources, dance and movement, or share and discuss poetry, chat, and reminisce. I can include staff, visiting family or other residents as appropriate. My visit could be a whole hour spent with one person, 20mins in succession moving between 3 people, or shorter lengths of time with a larger number of residents. I can leave notes or debrief with staff to transfer to resident's activity diaries, to share with family, and to share topics or activities that have interested that resident.

Learn more about my services, past clients and testimonials at <https://www.york-songbox.co.uk/adult-support-groups-residential-and-nursing-homes>