Collaborative songwriting with children experiencing homelessness and family violence to understand their resources

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Abstract

This thesis uses a range of creative and inductive scholarly approaches to highlight the creative resources that children bring to research, as well as the range of resources that they draw upon in the face of adversity. Children’s voices are central to this research and their contributions will be used to inform future music therapy practice, the homelessness and family violence system, and child welfare research.

The majority of the literature about children experiencing homelessness and family violence focuses on reporting the perceived ‘problems’ and ‘challenges’ faced by children, with little acknowledgement of children’s personal resources and capacities in times of crisis (Fairchild, McFerran & Thompson, 2017). As a result, children are represented through the lens of risk which in turn impacts the ways that they are viewed, understood and responded to by professionals, researchers and the service system.

Drawing upon participatory, resource-oriented and arts-based approaches, this research seeks to balance the representation of children in this context by exploring their resources and what helps them to ‘do well’ throughout their experiences of homelessness and family violence. Songwriting was used as a collaborative research method to co-construct knowledge with children through group and individual interviews. The children were engaged as co-researchers in generating and interpreting the data, and in representing the results. The group interviews focused on what music means to children in this context and through group songwriting the children identified that music offers an escape from the outside world and provides hope that the future will be better. The individual songwriting interviews were used to expand the breadth of this examination of resources and the children described a range of supports, such as friends, family, sport, pets, journaling, hope and creativity. Six identified themes explore the role that these resources play in children’s lives: seeking refuge, wanting to feel safe, hoping for a better future, feeling cared for, being self determined, and protecting self and others.
In order to reflect further on the results of the collaborative song writing projects, two additional reflexive projects sought to provide further depth and integration of knowledge. The first was a collaborative article written with an 11-year-old child (‘Malakai Mraz’) who believed that learning to play the drums in music therapy changed his life. The process of writing the article provided an avenue for reflecting upon our experiences of engaging in music therapy together. In the final reflexive project I used songwriting as an arts-based method to explore my own experience of being involved in this research. I used concepts of vicarious trauma and vicarious resilience to discuss how arts-based approaches might also support other researchers to process their own experiences of becoming immersed in deeply personal research data.
Declaration

This is to certify that:

i. This thesis comprises my own original work towards the degree of Doctor of Philosophy except where indicated in the Preface,

ii. Due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used,

iii. The thesis is fewer than 100 000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.

Signed: [Signature]

Name: Rebecca Fairchild

Date: 26/03/2018
Preface

Thesis with Publication

This thesis is being submitted as a Thesis with Publication, including two published articles and two articles currently under revised review. Authorship of these works has been determined in discussion with the supervisory team and is detailed below.

Chapter 2.

This co-authored paper reports the findings of a critical interpretive synthesis that explored the ways children are represented in the homelessness and family violence literature.
It was published in a peer reviewed child welfare journal in March 2017.

Chapter 4.

This co-authored paper reports the method and findings from the first study of this project. It is under revised review with a music therapy journal.
Chapter 6.


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This article is co-authored with a child who participated in music therapy and describes our experience and reflections from engaging in music therapy together. It was published in a peer-reviewed music therapy journal in March 2018.

Chapter 7.


This sole-authored article provides an arts-based reflection on my experience of being a researcher in the field of child welfare. It is currently under revised review with an arts-based research journal.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Background to the Research

I have been working with children who are accompanying their families through the homelessness and family violence service system in Australia since I graduated from my music therapy degree in 2009. In my first music therapy position, I worked in a pilot program as a music therapy group facilitator within a team of people with backgrounds in social work and social welfare. As the only creative therapist within the program, I grappled with finding my place amongst case managers who focused primarily on crisis intervention and supporting families with primary needs such as food, safety, shelter, health and education. As children were referred to attend the therapy groups I was running, I was told about their painful stories of violence, transience, family disruption and intergenerational poverty. I noticed how family members, schools and professionals often described children through the lens of risk, perhaps in order to emphasize the need for children to be able to access our service. However, when these children engaged in music therapy, what I saw was their resilience, strength, determination, willingness to be heard, and their interest in music despite their experiences of adversity.

This research developed from my clinical role as a music therapy group facilitator at Bethany, a community based support agency in regional Victoria, Australia. Bethany aims to support children, young people and their families who are experiencing marginalisation due to family violence, homelessness, problem gambling, poverty, abuse and family separation. I worked at Bethany for 7 years within a program that supported children who were accompanying their families through the homelessness and family violence system through integrated streams of service including supported assessment and case planning, case management and therapeutic group work. Akin with child-centred principles identified by
Winkworth and McArthur (2006), individual children in families were viewed as the primary client within this program. However, the program also acknowledges the importance of involving supportive systems that surround the child, such as their non-violent caregiver’s, siblings and extended family members. As a result, ecological and family focused perspectives were also an important part of the work.

This research involved children aged 8-14 who had participated in a music therapy group while their families were accessing support from Bethany. The 15-week group that the children were involved in focused on working towards a performance in the final session for their families and support workers. Throughout the process of working towards the performance, the children participated in a range of therapeutic methods such as songwriting, improvisation, body percussion, drumming, song sharing, and music video creation, which took place alongside discussions of healthy coping strategies, positive identity, and exploration and expression of feelings. While this research took place at Bethany, as I was completing the final stages of this thesis I gained new employment at a different organization that specializes in counselling for people experiencing family violence and sexual assault. This new role provides an opportunity to further develop my therapeutic skills in offering individual support to children, young people and families.

Children who experience family violence and homelessness within their families in Australia have been described as the most vulnerable members in our society (Bunston, 2017). Thus, ongoing concerns and fears for children’s safety, wellbeing and development are valid and are a reality for many children and families in this context. However, as I will describe throughout this thesis, I have noticed a tendency for authors to privilege descriptions of the ‘challenges’ and the ‘problems’ that children face when they are describing their therapeutic work with children in this context. This way of writing seems incongruent with the strengths-based and collaborative approaches that are often adopted by professionals.
working in this field. In order to balance the representation of children in this context, this thesis seeks to share an alternative narrative to what is commonly represented in academic literature, the media and in other descriptions of children experiencing violence and transience. This alternate narrative is grounded in children’s experiences, and their reflections on their capacities, hopes, determination, supportive people in their lives, and their desire for things to change in the future. As a way of hearing and representing children’s voices, I used songwriting as a collaborative and arts-based research method to explore their resources and what helped them to ‘do well’ in their lives. Through sharing the children’s songs and perspectives throughout this thesis, I hope this research will provide a deeper and more holistic representation of children’s personal and musical resources.

**Motivation for the Research**

Prior to commencing this doctoral research I completed a Masters by Research, with the recruitment to the research and the data collection also taking place at Bethany. From the beginning of this research journey, I have been committed to researching children’s experiences because I noticed in my work and in the literature that children’s voices were often absent or not prioritized. My Masters research explored the experience and meaning of a performance in music therapy for pre-adolescent children who participated in the performance, as well as for their parent’s who were audience members at the performance (Fairchild, 2014; Fairchild, Thompson & McFerran, 2016). Three children (11-12 years) and four parents participated in the research. The children were interviewed twice, immediately after the performance and a week after the performance. The parents were interviewed once, immediately after watching their child’s performance. Through this research, I gained skills in generating, analysing and interpreting interview data using the qualitative method of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.
The results from the Masters project were useful in developing a focus for the doctoral research described in this thesis. The children identified that it was both internal and external responses that contributed to their experience of the performance. Their internal responses included feelings of pride, anxiety, excitement and ownership, and the external responses encompassed children’s feelings of being supported by their family and audience members, and the children feeling connected to each other while they were performing. The parent’s reported that they saw their child through a different lens while they were watching the performance and described how this helped them to notice the strengths and potential of their child. The children also identified positive changes in their relationship with music as a result of participating in the group. Following on from this research, I started to think about how it was both the internal and the external resources that supported children to cope throughout this experience and I was interested in exploring this concept more broadly in children’s everyday lives.

The notion of children needing both internal and external resources to be able to survive and thrive in their lives is represented in the resilience literature (Cutuli & Herbers, 2014; Liebenberg & Ungar, 2009). Resilience has been a useful framework that has underpinned my work since I started working in this field. There are a myriad of systemic issues that surround children’s experiences of homelessness and family violence due to children being exposed to ongoing threats to their safety and wellbeing due to lengthy legal processes, inconsistent police responses and often mandated access with the violent perpetrator. While these systemic challenges are concerning, Obradović (2010) and Cutuli and colleagues (2013) have identified that many children experiencing traumatic events such as family violence and homelessness have shown that they have the capacity for resilience. Therefore, I have found it helpful to reflect on children’s innate capacities and protective
strategies at times when the work and research has left me feeling helpless due to children’s ongoing exposure to risk and adversity.

While I was in the early stages of undertaking this doctoral research, I had the opportunity to attend the Pathways to Resilience Conference in Halifax, Canada, where I learnt about the latest wave of resilience that involves uniting concepts of resilience with social justice. Angie Hart and colleagues (2016) have critiqued the responsibility that resilience places on individuals to overcome challenges and create positive change in their lives, and suggested that it is equally important for researchers and professionals to take action to reduce children’s exposure to these challenging circumstances. This approach was congruent with my experience of wanting to understand children’s resources and experiences, while also feeling an innate responsibility to challenge the systemic issues that surround children’s experiences of homelessness and family violence in the first place. As a result, I thought it was important that I was able to offer meaningful opportunities for children to be heard and understood within this context, while also taking responsibility as an adult and as a researcher to advocate for children and to speak up for them.

As I was designing this research, I decided that I wanted to involve the children in more of a collaborative process in order to better represent their understandings of their experiences. Rather than interviewing the child and then going away to analyse and interpret the results myself as I had done in my Masters research, I wanted to involve the children at a deeper level throughout the research process. In order to engage children as co-researchers and to recognize the resources that they bring to research, I developed a collaborative songwriting research method that engaged children throughout the process of data generation (brainstorming ideas), interpretation and collaborative analysis (development of song lyrics), and representation of the findings (creating and recording the song). This collaborative
method was used in both group and individual contexts to explore the resources in children’s lives.

The Need for Music Therapy Research in this Context

While the incidence of family violence and homelessness continues to rise around the world, there is a gap in the music therapy literature exploring children’s experiences and therapeutic approaches to working in these contexts. Early music therapy research by Staum (1993) and Staum and Brotons (1995) described a behavioural approach that focused on the development of social skills with children who were living in homeless shelters with their families in the United States. Staum (1993) recommended that future work with this population offer flexibility to adapt to the individual needs of children, establish safe and non-threatening environments for children to process their experiences, provide children with choice and control over the activities, and facilitate connection between children, parents and other families in the homeless shelter.

In more recent literature, Yates and Silverman (2016) explored the needs of children who were living in homelessness shelters in the United States to provide a foundational understanding of what music therapy might offer in this context. Through interviews with workers at the homeless shelter, the authors identified the following needs of children in this context: for staff to be positive role models and be able to establish safe and trusting relationships with the children, for children to have opportunities for emotional support, for children’s wellbeing to be assessed and monitored throughout their time at the shelter, and for children to be invited into a calm living environment with predictable routines and expectations. These overarching themes would be important to consider when establishing a music therapy program, and are congruent with literature that describes trauma-informed approaches with children.
Nagel and Silverman (2017) explored the perspective of 5 music therapists who had worked with children and families who were experiencing poverty in the United States. Through individual interviews with each of the therapists, they were asked to share the experience of working with families experiencing and to explore their perspectives about what music therapy offered in this context. The results identified the following themes: music therapy offers a way for adults to develop parenting skills by learning strategies for engaging creatively with their children, participation in music therapy provides a way for children and adults to practice healthy interactions that can be transferred to the home environment, music therapy provides a unique and complementary modality within the continuum of support offered to children and families, and it is important for music therapists to be aware of the range of compounding stressors that families may be exposed to in addition to their experiences of poverty.

Music therapists working and researching in the field of child welfare have identified the importance of establishing safety with children and young people (Layman, Hussey & Laing, 2002; Clarkson, 2008; Zanders, 2012), which is congruent with perspectives in the trauma literature that states that safety is the foundation of any therapeutic work (Herman, 2015; Ogden & Fisher, 2015), Strehlow (2009) has described how music can offer a way of out silence for children who have been silenced due to their experiences of abuse or victimisation. Music therapists have described using a range of interventions in this context to provide a space for processing their experiences and hearing their voices, including music listening (Kim, 2015; Krüger & Stige, 2014; Montello & Coons, 1998; Zanders, 2012), songwriting (Fairchild, Thompson & McFerran, 2016; Fairchild & McFerran, under review; Staum & Brotons, 1995; MacDonald & Viega, 2011), improvisation and instrument playing (Austin, 2007; Strehlow, 2009) and performance (Fairchild, Thompson & McFerran, 2016; MacDonald & Viega, 2011).

In their child protection research with families identified as ‘at risk’ or with children who had been emotionally neglected, Jacobsen, McKinney and Holck (2014) investigated how dyadic music therapy can work on communication and interaction between the parent and child (5-12 years). After a 10-week dyadic music therapy intervention, the parents reported being less stressed by their child’s behaviours and moods, and demonstrated more understanding and increased responsiveness to their child’s needs, in comparison to families who did not receive music therapy. Therefore, within this context, music therapy has been shown to improve parenting capacity and parent/child interaction. Similarly, within the family violence context, Clarkson (2008) has identified the importance of engaging the adult survivor of violence, most commonly the mother, in the child’s recovery process. However, further exploration is needed within this context.
In the United States, Zanders (2012) used a qualitative inquiry method to explore the personal and musical lives of 10 adolescents who had been involved in the foster care system. The study found that the young people’s experience of foster care, and the quality of their relationships with their biological families and with their foster families, impacted the ways that they used music as a resource in their lives. Additionally, a positive and healthy relationship with music also influenced their experience of foster care. The young people described various ways that listening to music was helpful in their lives, including: music helps them to cope with their exposure to ongoing trauma and adversity, music is a way of escaping things or people that are causing them distress, music is a way of calming themselves, music provides a way to express and represent their identity, and music helps them to forget painful memories from the past.

In 2015, Zanders presented a framework for music therapy with young people who were living in foster care. He identified three stages for engaging the youth: creating stability, finding resources, and finding meaning. Through the presentation of a case study of a young person he worked with, Zanders (2015) shared the importance of establishing safety and stabilization in the early stages of therapeutic work through developing a therapeutic relationship, establishing physical and emotional safety, and providing creative ways of identifying and expressing emotions. Following this, the focus was on developing and strengthening the internal and external resources that the young person identified. The final stage involved finding meaning through exploring and representing identity, identifying significant people and understanding how the young persons experience of grief and loss had impacted his past, present and future.

Within the Norwegian context, Krüger and Stige (2014) explored the ways that adolescents experienced being a part of the child welfare system and how they were using music in their everyday lives. The young people in their study identified challenges within
the system, including feeling stigmatized which often resulted in a loss of identity, and a difficulty in positive dialogue with professionals due to a lack of trust and understanding. When considering the role of music in their lives, the young people identified that music was a way of processing their emotions and creating a narrative of their personal experience. Using the lens of the United Nation Convention of the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989), Krüger and Stige (2014) have suggested that future music therapy research in this context should focus on the rights of children and young people to be taking seriously in their contributions to research, and recommended using music as a way of facilitating this dialogue.

Music therapy research within the context of child welfare has established foundational understandings regarding the ways that children and young people are using music in their lives, and the ways that music therapy can offer a supportive space to tell their story and to have their voice heard. Following on from this, I believe there is an important role for music therapists in collaborating with children and advocating for their resources to be recognized and built upon through music therapy. Therefore, this research seeks to provide a contribution to the music therapy and child welfare literature, while also impacting the homelessness and family violence system more broadly.

**Scope of the Research**

**Aim.**

The overarching aim of this research was to co-construct knowledge with children experiencing homelessness and family violence to understand the range of resources they were drawing upon in their lives using a collaborative songwriting method. The children collaborated in two ways to achieve these aims: 1) group songwriting workshops to explore the ways children were using music as a personal resource, and 2) individual songwriting
interviews to explore the range of internal and external resources that existed in children’s lives.

Further to the initial aims of the research, I had the opportunity to expand my understandings of children’s resources through co-authoring a reflexive paper with an 11-year-old child (‘Malakai Mraz’) who had participated in music therapy and identified that learning to play the drums in music therapy changed his life. Malakai expressed a desire to share his story and to help other children have the same opportunities that he had in music therapy. Therefore, the inclusion of the collaborative paper in this thesis seeks to demonstrate an innovative way that children’s voices can be responded to and subsequently integrated into the academic literature.

**Key terms.**

*Family violence.*

There are a range of terms that are used to describe violence occurring between partners and family members, including ‘family violence’, ‘domestic violence’ and ‘intimate-partner violence’. For the purpose of this thesis, I have chosen to use the term ‘family violence’ as I believe this best captures the impact of the violence on the entire family, including recognising children as witnesses or victims of the violence. Family violence is committed primarily, though not exclusively, by men against women and their children. In this research, all of the children participating were exposed to family violence that was perpetrated by a male parent or a parental figure such as a stepfather.

Family violence has been described as ‘any behaviour that controls or dominates a family member that causes them to fear for their own or other family member’s safety or wellbeing’ (Victorian Family Violence Protection Act, 2008, p. 12-13). Family violence might include forms of physical, sexual, psychological, financial or spiritual abuse. Children’s exposure to family violence varies between families, however often involves
hearing or watching the violence, being blamed for the violence due to their behaviour, and intervening in an attempt to protect the victim or to stop the violence (Stanley & Humphreys, 2015). In cases of high-risk family violence, the woman and her children might be required to flee the family home in attempt to find safety. As women may lack familial, social and financial resources after they have fled the violent situation, they often find themselves accessing the homelessness service system with their children in order to find stable housing and to keep their children safe.

**Homelessness.**

In Australia, the term homelessness is applied across a number of circumstances such as sleeping rough or living in vehicles, staying with family or friends temporarily, living in temporary accommodation such as crisis or transitional accommodation, or living in a boarding house (Chamberlain, Johnson & Robinson, 2014). In addition to experiences of family violence, families may enter the homelessness system due to a number of intersecting reasons including intergenerational poverty, unemployment, financial instability, and a lack of availability of affordable and accessible housing. The children in this research had experienced various levels of homelessness, which often resulted in changing schools, moving house several times, leaving behind belongings and comfort items, and losing connection to extended family members and supportive networks.

**Resources.**

Considering the way that children are predominantly represented in the homelessness and family violence literature, which is to prioritize descriptions of the challenges that exist in their lives, this research sought to focus on children’s resources and how they can be explored and represented through music. Therefore, the concept of resources is central to this research and is underpinned by resource-oriented music therapy perspectives described by Norwegian music therapist Randi Rolvsjord (2010). Resource-oriented music therapy focuses
on identifying and building upon the existing strengths and resources that people bring with them to therapy and to research, rather than focusing on the challenges and deficits that exist in people’s lives. This approach acknowledges children as active agents in their own lives, and recognizes the internal and external resources that are already in place that are helping them to cope with adversity.

Within the trauma literature, Ogden and Fisher (2015) have described resources as innate capacities that develop over time through exposure to various situations and through interactions with others. These resources vary in nature and therefore often serve different purposes, such as being relational, emotional, intellectual, creative, material, psychological and spiritual resources. Ogden & Fisher (2015) identified that these internal and external resources help people to feel safer, stronger, peaceful and more competent to cope with a difficult situation. Therefore, this understanding of resources is helpful in understand the various functions that resources play in children’s lives.

**Children.**

Throughout this thesis, the term ‘children’ is used to represent the participants in this research who were between 8 and 14 years. Though some researchers prefer to use language such as ‘young people’ or ‘pre-adolescent’ to represent this age group, I felt that the term children best represented the fact that they were accompanying their families through the homelessness and family violence system and as a result their childhoods had been impacted. Some children had been put in situations where they had to take on additional responsibility such as protecting their younger siblings when their parents were fighting, intervening to try to stop the violence, helping with cleaning or looking after family members after the violence had occurred, or calling the police or protective services. Though children were required to take on additional responsibility at times, it is important to remember that due to their young age they were still, for the most part, reliant on their family and supportive systems to keep
them safe and to provide them with opportunities to enhance their wellbeing. Therefore, the term ‘children’ seeks to remind readers that the participants were part of a wider family system, both supportive and unsupportive, and this is crucial in understanding children’s experiences.

**Overview of the Thesis**

**Thesis with publication.**

This thesis is being submitted ‘with publication’, which means that several of the chapters contain published papers or papers currently ‘under review’ with peer reviewed journals. As a result, the structure and style of this thesis differs from a traditionally formatted thesis in several ways. Though I am the primary author of this entire thesis, some chapters that are written for publication have co-authors listed in order to recognize the intellectual inputs of my supervisor/s, or in one case, of an 11-year-old ‘Malakai Mraz’ who co-authored an article with me (chapter 6). As stated in the requirements of The University of Melbourne, papers written for publication should maintain the same published formatting, which results in differences in editing and referencing styles between chapters. In order to reflect consistency across the thesis, each chapter contains its own reference list rather than providing a complete list of references at the end of the thesis. In addition, each chapter is preceded with a brief bridging piece to orient the reader to the style and details of the section.

Throughout my experience of undertaking a thesis with publication I have benefitted from the critical feedback of peer reviewers and journal editors, and this process has assisted me to further develop my ideas and enhance my writing style. It was helpful to have the support of my supervisors throughout my candidature to develop skills in responding to reviewer feedback and to guide me through the publication process, which are crucial skills in researcher development.
Thesis structure.

Chapter 2 details the methods and findings of a critical review of the literature that focused on the ways children’s needs and capacities are represented in the homelessness and family violence literature. Using the method of critical interpretive synthesis to approach and review the literature, my supervisors and I question the degree of congruence between the predominant descriptions of children through the lens of risk in the early stages of articles and the strengths-based approaches that authors adopt in their descriptions of programmes for children in this context. This paper is written for a broader child welfare audience, in order to impact the ways that children are represented and understood in this context. The paper was published in an Australian child-welfare journal, Children Australia, in March 2017 (Fairchild, McFerran & Thompson, 2017). As the critical review of the literature focused purely on the homelessness and family violence literature, additional literature is integrated throughout this thesis to include relevant music therapy knowledge.

Chapter 3 describes the overarching design and philosophical underpinnings of the research, including arts-based research, participatory approaches, embodiment, and reflections on power and privilege. The chapter shares a rationale for engaging children in collaborative research and provides an overview of the collaborative songwriting method that was developed to engage the children as co-researchers throughout the data generation, interpretation of ideas, and in the representation of the findings. An illustrative example of the collaborative songwriting method is provided to demonstrate the research process.

Chapter 4 is a paper written for publication that describes the use of songwriting as a collaborative research method to explore the ways that children use music as a personal resource in their lives. Fifteen children (8-14 years) participated across two music workshops to write songs in response to the guiding question what does music mean to you? This paper is co-authored with my primary research supervisor and is written for a music therapy
audience. It is currently under revised review with an international music therapy journal (Fairchild & McFerran, under review).

Following their involvement in the music workshops, the children were given the option to contribute further to the research through attending an individual songwriting session that involved exploring the range of resources in children’s lives. 10 children chose to continue their participation in this part of the research and each of them wrote a song in response to the guiding question what helps you to ‘do well’ in your life? Chapter 5 shares the individual stories and songs written with the children and seeks to demonstrate the subjective and diverse elements of the children’s reflections about the internal and external resources that support them in their lives. Informed by arts-based research, the songs co-created by the children represent the essence of the research findings. A discussion of the themes that emerged from looking across all of the songs is also provided and contextualized with relevant literature.

After I had completed the two research projects described above, I had a unique opportunity to collaborate with a remarkable young person following his participation in individual music therapy. ‘Malakai Mraz’ (pseudonym) was an 11-year-old child who was accompanying his mother through the homelessness and family violence system. Music therapy with Malakai focused on learning to play the drums, songwriting and developing positive coping strategies. In the final session Malakai identified that ‘everything changed when I got those drums’, and he said that he wanted to help other children to have the same opportunities that he had in music therapy and he wanted to share his story. In Chapter 6, I share a collaborative paper co-written with Malakai that focused on exploring our experiences of being involved in music therapy together and reflecting on the range of conditions at play that contributed to Malakai’s growth and development. This paper was

The process of completing research in the field of child welfare is often an emotional undertaking, however the impacts of this work on the researcher are rarely acknowledged. Chapter 7 is a sole authored paper written for publication that provides a personal and arts-based reflection on my own experiences of being involved in this research. In this paper, I discuss concepts of vicarious trauma and vicarious resilience in research and practice, and consider how arts-based approaches may support researchers to reflect on how they have been impacted by their immersion in the research data. Through a reflexive discussion, I share four songs that I wrote throughout the process of completing this research to illustrate my own process of personal and professional discovery throughout this research. This paper is written for an audience of arts-based and creative researchers, and is currently under review with an arts-based research journal (Fairchild, under review).

Finally, Chapter 8 provides a reflexive overview of the findings across the entire research and discusses recommendations for improving responses to children in this context. Critical reflections on the collaborative songwriting method are provided, alongside recommendations for the homelessness and family violence system, music therapy practice and strategies for collaborative research with children in this context.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has provided a narrative of the background and context for the research, including the motivations for exploring children’s experiences, the context and the theoretical underpinnings, and the need for music therapy research in this context, which provide a foundation for this research. The chapter also offered an overview of the structure of the thesis and the key terms used in order to guide the reader through the remaining chapters.
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Bridging material

The next chapter takes the form of a literature review, using the method of critical interpretive synthesis (CIS). Literature regarding music therapy within the child welfare context, community music therapy and resource oriented music therapy is provided throughout this thesis. Therefore, in this chapter I chose to take a different approach to the literature in order to explore and critique the ways that children are represented in the homelessness and family violence literature, rather than using a traditional literature review format to purely describe and canvas the available literature. Through a critical analysis of 17 articles that described programmes for children in this context, I identified that children were primarily being described through the lens of risk by emphasising the ‘challenges’ and ‘problems’ that they faced as a result of their experience. On the other hand, there was little recognition of children’s personal resources and resilience in times of crisis. The findings from this critical review of the literature influenced the focus and design of the research and provided a basis for understanding my decision to focus on exploring children’s resources in a collaborative way in this research.

This chapter was written for publication and is primarily targeted at professionals and researchers working in the field of child welfare. The article was published in Children Australia in March 2017 and is co-authored by my research supervisors Katrina Skewes McFerran and Grace Thompson.

Chapter 2

A critical interpretive synthesis of the ways children’s needs and capacities are represented in the homelessness and family violence literature

Abstract
This paper describes a critical interpretive synthesis (critical review of the literature) exploring the ways children are described and represented in the homelessness and family violence literature regarding programmes. Authors’ descriptions of children and their perceived needs are considered from individual, interpersonal and systemic positions, with an inherent focus on the influence of academic language and power in representing children. The articles reviewed here contained an abundance of negative descriptions of children’s poor health, educational and developmental outcomes, but very little acknowledgement of children’s personal resources and capacities in times of adversity. The programme goals and strengths-based therapeutic intentions described by the authors of these articles were not always congruent with the ways children were being represented in the early stages of the articles. We argue for a better balance in representing children’s strengths alongside their challenges when describing their presentation and participation in programmes and research.

Keywords: critical review, children, homelessness, family violence, representation
We learnt a word at school called stigma. I think it’s when the stories and stuff that people tell you about another person . . . it sticks to them. So if there’s a bad stigma on you, don’t let that be who you are and just be your own person . . . I know some people who have gone through the same stuff (as me), like violence in their house and stuff . . . And they kind of let that become who they are . . . They’re always angry and get into lots of trouble . . . No one wants to be that kid.

‘Blue’ (pseudonym) – aged 14

As Blue suggests, stigma is a powerful word. It can place a divide between people and often involves making assumptions about their limited capacities and, in Blue’s words, ‘it sticks to them’. The context of homelessness and family violence is riddled with negative attitudes, multiple oppressions and misunderstandings surrounding these experiences. The local and international literature regarding children is abundant with descriptions of the possible physical, social and psychological impacts of homelessness and family violence, predominantly reporting individual and family deficits with a lack of acknowledgement of children’s strength and resilience during times of adversity. We believe it is timely to critically reflect on the influence of academic language when describing and representing children, to ensure we do not further stigmatize and disempower those who are already experiencing marginalisation.

Regardless of how careful and well meaning we are with our choice of language in academic writing, the process of representing others’ experiences remains challenging and paradoxical (Ellingson, 2011). The presentation of research typically follows prescribed models across various disciplines; however, feminist researchers have warned about the potential risks of appropriating participants’ voices to meet academic standards (Ellingson, 2011). The scientific divide between the ways in which ‘truth’ is discerned in research
impacts on how knowledge is sought and subsequently how participants are represented (Roof, 2012). Within our field of music therapy, authors have been challenged to consider the privilege and power from which knowledge has been obtained (Edwards & Hadley, 2007), and reflexivity and discussions of ontological positions are increasingly playing an integral role in academic writing (McFerran, Hense, Medcalf, Murphy, & Fairchild, 2016). Irrespective of the level of collaborative approaches in research and practice, the author ultimately holds a sense of authority and responsibility about how knowledge and the participants will be represented throughout these descriptions.

In Australia, children accompanying their families make up a significant proportion of the population accessing homelessness and family violence services (Homelessness Australia, 2016). There is a growing number of researchers stressing that children are a diverse group with complex and individual needs, and early intervention is crucial to reduce intergenerational impacts (Kirkman, Keys, Bodzak, & Turner, 2010; Moore, McArthur, & Noble-Carr, 2011). Despite this, the systemic and therapeutic responses for these children are inconsistent, sparse and even non-existent in some contexts (Mudaly, Graham, & Lewis, 2014). In order for researchers, policy makers and practitioners to better contribute to making a difference in children’s lives, a greater commitment to providing appropriate therapeutic and practical responses is needed. However, of equal importance is the dire need to address numerous systemic issues that contribute to children’s exposure to these challenging circumstances in the first place (Hart, Gagnon, Eryigit-Madzwamuse, Cameron, & Aranda, 2016).

There are myriad approaches for working with children experiencing homelessness and family violence. Group work is a common response to these children’s experiences; however, the nature, aims and theoretical orientation of the programmes differ greatly across national and international contexts. Malekoff (2014) describes positive group experiences as
a protective factor for children in vulnerable contexts, with a focus on enhancing strengths and capacities within a safe and nurturing environment. Akin to strengths-based approaches in social work, resource-oriented practice within music therapy involves identifying and celebrating personal strengths of participants and building upon existing resources, rather than focusing on deficits and pathology (Rolvsjord, 2010). Similarly, the latest theories of resilience focus on what is going right for children and striving to understand the internal and external resources they draw upon throughout life’s challenges (Hart et al., 2016; Liebenberg & Ungar, 2009).

Despite the increasing focus on strengths-based approaches across disciplines in this context, the way we write does not always fully represent how we work in collaborative and mutually empowering ways with children and their families. Considering the influence of the academic discourse, through which we consistently strive to ‘prove’ that the work and research we are doing is meaningful and worthwhile, we argue for the need to acknowledge the wider impact of the ways we write about and represent children. Therefore, the aim of this paper is twofold: (1) To describe a critical interpretive synthesis (critical review of the literature) (McFerran et al., 2016) exploring the ways children’s needs and capacities are described and represented in the homelessness and family violence literature regarding programmes, and (2) to stimulate ongoing dialogue and reflexivity about the power of language and representation of children in academic writing and discussion.

Method

**Critical Interpretive Synthesis.**

The Critical Interpretive Synthesis (CIS) is a critical approach to a literature review, first described by Dixon-Woods et al. (2006). It is an inductive and exploratory approach, with the searching of articles, critique and analysis occurring concurrently (Dixon-Woods et al., 2006). The CIS involves researchers undertaking secondary analyses of the literature by
focusing on how authors have shaped the construction of knowledge (McFerran et al., 2016). The approach acknowledges the researcher’s interpretations and subjectivity as an integral part of the process, and necessitates constant reflexivity and questioning of the data (Dixon-Woods et al., 2006). The process we have developed for conducting a CIS comprises four key steps. These include: approaching the data through the generation of research intentions, gathering the data in a systematic way, interrogating the assumptions that can be demonstrated in the data through the analysis and interpreting the findings into a synthesis that incorporated the key learnings (McFerran et al., 2016, p. 5).

**Approaching the literature.**

We began with a guiding question for the literature search, which was: *What types of programmes are described for children in the homelessness and family violence literature?* The search of the literature involved identifying articles and book chapters using combinations of the following key words: ‘homelessness’, ‘family and/or domestic violence’, ‘groups’, ‘therapy’, ‘programmes’, ‘children’, ‘young people and/or adolescents’ and ‘families’. Rather than relying on electronic databases to identify literature, as is usually the case in conventional systematic reviews, we approached the literature in a more exploratory way that fitted with the emergent nature of the critical interpretive synthesis (Dixon-Woods et al., 2006). Papers were identified through a variety of mediums starting with Google scholar and university databases, and supplemented by reading through the reference lists in all the literature retrieved and hand searching for book chapters. As suggested by Dixon-Woods et al. (2006), literature was selected based on its relevance to the aims of the synthesis as well as its capacity to contribute to the interpretation and development of concepts, rather than to provide a comprehensive overview of all literature in the field. Therefore, we chose to only include literature that had a specific focus on children experiencing homelessness and/or domestic or family violence, and broader traumatic experiences such as abuse and
bereavement were excluded from the analysis. In order to provide a broad understanding of the literature we included articles from Australian authors as well as international authors (only articles written in English). We specifically searched for literature that included case studies and programme descriptions, as opposed to quantitative research, as we were most interested in the ways children were being described and represented in the context of everyday practice rather than the perceived outcomes of the programmes.

A total of 17 articles were selected for inclusion (as listed in table 2.1). The date of publication ranged from 1993 to 2014 and included papers published by authors from Australia (3), the United States of America (11), Canada (2) and India (1). The authors represented a variety of disciplines including art therapy, social work, music therapy, counselling and play therapy. The age of the articles included in the review, with almost half of them being more than 10-years old, represents the limited availability of contemporary papers describing programmes for children in this context. A summary of the authors, approaches and settings can be found in Table 2.1.

The critical review was a way to challenge our perceived biases about children’s representation in homelessness and family violence programmes. Reflexivity was integral in these early stages to ensure that we were interrogating the data carefully and being mindful of how our own perspectives were influencing the analysis process (Finlay, 2014). As a way of tracking our own influences and documenting the development of our ideas, extensive note taking was embedded throughout the analysis process (Charmaz, 2014). Regular research supervision exploring how our emotional responses were contributing to the analysis process was essential, and this ongoing cycle of reflexivity allowed us to continually check whether our assumptions were present in the actual data (McFerran et al., 2016).
Table 2.1

Articles and Book Chapters Included in the Synthesis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article Number</th>
<th>Author/s Name (year)</th>
<th>Therapeutic medium</th>
<th>Context (including setting and culture)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Senroy (2008)</td>
<td>Play therapy</td>
<td>Shelter home. Girls who have run away due to domestic violence. India.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Heise and MacGillivray (2011)</td>
<td>Art activities</td>
<td>Homeless Shelter. Memphis USA.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Systematically gathering the data.

Initially, we extracted information under the following subheadings: author details and publication year, dominant play strategy, description of the group, type of crisis experienced, setting, culture, gender, age of participants, goals, theoretical orientation, role of the child throughout the programme, assumed degree of expertise by the writer, evaluation strategies and perceived outcomes of the programme. However, in the early stages of analysis, we found ourselves experiencing a sense of discomfort and anger each time we read about the ways children were being described at the beginning of the articles. There seemed to be a heavy emphasis on describing family deficits and bleak statistics for children’s futures, and this seemed incongruent with our experiences of working musically with children in this context. Therefore, our emotional responses were a result of feeling uncomfortable that children were being described in such negative ways as well as the profound lack of discussion about children’s strengths and capacities. As we have described previously (McFerran et al., 2016), tuning into and responding to these emotional responses was an essential part of the analytic process. Reflexivity, supervision and time away from the data were crucial as a way of understanding why our emotional responses were so intense. This process shifted the focus of the critical review, which became: To explore the types of programmes that are described for children who are experiencing homelessness and family violence with their families, with a focus on critically analysing the ways that children’s needs and capacities are represented. New categories were inductively generated throughout the entire process, including language to describe children in the homelessness and family violence system, language to describe children and what children need, programme goals and the therapeutic qualities of programme facilitators.

Interrogating the literature.

Data analysis occurred simultaneously alongside the iterative and recursive processes
of mining and categorising the data (Smith, 2011). We continually interrogated and made comparisons across the data, regularly returning to earlier articles to obtain additional information by viewing the data through a different lens. Our emotional responses continued to be integral to the creation of new questions and challenging our own assumptions, with the constant refinement and generation of questions being an integral part of the process (Zaza et al., 2000). For example, our decision to take some time away from the analysis in response to feelings of anger and sadness about the negative ways children were being described provided time to move beyond simple reactivity and generalized assumptions. The use of reflexivity and supervision helped us to clarify that the issue was our emotional response to the underlying assumption that all children in the homelessness and family violence system will be irretrievably damaged in these difficult circumstances, which was incongruent with our own experiences of working creatively with children in this context.

**Interpreting the analysis into a synthesized form.**

Interpreting the analysis involved collating the findings into synthesized forms such as tables and figures (Dixon-Woods et al., 2006; McFerran et al., 2016). After careful consideration of the ways children were being described and represented, we decided to focus specifically on the language that was being used throughout the articles. This process involved collating key phrases and words from the literature, and considering the positions authors were adopting when choosing to use these phrases. We noticed that children’s needs were being described from systemic, individual and relational positions, and subsequently used these categories to collate the data relating to these ideas. The next section will present the synthesized results and discussion of the findings.
Results

Descriptions of children’s experiences in the homelessness and family violence system.

The type of language used to describe children in the homelessness and family violence system appeared to be important from the beginning of the analysis. All of the articles provided descriptions of children in the homelessness and family violence system, usually in the early stages of the articles, to portray their needs and to represent the significance of the programmes to be described. These descriptions included statistics about the number of children and families in the system as well as generalized statements about how these children might be impacted upon by their experiences. We collated the words and phrases used to describe children’s experiences’ (Table 2.2), and attempted to categorize them as systemic, individual or interpersonal in order to consider children’s experiences from an ecological perspective.

Systemic.

The systemic category refers to the overarching social structures and systems that contribute to children’s experiences of homelessness and family violence. We chose to place these descriptions under the systemic category because we believe the increasing exposure to risk factors for these children are a primary result of systemic issues, such as inequality and power imbalances.

Children were often described as having ‘unaddressed’ and ‘unmet’ needs within the homelessness and family violence system, which was seen to be a result of a ‘lack of availability of services’ specifically for children. Gaps in the service system were noted, with one of the Australian authors discussing how homelessness services are not designed to meet the needs of children, working mostly in a case management capacity with families rather than offering direct therapeutic and child-centred support for individual children. As Table 2.2 illustrates, children were labeled as ‘marginalized’, ‘oppressed’ and ‘negatively
stigmatized’ within the homelessness and family violence context. Six of the articles described children as ‘at risk’ due to their exposure to adversity, which we interpreted as a risk that was placed on them due to a lack of systemic response to children’s experiences. As a result of the lack of services and support for these children, they were considered to be ‘one of the most vulnerable groups’ and to be ‘in need of care and protection’.

**Individual.**

The individual category refers to the personal experiences and characteristics associated with the ways children might present in the system. The children’s individual experience of homelessness and family violence were characterized by feelings of ‘pain’, ‘fear’, ‘ongoing crisis’ and ‘insecurity’. Impacts of these experiences on children were sometimes described using strong language such as having ‘extreme’ and ‘damaging’ effects on children’s functioning, with one article labelling these as ‘dangers’ to development. Seven of the authors used language such as ‘problems’ and ‘challenges’ to describe children’s presentation in the system.

Children were described as having ‘unique needs’ or ‘symptoms’ that need to be ‘alleviated or overcome’. Impacts on mental health included feelings of ‘anxiety’, ‘depression’, ‘sadness’, ‘worries’ and ‘guilt’. Academic challenges included ‘poor school attendance’, ‘low academic skills’, ‘problems at school’ and ‘lower levels of cognition’. Some children were described as presenting as ‘withdrawn’, ‘introverted’ or ‘mute’. Negative behaviour such as ‘aggression’, ‘oppositional behaviour’ and ‘impulsivity’ was seen as a consequence of adverse experiences. Despite all the articles describing children’s negative responses to their experiences of homelessness and family violence, only one article acknowledged how ‘some children may be resilient’ in the face of adversity.
### Table 2.2

**Words to Describe Children’s Experiences in the Homelessness and Family Violence System**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Systemic</th>
<th>Individual</th>
<th>Interpersonal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negatively stigmatized (4)</td>
<td>Pain (1) Fear (7) Unsafe (1, 9) Ongoing crisis (9)</td>
<td>Distrust (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelters: Chaotic, noisy, overcrowded, stressful, lack of privacy, strict rules (4, 11)</td>
<td>Unpredictable (6, 9, 10) Uncertain futures (11) Insecurity (2, 7) Unstable (6) Chaos (10, 13)</td>
<td>Lack of nurturing parenting (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unaddressed needs (11) Unmet needs (15)</td>
<td>Great deal of stress (4) Stressed (5) Distressed (9, 12, 13) Debilitating (4) Homelessness as a stressor (14)</td>
<td>Poor role models (4) Lack of proper role models (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marginalized (5) Oppressed (5)</td>
<td>Problems (3, 7) Host of problems (4) Multiple problems (4) Challenges (5) Significant problems (9) Problem areas (16)</td>
<td>Increased interpersonal conflicts with family members (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low income (5) Poor (7)</td>
<td>Numerous traumas (3) Unique needs (4)</td>
<td>Limited social support system (4) Lacking social networks (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At risk (1, 8, 12, 16) Increased exposure to risk factors (15)</td>
<td>Low self esteem (1, 3, 4) Poor self-esteem (2, 10) More likely to exhibit difficulties (2) Quiet (1) Introverted (1) Passivity (2) Withdrawn (3, 9) Mute (9) Regressive behaviour (3)</td>
<td>Children’s progress may not be met by parallel changes in parents (12) Social isolation (2) Isolation (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children as most appropriate prevention audience (12)</td>
<td>Having “symptoms” that need to be alleviated and overcome (6) Trauma related symptoms (3)</td>
<td>Decreased interpersonal responsiveness (16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of availability of services (10, 13) Number of children experiencing homelessness and family violence exceeds number of services available (10)</td>
<td>Embarrassment (4)</td>
<td>Decreased level of social competence (13) Poor sibling, peer and other relationships (3) Social problems (10) Social skills deficits (13) Fragmented family boundaries (16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence against women as an important public health problem for women and their children (10) Focus has mainly been on women (12) Building capacity of support workers (17) Need to focus on early intervention and prevention (17) Homelessness services not designed to meet children’s needs (9) Intergenerational impacts (3)</td>
<td>Anxiety (2, 3, 9) Depressed (2, 3) Sadness (2) Worries (3) Feelings of responsibility (10) Guilt (10)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short term programs not sufficient for children requiring long term support (3) Major implications for future generations (7) Domestic violence is an abuse of power (1) At risk of multiple problems (7) Rising numbers of homelessness (16)</td>
<td>Low academic skills (8) Problems at school (12) Academic challenges (11) Lower levels of cognition (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dangers to development (7) Extreme effects (9) Damaging effects (14) Detrimental long-term negative impact (17) Some children may be resilient and show few reactions as a result of their experience (3)</td>
<td>Poor school attendance (8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Bracketed numbers correspond with article number in Table 1.
Although several of the authors adopted strengths-based approaches in their programmes, the ways the children were represented in the early stages of the articles were often not congruent with the aims and outcomes described at later stages.

**Interpersonal.**

The interpersonal category centres on relationships between children and their families, as well as their wider support networks. Interpersonal relationships were seen as key contributors to children’s negative presentation and challenges. Children were described as having a lack of exposure to ‘nurturing parenting’ and ‘proper role models’, resulting in feelings of ‘distrust’ and ‘increased interpersonal conflict’. Socially, children were thought to have ‘social problems’ and ‘deficits’ in their interactions with peers, and one author considered that children ‘may lose the capacity to connect and develop relationships’ following their experiences of transience and violence. As a result, children were said to have ‘limited social supports’ and a ‘decreased level of social competence’.

**Descriptions of what children in the homelessness and family violence system need.**

Alongside our collation of the language used to describe the children themselves, we also documented how authors described their perceptions of what children need in the context of homelessness and family violence. Again using the systemic, individual and interpersonal categories, we extracted key phrases and words used in the articles to describe children’s needs (Table 2.3). At times we grappled with which category most suited the need being described, as some of the needs could have fitted across all of the categories. The decision was ultimately based on who was responsible for responding to these children’s needs.

**Systemic.**

A number of systemic needs were identified when looking for language describing
### Table 2.3

**Words to Describe What Children in the Homelessness and Family Violence System Need**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Systemic</th>
<th>Individual</th>
<th>Interpersonal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus on early intervention and prevention (17)</td>
<td>Material resources (5)</td>
<td>Increase trust (4) Trust (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filling an articulated need (17)</td>
<td>To know they are not alone (3, 6, 12) To correct misconceptions that they are responsible. To know it is not their fault (3)</td>
<td>Building trust (15) Enhance parenting skills (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prevention activities to buffer against stress (15)</td>
<td>Safe place for positive experiences (10)</td>
<td>Peer to peer relationships (2) Increased social support (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breaking intergenerational cycles (7)</td>
<td>Building upon personal and family strengths (4)</td>
<td>Engage entire family system (16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Externalising responsibility (10)</td>
<td>Celebrate individual strengths and creativity (11)</td>
<td>Positive role models (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate programs and responses (7)</td>
<td>Telling their stories (5)</td>
<td>Interpersonal interactions (16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family systems perspective (14)</td>
<td>Explore personal feelings and experiences (14) Exploration of self and identity (6)</td>
<td>Strengthen interactions with others (17) Opportunities for social connectedness (17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be seen as unique individuals (17) Address their unique needs (4)</td>
<td>Counter the damage of violence and adversity (9) Minimize negative effect of homelessness and family violence on their physical and mental health (17)</td>
<td>Interpersonal problem solving (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensitive therapeutic interventions (9)</td>
<td>To focus on what is going right for the children, rather what is going wrong and needs to be ‘fixed’ (8)</td>
<td>Opportunities for positive interactions (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stability of care (9)</td>
<td>Safe outlet for creative expression and skill mastery (7) Creative expression (11)</td>
<td>Develop parental authority and responsibility (16) Increase parents coping ability (16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional and therapeutic security (9)</td>
<td>Express emotions (1) Recognize strong emotions (17)</td>
<td>Nurturing environment (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great need for intervention with preschool children (10)</td>
<td>Reduce feelings of anxiety and helplessness (16) Manage stress (16)</td>
<td>Empower parents to support children (14) Improve family functioning (16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence prevention (15)</td>
<td>Sense of control (17) Stability (8) Structure (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referrals to other services at the completion of the group (10)</td>
<td>Confidence and self-esteem (17)</td>
<td>Consistency (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offset risk factors (7) Reverse potential negative outcomes to life stressors (8) Promotion of protective factors to help children cope (11) Increase protective factors (8)</td>
<td>Age appropriate activities (2) Developmentally appropriate (3) Engagement in meaningful activities (8, 11) To develop the ability to relax (15)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be safe (1)</td>
<td>Opportunities for academic success (4) Skill development (8) Academic activities (15)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hope for the future (2, 3, 5, 8) Vision for the future (11) Perseverance (11)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More effective coping skills (13) Reduce symptoms of maladaptive coping (14) To learn to cope with their experiences (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coping strategies (3) Recognize different kinds of abuse (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Decrease frequency of children’s behaviour problems (16) Minimize negative behavioural issues (17)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Overcome feelings of stigma and isolation (6) Reduce feelings of isolation (15, 17)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Counteract isolation (8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Bracketed numbers correspond with article numbers in Table 1.
what children in the homelessness and family violence system need. Primary needs such as ‘to be safe’, ‘violence prevention’ and ‘early intervention’ were seen as the responsibility of the system in order to protect and support children. Opportunities for children to be ‘seen as unique individuals’ and to have their ‘unique needs’ addressed were identified as integral for intervention programmes. ‘Emotional and therapeutic stability’ was interpreted as something that should be provided by the system in order to ‘reverse potential negative outcomes to life stressors’, ‘offset risk factors’ and ‘promote protective factors’.

**Individual.**

From an individual perspective, children were described as needing a safe and supportive space to ‘express emotions’, ‘explore personal feelings’ and ‘rewrite personal narratives’. Strengths-based approaches acknowledged the need to ‘focus on what is going right for children, rather than what needs to be fixed’ and to ‘celebrate personal strengths and creativity’. On the other hand, children were thought to need to ‘decrease the frequency of behaviour problems’ and ‘minimise negative behavioural issues’.

Children were described as needing to ‘learn to cope’ and ‘reduce symptoms of maladaptive coping’ in response to their traumatic experiences. Similarly, programmes also needed to minimize ‘negative effects’ and ‘counter the damage’ of violence and adversity. Children were thought to need ‘hope’ and ‘vision’ for the future, and to learn skills of perseverance through times of adversity. Reducing feelings of self-blame was also seen as important, with authors recognizing that children needed to ‘know they are not alone’ and to ‘know it is not their fault’.

**Interpersonal.**

Children were described as needing ‘opportunities for positive interaction’ and ‘social connectedness’. Building ‘trust’ was described as important so that children were able to develop their interpersonal skills and ‘strengthen their interactions with others’. ‘Engaging
the entire family system’ was viewed as a way of building upon family relationships and responding to children’s interpersonal needs. By ‘empowering parents’ and ‘enhancing parenting skills’, they may be better equipped to provide ‘consistency’ and a ‘nurturing environment’ for children throughout transient times. Although some authors identified that children need ‘peer to peer relationships’ and ‘social support’, the interpersonal needs tended to focus mostly on family relationships rather than the need for children to feel connected to their peers, school and the wider community.

**Descriptions of what programmes offer.**

Programme descriptions and goals were collated (see Figure 2.1) and compared with the list of identified needs. All of the programmes adopted one or more of the following goals: (1) emotional expression through creative mediums such as art, play, storytelling, drama and music, (2) making plans for staying safe, (3) increasing self-esteem and positive identity, (4) developing conflict resolution and problem solving skills, (5) de-stigmatisation through psychosocial-education about homelessness and family violence and reducing children’s feeling of self-blame, (6) fostering relationships between participants and family members and (7) building upon strengths and coping strategies.

The goals of the programmes mostly aimed at addressing the individual and interpersonal needs identified in the early stages of the articles. Even though a number of systemic needs were emphasized in the early stages of the articles, it became clear that the goals of the programmes did not explicitly address these needs. Rather than responding to the numerous systemic issues contributing to children’s exposure to adversity, the programmes were primarily designed to focus on changing children’s behaviours, planning ways of staying safe and developing strategies for processing and overcoming their experiences.
Figure 2.1

Programme Goals

![Programme Goals](image)

**Descriptions of the facilitator’s role.**

The ways that the authors described their own (or other facilitator’s) therapeutic qualities shows their well-meaning intentions to offer valuable programmes for children in this context (Table 2.4). Many of the facilitators were informed by strengths-based approaches, through which they focused on building upon the existing strengths of children and fostering their potential. Yet, these approaches were not always congruent with the ways authors were representing the children in the write up of the children’s needs and programme descriptions.

Programme facilitators were thought to offer ‘safety’ and ‘security’ by providing a ‘supportive’ environment for children to feel comfortable and secure. Facilitators were described as providing ‘encouragement’ to children to talk about, express and process their emotions and being a ‘witness’ to these often-traumatic experiences. Empowering conditions
and collaborative approaches were discussed in many of the articles. While these approaches were represented in many of the programme descriptions, the language used to describe children did not always reflect the same values.

*Table 2.4*

*Qualities of the Facilitators*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Words to describe the facilitators role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Safety and security (2, 3,11,13,17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive (1,7,16,17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistency (6,8,10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on strengths and potential (2,6,11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Build sector capacity (9,15,17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative (5,8,11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust (1,2,4,6,7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsive (6,10,11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witnessing (2,5,15,17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouragement (2,11,12,13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowering conditions (1,4,7,13,16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role model (1,2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Bracketed numbers correspond with article numbers in Table 2.1*

Programmes and facilitators were described as being ‘responsive’ to children’s changing needs. ‘Building sector capacity’ to engage with and respond to children was mentioned in three of the articles as an underlying motivator for running the programmes, however this was not always discussed in terms of programme goals and subsequent outcomes. In order to fully contribute to changing the trajectory for children in this system in the future, further consideration and implementation about the ways to build capacity of workers and families to respond appropriately to children is needed. The programme goals
and descriptions of the facilitators provide an insight into the ways the children were viewed within programmes; however, this was not always congruent with the ways they were described in the early stages of the articles. Although we assume that the authors had the best intentions in delivering high-quality services for these children, this was not always represented in the ways they wrote about them.

**Discussion**

Perhaps in order to demonstrate the importance and need for direct work with children experiencing homelessness and family violence, many authors emphasized the numerous challenges faced by these children. We are not denying the importance of acknowledging children’s experiences and the possible impacts these have on their present and future functioning, and we acknowledge that there is a vast amount of research showing how early-life stress may contribute to a range of difficulties. However, we felt that the emphasis on these descriptions does not adequately represent the whole picture for these children. Most of the articles were critically missing descriptions of how many children show the capacity to adapt to stressful environments and experiences within themselves, and with the support of their wider systems.

**Finding a better balance.**

The language used throughout the articles seemed to emphasize what is ‘wrong’ with children and portray the assumption that children were in need of being ‘fixed’, often unintentionally subscribing to what Valencia (1997) described as the ‘deficit model’. In doing so, an incongruence emerged between the ways children were being represented and the ways the same authors described their strengths-based approaches to working with these children. Within our field of music therapy, we have been challenged to consider how the way we write can more accurately represent the work that we actually do (Procter, 2001). We argue that what is needed in this discourse is a better balance in representing children’s strengths
Resilience as a theoretical lens.

The possible negative effects associated with the experience of homelessness and family violence are a reality for many children and should not be underestimated (Humphreys, Houghton, & Ellis, 2008). However, some authors have described the ways that many children who experience homelessness and family violence show resilience despite their exposure to adversity (Cutuli et al., 2013; Masten, Cutuli, Herbers, & Reed, 2009; Obradovic’, 2010). Resilience researchers seek to understand why some children thrive and succeed despite life’s challenges, whereas others struggle immensely. The strengths and resources that a child adopts, often called protective or promotive factors, contribute to their ability to avoid the negative implications that are often associated with exposure to risk (Masten et al., 2009). Though many of the articles in this critical review described strengths-based approaches, they did not always explore how these strengths may contribute to children’s abilities to do well despite their experiences of transience and violence.

Many resilience theorists posit that both internal and external resources are needed to assist children to successfully deal with stress. Byrd (2010) identified two integral factors that contribute to successful adaptation in the face of adversity: children’s internal characteristics such as academic abilities and social skills, along with environmental factors such as positive parenting and a safe and structured home environment. Similarly, Cutuli and Herbers (2014) identified positive parenting and child self-regulation as positive resources in children’s lives that assist them to bounce back from adverse experiences. Having a close relationship with a competent adult, especially a caregiver, is viewed as crucial for children who have experienced homelessness and family violence (Luthar, 2006). Several interpersonal needs were identified in the analysis of articles, including engaging the entire family, building upon parenting skills and assisting families to provide consistency and security to children in their
home environment. However, the programmes described in the critical review were not always designed to build upon the interpersonal needs identified.

**Uniting principles of resilience and social justice.**

Resilience as a concept has been critiqued due to the responsibility it often places on individuals to overcome experiences of adversity, rather than adults taking responsibility for preventing those adversities from occurring in the first place. Friedli (2012) asserts, “A focus on resilience cannot adequately explain inequalities in [health] and wellbeing and may serve to disguise or distract from analysis of social structures that result in and maintain inequalities in power, wealth and privilege” (p. 1). Similarly, Taylor, Mathers, Atfield and Parry (2011) have said that building resilience is nothing more than “putting a sticking plaster over the wound caused by macro-structural inequalities in power and resources” (p. 6). In response to these critiques, Hart et al. (2016) have spearheaded a so-called fifth wave of resilience, which is an overarching approach that aims to unite principles of resilience with social justice. In addition to helping children to overcome experiences of adversity, the focus is equally on transforming aspects of that adversity.

The articles included in this critical review focused substantially on improving children’s behaviour, providing opportunities to express themselves and assisting children to cope with their experiences. In contrast, there was little focus on addressing the numerous systemic needs identified in the early stages of the articles. Although direct work with children is essential in order to assist them to process their experiences and develop healthy coping strategies, we consider whether there is capacity for practitioners to take on an advocacy role in delivering these programmes. For example, practitioners might provide further opportunities for children’s voices to be heard by their families and external systems through creative arts methods such as songwriting, poetry, creating artwork and performances. As adversities such as homelessness and family violence are linked to societal
issues such as inequality and social disadvantage, we need to consider how resilience informed approaches might contribute towards social change and make a greater impact on the wider systems.

**The power of language.**

Within the field of academia, authors represent the power and privilege within their own institutions, as well as within the way scholarly knowledge is obtained and represented (Muhammad et al., 2015). Critical theory and feminist scholars have challenged the power traditionally held by authors in deciding the ways to represent participants and the subsequent findings (Ellingson, 2011; Roof, 2012). As the majority of authors included in the critical review were also practitioners, it is likely that they were trying to prove that the programmes they were describing were meaningful and worthwhile in an attempt to secure funding and approval for programmes to continue. Therefore, they may have felt compelled to emphasize the ‘problems’, ‘risks’ and ‘challenges’ faced by children in this context. Including discussions about strengths and resilience does not suggest that if children are coping or drawing upon their existing resources to manage challenges in their lives that they do not have a right to process their experiences of homelessness and family violence through the types of programmes described in the literature. However, we consider whether the strong and powerful language used to emphasize the need for the intervention was congruent with the strengths based approach that many authors adopted when describing the programmes and therapeutic qualities of the facilitators.

The language that we use to describe people can shape the way that others perceive them, and subsequently influence the development of predetermined assumptions and cognitive processes (Wolff & Holmes, 2011). Using broad language and defining groups of people by their challenges have potential pitfalls for how they will be viewed by professionals and community members. Most of the articles included in the critical review
privileged descriptions of hopelessness, rather than messages of hope and resilience, in the early stages of articles. Therefore, it is likely that the order information is presented in is likely to influence the ways that practitioners working in the field understand children’s needs and capacities. As a result, we encourage practitioners and authors to be reflexive, purposeful and make conscious decisions about the ways they choose to represent children in this context.

**Conclusions and Recommendations**

Although our critical review was limited by the age and cultural influences of some of the papers, the findings represent some key considerations for future research and practice. Our emotional responses to the predominantly disempowering language used throughout many of the articles served as a vehicle for interrogating existing discourse and then generating new knowledge about the ways we view, understand and represent children’s experiences. In the early stages of the analysis, we attempted to set these emotions aside and took time away from the data in order reflect on why these reactions were so strong. As we came to realize the extent to which children were defined by their challenges in order to emphasize the need for support, we could no longer ignore our feelings of sadness, anger and frustration. Bourdieu describes how in-depth and careful analysis can help to uncover knowledge that has previously been invisible (Navarro, 2006). In this way, what was once unseen has now become known and this has become the new lens through which knowledge is viewed and understood and is the motivator for striving to change the ways children are described and represented in the academic discourse. Within our own research, we are now conducting a project that focuses on changing perceptions of children in the homelessness and family violence system by engaging children in a collaborative songwriting method that explores children’s strengths and capacities in times of adversity.

The deficit focus subconsciously underpinning many of the articles in the critical
interpretive synthesis provides a narrow depiction of children’s experiences and presentation in homelessness and family violence programmes. Labelling children as ‘at risk’ places an emphasis on their assumed individual deficits, rather than challenging the systems surrounding the child that are supposed to be supporting them (te Riele, 2006). If we, as authors, spend the majority of our time focusing only on the problems faced by children, we run the risk of contributing further to the stigmatization and labeling of these children as somehow broken. We consider there are many dangers inherent in identifying challenges without also acknowledging strengths and believe what is needed is a better balance in representing children within this context.

Regardless of how well intentioned we are in our collaborative and mutually empowering approaches with children when delivering programmes, we need to consider how we can more accurately reflect the significance of these contexts without compromising our values and strengths-based approaches in the process of writing about them. We recommend a shift away from broad and generalized descriptions of children’s needs and challenges at the beginning of articles and chapters, and a step towards more contextualized and personalized representations so that we can provide more illustrative accounts of children’s experiences within their individual contexts. We believe that in doing so, we would still be able to demonstrate the need for services in this area, while providing more accurate and fair representations of the children with whom we work and conduct research.
References


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Bridging material

The results from the critical interpretive synthesis in the previous chapter informed the development of the research questions and the ways that I engaged children in the research. As the critique of the literature revealed a tendency for authors to describe children through the lens of risk, I was compelled to balance this representation by exploring children’s resources and resilience throughout their experiences of homelessness and family violence. I felt that it was important to provide an opportunity for children to be heard, while also offering a space to reflect on how they would like to be represented and to decide which part of their stories they would like to share. Therefore, the development of an original collaborative songwriting research method sought to provide a way for children to be involved throughout various stages of the research process. The children’s involvement included: generating the data through brainstorming ideas for their songs, collaboratively interpreting the data through choosing the main ideas for their song and developing song lyrics, and representing the results through deciding on the musical elements and recording their song. The next chapter provides an overview of the design of the research.
Chapter 3
Research Design

‘I cannot speak for children but I can speak up for them’ (Cope, 2008, p. 431)

Introduction

The critical interpretive synthesis identified the tendency for the homelessness and family violence literature to privilege representations of the ‘challenges’ and ‘problems’ that children often experience, with little acknowledgement of the resources that they draw upon in difficult times. In an attempt to balance the representation of children in this context, this exploratory research aimed to: 1) understand the range of resources that children draw upon throughout their experiences of homelessness and family violence and 2) to collaborate with children and represent their voices and experiences in mutually empowering ways.

This chapter begins with a rationale for engaging children in collaborative research and an overview of the participatory approach to research and music therapy practice. The research is informed by principles of arts-based research in the way that the songs written in the research represent the essence of the findings, and a discussion of concepts relating to arts-based research will be provided. A description of the collaborative songwriting method will then be provided and the various projects will be described. An illustrative example of the collaborative songwriting method will incorporate one of the children’s contributions to demonstrate the process. The chapter will finish with reflections on how the representation of participants in research, embodiment, and power and privilege informed the development of the research and how these concepts influenced the ways knowledge was developed and understood.

Children’s Voice in Research

In order to meet the research aims I explored the ways children have been included in research, as well as the guidelines provided by the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989) that acknowledges children’s rights to be heard and for their views to be
respected and responded to appropriately. The Convention states that children should have a right to express their own opinions (article 12), to express their views freely using a medium of their own choice (article 13), to feel protected from various forms of exploitation (article 36) and for the highest possible standards to be used when working and interacting with children (article 3.3). Beazley and colleagues (2009) have expanded upon this concept and added that children should have the right to be engaged in research appropriately and in a way that is meaningful to them. Article 12 of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989) articulates that children have the right to be involved in decisions that affect them, extending from decisions that affect them as individuals to decisions that collectively impact all children. Therefore, children are viewed as social actors in their own lives. O’Kane (2017) has argued that ongoing efforts are needed with parents, researchers and communities to ensure children’s views are taken seriously and that their rights to be heard are being upheld.

Often due to their age, children are most commonly seen as receivers of knowledge or ‘learners’, rather than producers of knowledge or ‘teachers’ (Arztmann, Wintersteller, & Wohrer, 2016). To meet my research aim of collaborating with children to explore their experiences, I needed to be mindful of how my own assumptions of children’s capacity may influence the way data was collected. For example, seeing children only as learners fails to acknowledge children’s capacities and is deeply embedded in power structures that exist within our society where adults are the ‘teachers’. These conflicting views that are present within academia and in the community about whose voice is most meaningful and legitimate (Arztmann et al., 2016) have the capacity to perpetuate the silencing of children within the homelessness and family violence context if not addressed. While many scholars have argued for the importance of engaging children in research about topics and concepts that affect them, designing projects where children are meaningfully engaged in the research process is
challenging. Longino (1990) has posited that anyone who is affected by the scientific knowledge that is created should have the opportunity to be involved in creating that knowledge and argued that this should be produced within communities. Lundy and colleagues (2011), like many other child-centred researchers, argued for an approach that values children as experts in their own lives and upholds their rights to be heard. Therefore, my task was to find a way to collaborate with young people and involve them in as many aspects of the research design as possible.

Bradbury-Jones and Taylor (2015) have provided a critique regarding the engagement of children as co-researchers, while offering possible solutions to common challenges experienced by researchers in this context. In response to the assumption that children lack research competence, Bradbury-Jones and Taylor (2015) discussed that children often demonstrate an innate capacity to learn and master new skills if given the opportunity. As a result, it is the researchers’ responsibility to ensure that there is congruence between the research methods chosen and the children’s level of competency, rather than children being responsible for having to ‘prove’ themselves and their capacity to contribute to research (Lundy et al., 2011). In my research, it was important to address the power balance that inherently exists between an adult researcher and a child, and it required ongoing reflexivity to consider the implications of this.

Kellett (2005) reminds researchers that as adults they need to take responsibility for child-led research. Bradbury-Jones and Taylor (2015) discuss how engaging children in collaborative research does not release adult researchers’ responsibilities and they stress that the protection of children is always central to the research process. Therefore, adult researchers must take responsibility and have clear procedures in place regarding confidentiality and dealing with disclosures. Bradbury-Jones and Taylor (2015) discuss the advantages of engaging children to provide insider perspectives on their experiences that they
bring to the research. Involving children in the interpretation of the findings ensures that new knowledge is grounded in the perspectives of children themselves, rather than describing adult interpretations of children’s experiences (Lundy et al., 2011).

The literature regarding research with children in the context of family violence often focuses on the potential dangers and risks of involvement, however Överlien (2010) has suggested that equal emphasis needs to be placed on the significance and opportunities of children’s collaborative inputs. Similarly, Morris, Hegarty and Humphreys (2012) have explored how research with children who have systematically been unheard within the context of their families experience may lead to positive outcomes in children’s lives as well as more broadly in the wider community. While ethical challenges may be prevalent in the context of research with children, this challenge presents opportunities to consider innovative, creative and safe research methods to collaborate with children. Additionally, it was my role to find opportunities in the challenges associated with children’s voices not being taken seriously and to provide meaningful ways for their contributions to be shared.

Participatory approaches have the potential to capture children’s views in child-centred ways using a range of different methods such as drama, stories, music and visual art (Pinter & Zandian, 2015). McNamara (2013) suggested that the use of creative data collections strategies with children would help to reduce stress, maximize satisfaction and establish feelings of mastery surrounding participation in research, and this aligns with a rights based approach to research with children. As suggested by Lundy and colleagues (2011), these collaborative approaches offer creative ways of knowing and provide a space for children to contribute in a way that is meaningful and relevant to them. Therefore, I felt that it was important to acknowledge the creative resources that the children were bringing to the research.


**Participatory Approaches in Music Therapy Practice**

In order to describe the participatory approach to the research, I believe it is important to first consider how my approach to music therapy practice aligns with these values. According to Stige and Aarø (2012), a participatory approach acknowledges a willingness to listen to all voices and provides opportunities for partnership between professionals, individuals and communities. In his early descriptions of community music therapy, Brynjulf Stige (2006) described participation as interactional and relational. In this way, participation is viewed as a process of collaboration and Stige (2006) called for mutual recognition of the values, agency, social agendas and resources that people bring to music therapy practice and research. Within my research and practice with children in the homelessness and family violence context, participatory approaches have been central in collaborating with children and providing opportunities for their voices to be heard and understood. Contemporary perspectives in music therapy such as community music therapy and resource oriented music therapy have described how participatory approaches to research and practice are a primary influence and driver of individual and social change.

Within the community music therapy discourse, participatory approaches refer to the balancing of expertise between the music therapist and the participants (Stige and Aarø, 2012). Thus, music therapy is not regarded as an expert-driven practice and the roles and responsibilities of all involved are regularly negotiated and adapted to suit individual and community needs. Community music therapy focuses on mutual empowerment of all participants and provides opportunities for shared decision making. The participatory approach is informed by human rights and ethics-driven practice. Community music therapists partner with individuals and communities to contribute to positive social change, through the provision of resources, the acknowledgement and valuing of existing resources, and through providing opportunities for people to be heard and understood within the context of their experience (Stige and Aarø, 2012; Stige, 2002; Stige, Ansdell, Elefant and
Pavlicevic, 2010). These values are congruent with my own approach to music therapy practice in this context.

Participatory approaches within music therapy focus on privileging and strengthening the existing resources that participants bring to therapy, rather than focusing on their perceived deficits and pathologies (Rolvsjord, 2010; Stige & Aarø, 2012; Stige, Ansdell, Elefant, & Pavlicevic, 2010). Randi Rolvjord’s (2010) first descriptions of resource-oriented practices were driven by concepts of mutual empowerment and collaboration between the therapist, participants and the community. Lucy Bolger (2015) further elaborated Rolvsjord’s foundational ideas in her participatory music therapy research with marginalized young people by describing how three interlocking principles informed her approach. *Equality* refers to a conscious intent to balance power relationships and a promotion of equal rights for all participants to contribute and to showcase the strengths and resources that they bring to the research. *Mutuality* represents the collaborative relationship between participants and researchers that involves a mutual responsibility of working towards the identified goals and privileges the development of a shared understanding. *Participation* indicates the active and collaborative participation in decision making throughout all stages of the research, from all collaborators including music therapists, researchers, participants and communities.

The principle of activism within community music therapy acknowledges that the challenges that people face are often directly related to the limitations and oppressions that exist within our society (Stige & Aarø, 2012). In his early work on culture and music therapy, Stige (2002) encouraged music therapist’s to consider their social responsibility in designing research and ways of working with people that addresses these social inequities. Within my own practice and research, I have felt this sense of responsibility as an adult working with children who usually have little control over what is happening to them and limited opportunities to be heard within the context of their families experience. Consequently, a
commitment to working together and collaboratively with children to impact the ways that they are viewed and represented is a primary purpose of this research.

**Participatory Approaches to Research**

This research is also underpinned by participatory approaches to the development of new knowledge. Participatory research has been described as an orientation or approach to research, rather than a method itself (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2008; Bradbury & Reason, 2006). This approach draws upon the understanding that knowledge is co-constructed between the researcher and the participant or community (Lincoln et al., 2011), and co-researchers are viewed as an integral part of the research as experts in their own experiences (Grant, Nelson & Mitchell, 2011). Participatory research is grounded in efforts to create action that contributes to social change and is focused on partnership with individuals and communities (Brydon-Miller, 2014; Brydon-Miller et al., 2003). Paulo Freire (1970) has posited how change must be forged with, not for, people who are experiencing oppression or marginalisation and recommended an ongoing cycle of critical reflection in researchers and participants. Grant and colleagues (2011) have identified common goals within participatory research to include emancipation and empowerment of individuals or community members, addressing power imbalances, and shedding light on social problems and oppressive social structures. Thus, as suggested by Torre and colleagues (2017), this approach to research required ongoing reflexivity regarding notions of power, privilege and vulnerability.

Participatory research has the capacity to challenge inherent power inequities that exist in society through the distribution of power between researchers and co-researchers. This shifting of power requires the researcher to be willing to share or relinquish power throughout various stages of the research process (Grant, Nelson & Mitchell, 2011), so that those who are adversely impacted by an oppressive structure may be seen as creators rather than objects of social research (Fine & Torre, 2004). Regardless of how well intentioned
researchers are in their sharing of power, there is a risk that interpretations by researchers will be privileged over the perspectives and contributions of participants throughout the analysis and presentation of the results (Roberts & Dick, 2003). Grant and colleagues (2011) have provided strategies for addressing these power inequities, such as: acknowledging various sources of knowledge and valuing multiple perspectives, clearly explaining the research process and making it accessible for the co-researchers, recognising the resources and expertise that participants bring to research, and co-constructing knowledge and engaging participants in all stages of the research and in the representation of the results. Additionally, as researchers we have an unwavering responsibility to consistently explore our own subjectivity and to be reflexive about how our values are impacting the participatory process and engagement of individuals and communities.

Participatory research is informed by the understanding that individuals and communities have the capacity for critical reflection (Brydon-Miller, 2014) and focuses on identifying strengths and resources of participants and bringing these to light through the co-construction of knowledge (Kretzmann & McNight, 1997). Therefore, it is crucial to respect the extensive knowledge that individuals bring to the research process and in the sharing of their ideas and expertise (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003). Torre and colleagues (2017) have critiqued an historic tendency for studies to be designed to focus primarily on the ‘problems’ and ‘pathologies’ of marginalized communities. They suggested that reporting these findings independently may lead to the misrepresentation of these communities and ignore important concepts of power, history, systemic oppression and injustice that often lead to these challenges. Thus, new knowledge that is informed by a breadth of people’s experiences needs to be gained through mutual understanding and collaboration.

The participatory approach in my research is guided by principles of social justice that underpin a motivation to hear, understand and represent children’s voices. This approach
draws upon the understanding that children are the experts in their own lives, so they should have the right to contribute meaningfully and to be regarded as equals within the research process (Christensen & James, 2008). Stige and McFerran (2016) have described participatory research as an opportunity for previously unheard voices to be heard, while simultaneously addressing the inequalities that exist in our society. These unheard voices take on the role of co-researchers while the researcher adopts the crucial role of facilitating the dialogue and providing a space for these voices to be heard and understood. Bolger (2015) adopted a participatory approach to her music therapy research with young people experiencing marginalisation and sought to understand the process of collaboration. Her research demonstrated how collaboration with young people provided opportunities to achieve positive growth by strengthening peer connections, increasing self-belief, and offering opportunities for empowerment of the participants, researchers and the wider community. Similarly, the participatory approach in my research sought to amplify the voices of children and to co-construct knowledge together in order to highlight the strengths and resources of children in this context.

Participatory researchers seek to provide opportunities for children to speak openly and freely about their experiences. Clark and Richards (2017) have advocated for greater attention to be given to the notions of collaboration and reciprocity within participatory research, with equal weight given to the children’s and the researcher’s contributions. Similarly, Kraftl (2013) recommends an expansion on the concept of voice within research, discussing how researchers can embrace the co-construction of voice in order to emphasize the shared responsibility in research by eliciting, interpreting, understanding and representing people’s ideas. Therefore, my decision to involve the children in the collaborative song-writing approach was informed by my intentions to provide a mutual space to co-construct
knowledge together while ensuring that the children’s views were being represented in the ways that they wanted them to be.

Arts-Based Research

The use of songwriting as a collaborative research method is informed by principles of arts-based research and seeks to emphasize the need for innovative, creative and adapted approaches that emphasize children’s capacities and competencies. Viega and Forinash (2017) have defined arts-based research as an umbrella term that encompasses art as a primary method in the research process as well as an overall methodology. Leavy (2015) has described arts-based research as a process that usually leads to an artistic representation of the research findings, and Piercy and Benson (2005) portrayed this process as bringing research findings ‘to life’. Beer (2016) recommended songwriting for or with research participants as one possible approach to arts-based research. In this research, the songs co-created with the children represent the essence of the research findings.

Critical arts-based research practices have embraced the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that their research is advancing principles of social justice (Finley, 2017). Arts-based research has been described as simultaneously engaging our senses in a way that touches us and provokes something very different from more traditionally written texts (Parsons, Heus & Moravac, 2012). Finley (2017) suggests that arts-based researchers have a responsibility to use the arts as a way of changing perspectives and instilling activism in the audiences they are sharing the arts-based findings with. Therefore, an underlying purpose of arts-based research is to provoke or make meaning from the artistic outputs and these can then be used to advance political agendas. As a part of this research, I made a commitment to share these children’s songs and perspectives in as many forums as possible in an attempt to contribute to social change and to impact society’s perceptions about children in this context. As a result, I have taken opportunities to share my learning’s within
music therapy contexts as well as child welfare forums through conferences, informal presentations and publications, as well as through ongoing discussion and advocacy with my colleagues who work in this field.

According to Patricia Leavy (2013), arts-based research challenges the assumption that knowledge is fixed and that research has to look and sound a certain way in order to be considered as research. Barone and Eisner (2012) have articulated how arts-based research extends the capacity of research as it provides a way of expressing meaning and knowledge through creative means. While arts-based research has the capacity to provide a deeper level of knowing, Barone and Eisner (2012) have stressed that it does not aim to provide concrete truths. Instead, in their view, arts-based research seeks to understand often complex and critical perspectives by creating arts-based representations and shedding a new light on hidden and previously unspoken concepts. Similarly, Hanaeur (2010) has stressed the importance of recognising that arts-based research can showcase multiple potential meanings and can be interpreted and felt in multiple ways. The songs written by the children in this research represent the subjective and diverse elements of their experiences, while enhancing our understandings about the internal and external resources that help them in their lives.

Particularly with young people, arts-based research stimulates comments, thoughts and collaboration, and provides a space for young people to interpret their own data and engage in participatory analysis. Within this research, the songs written together with children provided a way for their voices to be heard in multiple ways through the recordings of the songs, through their analysis of what they chose to share and to include in their songs, and through the ongoing reflection that occurs when sharing their songs with various audiences.
Research Questions

In order to meet the research aims of exploring children’s resources and collaborating with children to represent their voices and experiences, I constructed two initial research questions:

1) How do children who have experienced homelessness and family violence use music as a personal resource in their everyday lives? (Chapter 4)

2) What other resources do they draw upon throughout life's challenges? (Chapter 5)

Ethics and Approvals

Ethics approval was obtained from the Human Research and Ethics Committee through The University of Melbourne (Appendix 1) as well as approval from the Department of Health and Human Services due to the engagement of children within this setting (Appendix 2). The Ethics process involved providing an overview of the design of the research, the aims and research questions; details of the proposed participants, recruitment and research process; details for how we planned to manage participant and researcher risk; the researcher’s background and experiences; and a consideration of the benefits to the participants who chose to be involved. The plain language statement (Appendix 3) provided to potential participants explained the possible risks and benefits of participating in the project, and emphasized that participation was voluntary and participants could withdraw from the project at any time. As children were participants in the research, the parents signed the informed consent form (Appendix 4) for their child to participate. Additionally, the children were actively invited to give their assent to participate in the research, and they also signed the informed consent form. A discussion of how children were recruited to the research will be provided in subsequent chapters.

Collaborative Songwriting Projects (Project 1 & 2)

Project 1 and 2 used a collaborative songwriting method to meet the aims of exploring children’s resources and representing children’s voices through arts-based approaches.
Collaboration is a key concept that is present throughout this entire thesis and is informed by a desire to hear children’s voices and represent them in meaningful ways. A collaborative approach acknowledges the value of multiple perspectives and seeks to increase connection and understanding of individuals and communities, while reducing power inequalities between the researcher and the participants (Sprague, 2016).

Talmy (2010) has described how the research interview can be understood as a process of collaboration between the participant and the interviewer as they work together to co-construct knowledge, and suggests that this becomes an opportunity for empowerment. However, Rolvsjord and Hadley (2016) have cautioned researchers to consider the power they hold in relation to their decisions about what to research, what questions to ask, and who to invite to participate. They suggest it is crucial for researchers to deeply consider these power structures, particularly when the participants are (or have been) our clients. Children who had previously participated in a music therapy group with me were invited to participate in the research. Therefore, it was important to consider the ways that I approached these children and families to discuss the research, to ensure they knew their decisions about whether to be involved would not impact other services they were receiving from the organization and to ensure they didn’t feel obliged to participate in an attempt to please me. On the other hand, the fact that I knew the children seemed to contribute to their increased comfort levels in attending the program and interestingly the only children who didn’t agree to be involved were either unable to be contacted or unable to attend on the day. The process of recruitment will be discussed further in chapter 4.

**Project 1 summary: ‘What does music mean to you?’**

In Project 1, the collaborative songwriting method was used in a group situation to explore how children use music within their everyday lives throughout their experiences of homelessness and family violence. Fifteen children (8-14 years) who had previously
participated in a music therapy group within my clinical role at Bethany. Due to the high number of children agreeing to contribute to the project, I facilitated two music workshops where each group of children collaborated in writing a song about what music means to them. The group process of writing the lyrics and music for the song invited the children to collaborate in identifying the key themes in their experiences in ways that were meaningful to them. Children were engaged as co-researchers throughout the data generation, collaborative data analysis and presentation of the research findings. A detailed overview of the group songwriting process, children’s contributions and results is provided in Chapter 4.

**Project 2 summary: ‘What helps you to do well in your life?’**

In Project 2, the children were invited to have an individual music therapy session where they wrote individual songs about the range of resources that they draw upon when life gets hard. In contrast to a traditional interview, the songwriting process invited the children to articulate their experience in creative ways and refine their message into a song format. Ten children chose to contribute and each wrote their own song about what helps them to ‘do well’ in their lives. A reflexive discussion of each of the children’s songs and experiences will be provided in Chapter 5, along with the results arising from a contextual analysis of all of the songs.

**Illustrative Example of the Collaborative Songwriting Process**

This section will provide an illustrative example of the collaborative process of writing a song in an individual interview. The music therapy songwriting method that I developed with my supervisors aims to be a collaborative approach to research that mirrors the typical songwriting process in music therapy practice, which involves brainstorming on a theme, choosing the main ideas, developing song lyrics, creating melodies, beats and harmonies, and ultimately recording or performing the song (McFerran, 2004). What
separates the practice approach to the research approach is a focus on co-constructing knowledge with children for research purposes in response to the guiding question of ‘what does music mean to you’ (music workshops – see chapter 4) or ‘what helps you to do well in your life?’ (individual interviews – see chapter 5). Within the collaborative research process, brainstorming becomes a form of data generation, choosing the main ideas and developing the song lyrics involves collaborative analysis, and creating the melody and recording the song involves the presentation of the findings. This method was used within group and individual settings. The child’s contributions are indicated in italics to assist with separating the process and the illustrative example.

The young person identified as Blue (child-selected pseudonym) and was 14-years old. Blue had a long history of involvement in the homelessness and family violence service system with her mother and her younger siblings. Blue was an articulate young person who was proud to talk about her achievements since participating in the music therapy group, including becoming school captain at her school and writing songs with her friend. Blue discussed she was looking forward to writing her song as part of the collaborative process.

Blue also identified some challenges that were happening in her life, including her violent stepfather re-entering her families’ life due to being released from prison and she described recent family violence incidents in her home. Blue portrayed these incidents in a matter-of-fact tone and did not report feeling unsafe, however expressed a sense of frustration that her stepfather had re-entered their lives after they were starting to feel settled. Throughout the interview, Blue took ownership over the process and chose to write down all of the ideas herself.

**Brainstorming on the research question (data generation).**

The brainstorming phase involved writing down all of the child’s ideas on a large piece of paper. Children were asked to share any ideas, words, feelings or thoughts about the
theme in response to questions such as: ‘What helps you to do well in your life? What are some things that you like to do? What helps you to cope? Who do you go to for support? What are some good things in your life? What else would help you to do well?’

Some children chose to write down their own ideas, and others preferred for their ideas to be written for them while they talked. All of these ideas were grouped together in consultation with the child into similar headings as we were writing them down. The exact phrasing and wording was used as much as possible to reflect the child’s own language. The brainstorming phase generally lasted about 20-30 minutes for each child and the act of having their ideas written down in front of them seemed to make it an engaging and fun activity for them. The children knew that the purpose of the brainstorming was to generate material for their song and appeared to enjoy talking about their own experiences. Nonetheless, some children required several prompts and encouragement that supported them to expand on their ideas and express what they wanted to say. This was congruent with my experiences of songwriting in practice, where some children have a larger repertoire of words to describe their experiences, and others have very little language. This is part of the reason that an arts-based approach is so relevant in the homelessness and family violence sector, because it provides a bridge between experience and expression.

In the brainstorming phase, Blue talked about the people who helped in her life and identified her friends as a resource because they ‘get me out of the house’ when her mother and ex-partner are fighting. She discussed that she can talk to her friends about her problems and that they ‘help forget anything’s wrong’, ‘give good hugs’ and ‘give me something to do’. Blue identified her family as a resource and that they help her, but that they also ‘help each other’. Blue talked about how listening to music was the main activity that she could think of that she liked to do, and that music ‘makes me forget’ and is ‘an escape’ from the outside world. She discussed how music ‘calms me down’ and labeled music as a ‘constant’
because it has always been there for her. The ideas generated through the brainstorming phase can be found in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1

Blue’s brainstorming
When exploring what else would help her to do well in her life, Blue talked about how she wished she had a better dad. She talked about how she wished her biological dad who she had minimal contact with were ‘better’ so that she had somewhere to go when her mum and step-dad were fighting or when she felt like she needed to get away.

**Choosing the main ideas (collaborative data analysis).**

After they had exhausted the expression of ideas, the children were asked to look at all of their words and to think about what they would like the main message of their song to be. This is a critical juncture in songwriting, both as practice and as research, since the decision informs what the key message will be in the song. For this reason, my role as the researcher was critical in fostering reflection, aiding selection, and ensuring that my ideas and preconceptions about what will be most powerful and interesting were not too strongly conveyed in order to privilege representations of children’s perspectives. At this point, some children came up with other ideas that became the main message of their song. This main message usually became the chorus and was often chosen as the title of the song. The children then chose the other main ideas that they wanted to include in the remainder of the song and these usually became the verses. These main ideas were circled and given a heading to describe what the verse was about and these ideas were then expanded upon if needed. In this way, children were engaged throughout the interpretation and analysis by deciding together with the researcher what main ideas they wanted to include in the song and through the development of the themes that described what they wanted to talk about in their song. Similar to the concept of a distilled essence in phenomenological approaches, the final song lyrics were a way of representing the main findings.

*After Blue had written down most of her ideas, I asked her how she thought she was able to be so resilient and successful despite what she had experienced. Through this discussion she decided to make the main idea for her song ‘Don’t let bad things take over*
who you are’. She identified how ‘positive thinking’ was really important to her and that she knew ‘it’s not the end’. Blue thought that it was helpful to have ‘confidence’ and ‘courage’ and to ‘stand up for yourself’. Blue talked about not wanting people to think there was a stigma on her because she had experienced homelessness and family violence, and she wanted to prove to everyone that she was more than the label placed upon her. The main ideas that Blue chose to include in her song were circled and were given the following headings: The way friends are, people who help, what I want and music is a constant.

Co-creating the song lyrics (collaborative data analysis continues).

Once we had decided on the main ideas and the main message of the song, we worked together to co-create the song lyrics. Working together is a key phrase in this research, since it points to a shared responsibility rather than being exclusively expert led or child-led. Bolger’s research (2015) shows that collaboration involves a combined effort on the part of therapist and the child, warning against the inclination to ‘buy out’ of responsibility in order to hear the child’s voice. As a music therapist, our role is to foster creative expression by people who do not have musical skills. As a result, it was important to acknowledge my role in supporting children to contribute to the best of their ability. To assist us with developing the song lyrics, we had a brief discussion at this point to consider what style they wanted their song to be and whether they wanted the song to rhyme. It was also highlighted to the children at this point that they could use various iPad apps or create an original tune with myself on the guitar.

Co-creating the song lyrics was a creative and collaborative process, and the researcher and the child shared ideas for lyrics with one another. Some children were confident in this task and needed little input from me to create their song lyrics, while other children needed much more guidance and direction. The child’s original wording was included in the song lyrics as much as possible and the children who decided that they didn’t
want their song to rhyme seemed to find it much easier to come up with lyrics by themselves. It was interesting at this point to note what children chose to include in their songs, as well as what they purposefully chose to exclude. In this way, the children were actively involved in not only generating data, but also in being a co-researcher in their analysis of the material through selection of lyrics for their song.

*Blue was hesitant in the beginning to come up with ideas for song lyrics, stating that it was ‘harder than (she) thought’. However, after some modelling from me about how to incorporate her ideas from the brainstorming into the song lyrics, she became more confident to make suggestions for the song lyrics and to put her ideas together. The wording that Blue used in the brainstorming phase was reflected as much as possible in her final song lyrics, yet at times she chose to adapt this wording so it would better fit into the phrasing of the song. Blue’s song lyrics can be found below (Figure 3.2).*

**Co-creating the musical elements in the song (presentation of the research findings).**

After we had developed the song lyrics we worked together to decide on the musical qualities of the song. Some children already had a preconceived idea about how they wanted their song to sound, and other children wanted to try out several options before making a decision. The children had the option of using iPad apps such as Autorap, Garageband and Launchpad, or to create an original melody while I accompanied them on the guitar. Autorap is an iPad app whereby children speak into the app and then it converts it into a fast rap. Children are able to choose a backing track for the song prior to recording their voice and four children chose to use this method of making their song. One child chose to use Launchpad, which is an iPad app involving predetermined loops and DJ effects. This child (Josh) actually came into the interview with a preconceived idea that he wanted to use this app on his iPad and had already been experimenting with the sounds and effects prior to the interview. Two children chose to use Garageband to create a backing track using the looping
function for their song and then to record a melody over the top of this. Three children chose to create an original melody with myself playing on the guitar. As a music therapist, my role is to foster creative expression by people who do not have musical skills. Therefore, my training as a music therapist was crucial at this point, to ensure that the child’s musical influences and interests were reflected in their final song.

When talking about the style of the song, Blue said she didn’t really have any idea for how she wanted the song to sound other than ‘slow-ish... but not super slow and depressing’. Blue chose to create an original song accompanied with the guitar by saying ‘I like guitar’ and worked together with me to develop a style, chord progression and melody for the song. This was a collaborative process, and I provided several musical options at each point and Blue had the opportunity to choose from these or to offer other suggestions for how she would like her song to sound.

Figure 3.2

Blue’s Song Lyrics

CHORUS (Don't let bad things take over who you are)
Don't let bad things take over who you are
Keep being positive and don't think it's the end
Don't get mixed up with all the wrong people
Stand up for yourself and be confident in who you are

VERSE 1 (The way friends are)
Friends can help in lots of ways and make you forget what's wrong, with a simple hug
They can take you away from the drama and listen to your problems
They'll give you good advice and buy you lots of food

REPEAT CHORUS

VERSE 2 (People who help)
There's always that one person who knows when something's wrong
They can handle the situation better than anyone else and give the best advice
They're closer than any friend because they know everything about you

VERSE 3 (What I want)
I wish I had a better dad to go to when times get tough
Someone that would save me from the ongoing battle of love and hate

REPEAT CHORUS

VERSE 4 (Music is a constant)
The one thing that's pulled me through
Something that's helped me forget, is music
It's always been there, helping me cope and escape from reality

REPEAT CHORUS

Recording the song (presentation of the research findings continues).
The children’s voices were captured on the recordings as much as possible, though most children required support to sing their song. Perhaps if we had more than one session together it might have been possible for the children to record their songs independently. One
exception was in the case of Logan who chose not to sing after creating a backing track in Garageband, and requested that I record it for him instead. The children received a copy of the recording either immediately after the interview, or a few days later in person or by post. Children were encouraged to consider if they were planning to share their song with anyone and most of the children thought they would share their song with their family members, however it was important to discuss the possible implications of this.

After practicing the song several times, Blue and I recorded the song together, we both sang the vocals and I played the guitar. Blue reported that she was proud of herself for writing the song and that she found the process ‘a lot easier than what (she) thought it would be’. At the end of the interview, Blue stated ‘I usually listen to music, not make it. But now I make it!’ and she discussed that she had more confidence to write songs in the future. When I gave the recording the Blue, we had a discussion about whether or not she would like to share it with anyone. She discussed that she didn’t want her mum to hear it, due to the content in the song about her father. However, said that she was thinking about showing it to her best friend. The recording of Blue’s song can be found at https://soundcloud.com/user-191682090/sets/blues-song

Collaborative Reflections (Project 3)

Co-authored article with ‘Malakai Mraz’.

Project 3 involved an 11-year-old child (‘Malakai Mraz’) who was accompanying his mother through the family violence and homelessness system. Malakai participated in short-term individual music therapy that focused on learning to play the drums as a way of expressing himself and he also received a drum machine as a part of this process. In the final session, Malakai told me that being involved in music therapy had changed his life and he expressed a desire to help other children to have the same opportunities that he did. In response to this discussion with Malakai, I invited him to collaborate in a project with me
where he could explore his experience, share his story and reflect on why it was so meaningful to him. We decided to write an article together that describes our personal reflections of engaging in music therapy together and to explore the range of conditions at play that contributed to Malakai’s development throughout this process. We also wrote a song as part of the collaborative process as a way of providing an arts-based and child-centred representation of our experiences. The process of writing this collaborative paper with Malakai will be explored further in Chapter 6, along with our personal reflections of musically engaging with one another.

**A Commitment to Representing People not ‘Problems’**

As identified in the previous chapter (critical review of the literature), there is a tendency for authors to focus on representing the ‘problems’ and ‘challenges’ that children face in the context of homelessness and family violence. This perspective fails to acknowledge children’s actions and resources that are present throughout these experiences, and therefore only represents one part of their story. Jennifer Bibb and I published a position paper in *Voices: A World Forum for Music Therapy* (2016) that extends this concept within music therapy by drawing upon our experiences of working and researching within the contexts of child welfare and mental health. We challenged music therapists to consider how the ways we represent the people that we work and research with when we write and present about them impacts how they are viewed and understood by others. These considerations were crucial in informing the way that I approached the design of my research, and the way that I represented the people and findings throughout this thesis.

In her descriptions of resource-oriented music therapy, Randi Rolvsjord (2006) has suggested that the ways that we write and talk about music therapy practice influences the way participants and the music therapy process is perceived. Therefore, it is up to authors to decide whether they will tell stories about “victors or victims” (Rolvsjord, 2006: p. 11), and
to choose to emphasize people’s weaknesses and pathologies or to give priority to representing their resources and strengths. Simon Procter (2001) cautioned music therapists against the possible risks of becoming so preoccupied with professionalisation that we are no longer writing about our work in the same way that we actually do our work. Regardless of how well intentioned we are in the ways that we work with people, we as authors hold a sense of power and responsibility about how we choose to represent people in the ways we write about them (Fairchild & Bibb, 2016). As a result, we argued that what is needed is a better balance in the ways we represent the people that we work and research with.

The field of homelessness and family violence is fraught with multiple oppressions and often-negative attitudes surrounding experiences of poverty, violence, disadvantage and disrupted family relationships. Therefore, the language that authors choose to use is likely influence the ways that children are perceived. Typically, authors are responsible for determining how to represent these experiences with often little consultation with children about how they would like to be represented. While it is undeniably important to acknowledge what children have experienced and to consider how various traumas may have impacted the ways that they present and the subsequent ways that we engage with them, I have argued with my colleagues (Fairchild, McFerran & Thompson, 2017; Fairchild & Bibb, 2016) that it is equally important to represent the strengths and resources that people bring to music therapy so that we can more accurately represent the whole picture in our descriptions of children. Therefore, it was important that I took the time to model more congruent ways of representing children in the write up of my thesis.

This critical understanding about how we represent people influenced my motivations to undertake participatory research that focuses on changing perceptions of children within the context of homelessness and family violence, by providing opportunities to showcase their strengths and capacities during times of crisis. Throughout this thesis I have
demonstrated various ways that a better balance could be achieved in representing children through making conscious decisions about how I designed the research, engaged the children in data generation and collaborative analysis, and in how I represented the children in the write up of the research. For example, a focus on children’s resources in collaboration with children seeks to contribute an alternative representation of children to the homelessness and family violence literature. I have also made purposeful choices about the ways that I represent children in tables and descriptions of them, and these concepts are explored further in subsequent chapters. Similarly, the decision to co-author the article with ‘Malakai Mraz’ provided an opportunity to discuss with him how he would like to be represented and for Malakai to choose which part of his story he would like to share (Chapter 6).

**Embodiment and Reflexivity**

Tuning into my embodied and emotional responses was important in the development of new understandings and knowledge throughout this research. As discussed in the previous chapter, the decision to focus on the ways that children were represented in the critical interpretive synthesis was influenced by the intense emotions that I experienced while reading and synthesising the articles. Throughout the data generation and collaborative analysis of the music workshops and the children’s individual songs, I realized the importance of acknowledging what was unspoken and how I was feeling during the data collection and when reflecting on children’s songs and stories. In Chapter 7, I reflect deeply on my own experiences of being the researcher and share four songs that I wrote in response to my embodied and empathic responses to what children shared throughout the research.

Merleau-Ponty (1962) considered that ‘the body is the vehicle of being in the world’ (p.62) and argued that the body provides a connection to, and offers a way to understand, who we are as individuals and as community members. Finlay (2006) has offered an insightful critique of research methodologies where researchers solely immerse themselves in
transcripts, words and protocols, and suggests that researchers might miss new and important understandings if the body is absent in these interpretations. Similarly, Naples (2013) and Sprague (2016) have highlighted the important role that embodiment and emotional reflexivity can play in contributing and informing the analytic process. Within feminist research, scholars such as Campbell and Wasco (2000) and Lykke (2010) have described the researcher’s use of their body as a resource and Rolvsjord and Hadley (2016) have portrayed the researcher as an ‘embodied person’. Therefore, ongoing reflexivity about my own presence within this research as an embodied and empathic person was important in driving change and leading to new understandings.

To assist with understanding the intersections of embodiment and reflexivity in this research, it was helpful to reflect on the work of Finlay (2006) who described 3 interconnected layers that relate to the embodied reflexivity of both the researcher and participant. *Bodily empathy* refers to the value of being attentive and attuned to how participants present in their bodies and responses throughout the process of the research. This concept was important in my approach to research with children, as often their bodily responses such as looking away, fidgeting or putting their head down was an indicator that they were feeling uncomfortable, bored or that there was something they wanted to say but were unable to find the words to express this, or that they were triggered or overwhelmed by what we were talking about. Powell and Smith (2009) have identified how children’s cues such as becoming quiet or distracted may be useful prompts for the researcher to know that this might be a difficult issue to talk about, so it was important to be aware of these cues.

*Embodied self-awareness* involves the researcher’s reflection on their own bodily and emotional responses during the interview as well as when they are engaging with the data or transcripts. Throughout this research, I found myself becoming emotionally affected with the content of what the children had shared and at times I needed to take time away from the
data. If I had not acknowledged these intense emotions, I believe there is a lot I would have missed from my interpretations of the data and from the ways that I understood what the children had told me. *Embodied intersubjectivity* focuses on how the bodies and emotional responses of the participant and the research may become interconnected in an empathic connection. An ongoing cycle of reflexivity in considering my own embodied experience as well as the embodied experience of the participants was crucial in understanding the extent to which what I was feeling was present in the participants experience and in the data.

**Reflections on Power and Privilege**

Participatory researchers have identified that it is possible that power differentials and imbalances may be reproduced through the research process (Muhammad et al., 2015). Muhammad and colleagues (2015) have asserted that academia represents notions of power and privilege within the institution, as well as with the production of knowledge and what knowledge is seen to be most important and ‘credible’. Therefore, these notions have the potential for perpetuating systemic oppression and inequalities, and further stigmatising and marginalising already disadvantaged communities. Fine (2004) reflected on the power dynamics that exist within research relationships, and advocated the importance of creating a ‘space-between’ academic and community relationships as a mutual meeting ground.

There are many people in society who are the subject of discrimination, stigma, and exclusion from people in positions of power or within the dominant majority group (Lago, 2011). Anti-oppressive practice recognizes the power imbalances that exist in our society, and some music therapists have demonstrated the capacity for music to facilitate and represent the strengths and potential of its participants (Baines, 2013). Contemporary approaches to music therapy have called for ongoing reflexivity in the form of ongoing discussions and dialogue with participants and communities as well as personal and critical reflection to address power imbalances (Stige & Aarø, 2012). Researchers are constantly
making decisions about how to design their projects, how to engage people in the research and how to represent the findings. If we choose to emphasize people’s challenges in the ways that we write about them, it is possible that we are inadvertently contributing to the oppressive nature of how those people will be viewed by others. As suggested by Edwards and Hadley (2007), it was important to be reflexive about how my own privilege, power and social status contributed to the way that I approached the research and how this informed the decisions that I made.

Feminist researcher Diane Wolf (1996) encouraged researchers to think about the notions of power within the research process itself, with regard to who was designing the research, who was deciding who to invite/not invite to participate, and whether there is a degree of sharing the power between the researchers and the participants. Wolf identified that the researcher’s position of power might be influenced by whether the researcher is acting as an insider, outsider, or insider-outsider. The representation and writing of the findings was an important consideration, as researchers make important decisions regarding whose voices will be privileged and what information will be shared (Wolf, 1996). Expanding on Wolf’s initial discussions of power within research, Muhammed and colleagues (2015) added further perspectives that reflected on how power was exerted throughout the construction of knowledge. These concepts were challenging in this research because there were real world constraints around publications and finding appropriate forums to share children’s views. These challenges will be explored further in Chapter 8.

The notions of power and privilege become increasingly complex when the co-researchers are children. As an adult, I have a responsibility to protect children and to ensure that their rights are upheld to be safe and heard. Subsequently, I felt that as an adult researcher it was important to take responsibility as the adult in the situation for improving children’s lives, while trying to create a balance of power in providing a space for children to
collaborate and share their experiences.

It was also important to consider the power dynamics at play within the group interviews between the children, so that all children had an opportunity to contribute and to ensure that the research didn’t create or perpetuate hierarchies amongst the children. Bradbury-Jones and Taylor (2015) identified a range of factors that might contribute to power relations between children including gender, birth order, age, personality and cultural background. In this research, it was important to consider the power dynamics at play particularly as there were several siblings that participated in the music workshops and typically the older sibling was the most vocal in the collaborative process. An example of this within the group setting was when one younger sibling was becoming over-excited and over-bearing with his contributions and his older brother took it upon himself to attempt to manage his behaviour and told him to be quiet.

My location within a University as a researcher further places me in a position of power and privilege. Baines and Edwards (2015) challenged researchers to consider notions of ‘truth’ and ‘certainty’ that come from the ways that knowledge is represented in academic literature and academic forums. Kurt Lewin (1946) argued that it was not enough for research to published only in books and articles. Equally important is to find other informal forums where knowledge can be shared so that people who are not in privileged academic positions can still have opportunities to learn and contribute to the field. As a result, throughout the process of completing this research I have taken opportunities to share this new knowledge through international and national conferences, presentations in my workplace, informal discussions with managers and staff members working in the field, and discussions of the findings with other children and families that I work with to assist them to understand their own experiences.

While my research was set up to be collaborative and I have tried to represent
children’s experiences with authenticity and to privilege their contributions, I acknowledge that I do not have lived experienced of homelessness and family violence. Therefore, my interpretations are grounded in my own assumptions about what was important to share in the following chapters.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has provided an overview of the philosophical and methodological approaches that influenced the design of this research. A participatory approach was adopted within an exploratory design to explore children’s resources in the context of homelessness and family violence, and is informed by principles of arts-based research and rights-based approaches to research with children. Children’s voices are central to this research, and it is hoped that embedding their voices into the current discourse will impact the ways they are viewed and responded to within the homelessness and family violence system.
References


Bridging material

The next chapter reports on the design and results of the first project that involved using the collaborative songwriting method described in the previous chapter. In order to meet the aims of the research of exploring children’s resources and to collaborating with children, I decided to focus initially on the ways that children were using music as a personal resource throughout their experience of homelessness and family violence. As a music therapist, I was interested to understand what music means to children in this situation and to explore the multiple roles that music plays in their lives. As the children in the project had previously participated in a music therapy group, I sensed they might be more comfortable participating in a group setting for the first part of the research. In order to provide an opportunity for all children who indicated interest to participate in the project, I ran two music workshops that each involved writing a song based on the question ‘what does music mean to you?’. As readers move onto this next section, they are encouraged to engage on various levels with the written, arts-based and recorded material provided.

The chapter is written for publication and is targeted primarily at a music therapy audience. The article is co-authored by my primary research supervisor Katrina Skewes McFerran and is currently under-revised review with an international music therapy journal.

Chapter 4

‘Music is everything’: Using collaborative group songwriting as an arts-based method with children experiencing homelessness and family violence

Abstract
Children who experience homelessness and family violence sometimes have reduced opportunities to access appropriate educational, social and recreational supports. However, music often remains as a personal resource in children’s everyday lives. This article explores the use of songwriting as a collaborative and participatory arts-based research method used to give voice to young people’s understandings of how they use music in the context of homelessness and family violence. Fifteen children aged 8-14 participated in music-based focus groups that involved writing a song about what music meant to them. The collaborative songwriting research method was designed to engage children in creative and child-centred ways throughout all stages of the data generation and analysis process. This incorporated brainstorming to generate data and then the songwriting process was used as a way of analyzing the data, from the selection of main themes to the development of song lyrics. Two songs will be provided as an arts-based representation of children’s experiences and understandings of music as a resource, along with a description about the ways the songs were developed. Throughout the process of writing the songs, the children described how music provided an escape from what was happening in their lives and offered hope for a better future. Implications for working with children in the homelessness and family violence context will be discussed along with critical considerations for using collaborative songwriting as a research method.

Key words: child welfare, songwriting, music therapy, resources, collaboration, arts-based research
Introduction
Since the introduction of the United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), listening to and representing the voices of children has become a powerful and persistent approach for many researchers, practitioners and policy makers worldwide. As a result, children have started to become active agents in research and their views and ideas have been captured through various forms such as written text, spoken word and creative methods (Khoja, 2016). Considering many children use music as a resource in their everyday lives as a way of expressing their beliefs and identity (Schäfer, Sedlmeier, Städtler, & Huron, 2013), we suggest that music has the capacity to be a meaningful and collaborative medium for involving children throughout the entire research process. Therefore, this paper seeks to explore the use of a collaborative songwriting research method to understand the various ways that children experiencing homelessness and family violence use music as a personal resource in their everyday lives.

Deciding to engage children in collaborative and participatory research draws upon the understanding that children are active and important members of society and consequently they should have the right to participate in research (Lundy, McEvoy & Byrne, 2011). Authors who describe participatory approaches often reference the influential work of Freire (1972), who advocated for knowledge being constructed in collaboration with the people who were most involved in a particular experience, oppression or adversity. Therefore, undertaking participatory research with children provides opportunities to move away from traditional adult-led approaches (Barratt Hacking, Barrett, & Scott, 2007), and move towards a more inclusive and collaborative approach to research where children’s voices and contributions are viewed as essential to understanding their perspectives. Participatory research has the potential to capture children’s views in natural and resourceful ways using a range of different methods such as drama, stories, music and visual art (Pinter & Zandian, 2015). These approaches extend the capacity for research to generate multiple
ways of communicating what is important and various ways of knowing.

The contemporary music therapy literature supports the use of participatory, collaborative and strengths based approaches within research and practice. Within community music therapy, a participatory approach acknowledges a willingness to listen to all voices and to engage participants in a collaborative process (Stige & Aarø, 2012). This approach aims to promote social change by collaborating with people in the community and providing access to resources and opportunities for musical engagement (Pavlicevic & Ansdell, 2009; Rolvsjord, 2010; Stige & Aarø, 2012). A recent Australian study adopted this approach and focused on engaging young people experiencing marginalisation as co-researchers to understand the process of collaboration in participatory research (Bolger, 2015). Bolger’s research has demonstrated how collaboration with young people as contributors to the research process provided opportunities to achieve positive growth by strengthening peer connections, increasing self-belief and offering opportunities for empowerment. This suggests that engaging people in action and striving to change the world can be mutually empowering, that is, meaningful and valuable for the participants, the researchers and the wider community.

Rolvsjord’s (2010) resource oriented approach to music therapy is driven by an ethos of mutual empowerment and collaboration between the therapist, participants and the wider community. Her focus is on identifying and building upon the existing strengths and resources, rather than focusing on the challenges and deficits that exist in people’s lives (Rolvsjord, 2010). This involves recognizing how people use music within their own lives as a personal resource (Rolvsjord, 2015). Resource-oriented and community music therapy approaches both aim to celebrate the strengths and resources of participants inside and outside of the music therapy sessions, and acknowledges that people are active agents in their own lives (Rolvsjord, 2010, 2015; Stige & Aarø, 2012; Stige, Ansdell, Elefant & Pavlicevic,
As descriptions of children in the homelessness and family violence context rarely focus on the strengths, resilience and coping strategies of children (Fairchild, McFerran & Thompson, 2017), we believe it is timely to reflect on children’s resources and how they can be explored and represented through music.

Music therapy within the specific context of homelessness and family violence is an under researched area that warrants further exploration. The first author’s Masters research explored the experience of a performance in music therapy for pre-adolescent children and their families who were experiencing homelessness and family violence (Fairchild, Thompson & McFerran, 2016). Three children (11-12 years) and four parents participated in the research that involved individual interviews after the performance. The children described internal responses such as feelings of pride, anxiety, excitement and ownership throughout their experience of the performance. They also identified the importance of external responses such as feeling supported by their family and audience members, and feeling connected to the other children while they were performing. The parent’s described how watching the performance helped them to notice the strengths and potential of their child, rather than thinking about the challenges they were facing as a result of their experience of homelessness and family violence. The children also described positive changes in their relationship with music as a result of participating in the group. Following on from this research, we were interested in exploring the range of internal and external resources that supported children to cope in their lives.

Additionally, two recent articles from the United States have explored the role of music therapy with children experiencing homelessness and poverty. Yates & Silverman (2016) explored the needs of children through interviews with workers in this context. They identified the importance of establishing safety and trusting relationships with children, and providing opportunities for emotional support through music therapy. Nagel & Silverman
(2017) interviewed 5 music therapists about the role of music therapy with children who are experiencing poverty with their families. The results identified that music therapy offered a way for families to practice healthy interactions with one another within a supportive environment. The authors stressed the importance of music therapists having an understanding of the range of stressors in children’s lives in addition to their experiences of poverty.

It is also helpful to draw from perspectives of music therapists working and researching within the broader field of child welfare with children and young people who have been oppressed in various ways due to experiences of abuse, violence, neglect and poverty. There are two recent music therapy studies within the child welfare context that have explored young people’s experiences of using music as a resource and how this relates to their experiences of adversity and transience (Krüger & Stige, 2014; Zanders, 2012). While these studies provide a useful platform for the development of the current project, we acknowledge that there may be some differences due to the diverse context and ages of the children.

Zanders (2012) has explored the relationship between the personal and musical biographies of 10 young people (13-18 years) who were living in foster care in the United States. This research included a focus on exploring the young people’s musical experiences throughout their lives as well as how their experience of foster care impacted their relationship with music. Drawing upon the approach of a systematic qualitative inquiry, each of the young people participated in an interview that explored their experiences and musical engagement before entering the foster care system, their memories from living in foster care and their current circumstances. Listening to music on their own was the main form of engagement described by the young people and this was identified as a psychological resource that supported them in difficult times, rather than just something they did for leisure.
The young people described how listening to music was often used as a calming tool and helped them to cope with the ongoing trauma and loss they have endured throughout their lives. Music listening was also described as a way of escaping from the outside world and helping them to forget difficult memories from the past. Considering many of the young people described using music in similar ways, Zanders (2012) suggests that the use of group music therapy in this context would be a useful forum for supporting young people to connect with one another and share about their comparable experiences.

Krüger & Stige (2014) explored the use of music in the everyday lives of 15 young people (18-23 years) who were living in child welfare institutions in Norway. Drawing upon a rights-based approach to children’s participation in music and research, the study explored the young people’s experience of living in child welfare as well as how their use of music as a resource in their lives related to these experiences. A sociocultural perspective was also employed as a way of understanding the range of conditions that provided the opportunities for young people’s participation in music. The young people described feeling stigmatized by society due to the often-negative perceptions associated with their experiences, and they wanted to be able to show that they were more than the label that had been placed upon them. They also reported that they often felt unheard by adults and that there was a lack of dialogue in decisions that affected them. When reflecting on their use of music in their everyday lives, the young people explored how music was a way of communicating their story, expressing their feelings and representing their identity. Music was also identified as a way of facilitating communication with their peers and adults, though this was not always described as positive or helpful.

McFerran (2010) describes music as a resource that is available to young people across all cultures and contexts, regardless of their experiences of poverty, disadvantage and disability. This is comparable to our own observations in our research and work with children.
in this context who, despite their experiences of transience and violence, are still able to utilize music as a personal resource in their everyday lives. Therefore, this paper aims to describe how children use music as a personal resource in their lives to cope with the challenges associated with their experiences of homelessness and family violence. In addition, the project aims to collaborate with children as co-researchers throughout the data generation, analysis and arts-based presentation of the findings.

Method

Setting.

This project took place within the first author’s music therapy workplace at Bethany Community Support, a regional community organization near Melbourne, Australia. The organization offers a range of services including housing, family violence, gamblers help, kinship care, disability, counselling and family support. The first author is employed as a music therapy group facilitator within a program that supports children who are accompanying their families through the homelessness and family violence system. Ethics approval was obtained through The University of Melbourne (Ethics ID: 1544921) as well as approval from the Department of Health and Human Services due to the engagement of children within this setting (14th September 2015).

Recruitment.

Children who had previously participated in a 15-week music therapy group with the first author were invited to participate in the research, which involved a music workshop over the school holidays. As the children’s involvement had spanned a two-year period, we were very careful about the way we approached children and their families to invite them to participate in the research and this was a multi-layered approach. We emphasized at each stage that their participation was voluntary and that their decision would not impact their involvement in other services at the organization as some families were still accessing other
forms of support. First, the families received a phone call from the first author briefly explaining the research and asking if they would be willing to receive details about the research, including the plain language statement and consent form, in the mail. Once families agreed to receive the information, this was posted and families were given about a week to discuss the research with their child. After this, families received a phone call to ask whether the child showed interest in participating and, if so, a home visit was arranged to discuss the research with the parent and child. At the home visit, the first author discussed the research in simple terms and read through the plain language statement with the parent and child. At this point, the collaborative nature of the research was emphasized, along with the recognition that we wanted to capture the children’s voices, as they are the experts in their own lives. If they agreed to be involved, both the parent and child signed the informed consent form for the child to participate. Transport assistance was also offered to attend the workshop as required.

**Description of co-researchers.**

Fifteen children aged 8-14 agreed to participate in the research. Due to the high number of children wanting to be involved, we decided to run two separate music workshops to allow sufficient opportunities for all children to have a voice and contribute. All of the children had experienced various levels of homelessness and family violence and had participated in a 15-week music therapy group within the past two years. Some families were still receiving support from the service system while others were more stable at the time of the workshop. Interestingly, almost all of the children discussed their previous involvement in the music therapy group at the recruitment home visit and asked whether they could participate again. Some parents also spoke about their own engagement with music and how important it was to them in difficult times of their lives. On the day of the music workshop,
children were asked to select a pseudonym that would represent them in the research. The participant details can be found in Table 4.1.

*Table 4.1*  

*Participant Details*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name (Child selected Pseudonym)</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Josh</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamie Hayes</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nat Fyfe</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jasmine</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yoshi</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King Bob</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riley</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brosome</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackson</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nikki</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logan</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zantangabanana</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tweedle Dee</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Music workshops.*

The research was set up as a ‘music workshop’ with the intent of providing a fun and creative way of engaging children in the project. Each workshop lasted four hours and involved three activities: 1) a warm up activity using body percussion and singing 2) a song sharing activity where children took turns to share a song that was meaningful to them while everyone drew a picture about whatever came to mind while listening to the song, and 3) the collaborative songwriting method that focused on writing a song about what music means to them. Children were also provided with lunch and snacks throughout the day in addition to
several breaks. The music workshop was facilitated by the first author, and co-facilitated by a family violence children’s worker at the organization.

Initially we were planning to use the discussions and pictures from the song sharing activity as a form of data. Due the ages of the children participating we felt that, while this was a useful method we have used in music therapy practice, it was not particularly helpful in answering our research question as most children struggled to engage verbally in this task. Therefore, we decided to focus purely on the song that was written in each of the sessions.

**Arts-based research.**

Many children have shown that they are capable and willing to voice their views, thoughts and concerns through creative and expressive means (Emberly & Davhula, 2016). Therefore, using creative methods in research aims to provide opportunities for children to talk about what is important to them and communicate their messages and ideas through child-centred forms such as play, art, drama, music and photography (Holland et.al., 2010). Arts-based research involves the use of artistic processes as way of understanding and exploring an experience from both the researchers and participant’s point of view (Knowles & Cole, 2008). Arts-based methodologies challenge more traditional and scientific ways of knowing, and shift the focus to local and contextual understandings of people, events and experiences (Finley, 2008). This approach to research allows children, even those who are less talkative, developmentally impaired or otherwise marginalized, the opportunity to fully participate and contribute through creative modes of communication without the need to rely on verbal or written accounts (Pinter & Zandian, 2015).

Drawing upon our own experiences of songwriting with children in our work as music therapists, we chose to develop a collaborative songwriting research method that actively involved children throughout the research process. This included engaging the children in creative and child-centered forms of data generation, analysis and presentation of the
findings. More than simply providing data for us to analyse as expert researchers, we focused on the use of group songwriting as a way to co-create knowledge and understanding and to ensure that the final product represented the young people in ways that they could recognize and resonate with. This is in keeping with arts-based approaches described by music therapy scholars including Michele Forinash, Diane Austin, Michael Viega and Laura Beer in the arts-based research special edition of Music Therapy Perspectives (2016).

**Ethical Considerations.**

Research with children in this context requires ongoing reflexivity around the ways that children are engaged and supported throughout the research process. The United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989) emphasizes the importance for children to have opportunities to be heard, for their views to be respected and responded to appropriately, to feel protected from exploitation, and for the highest possible standards to be used when working and interacting with children. Beazley and colleagues (2009) have extended these recommendations by suggesting that children have the right to be engaged in research about topics that affect them in a way that is meaningful and child-centred. Hence, the development of the collaborative songwriting method sought to provide a creative way for children to participate in the research in a way that was interesting and fun. This approach acknowledged the creative resources that the children brought to the research, while also offering them additional resources and opportunities to express their views.

It was important to acknowledge and reflect upon the possible power imbalances that are inherent between adult researchers and children. As suggested by Bradbury-Jones and Taylor (2015), engaging the children in collaborative research and privileging their voices required reflexivity to ensure that children’s safety and protection was central to the research process. As adult researchers, it was important to take responsibility for protecting children by having clear procedures for managing distress, confidentiality and possible disclosures.
However, it was equally important to ensure that children’s rights to be heard were upheld and that their views and contributions would be taken seriously. Engaging the children in the collaborative analysis and interpretation of the findings provided a way of representing their subjective truth and to express what they thought was most important about what music meant to them.

**Songwriting in music therapy research.**

The use of songwriting in music therapy research spans a range of settings, practices and techniques. Descriptions of therapeutic songwriting in music therapy research often focus on how songwriting helps participants to express what is important to them at challenging times in their lives (Baker, 2016; Baker & MacDonald, 2013; O’Callaghan & Grocke, 2009). A well-documented form of songwriting research involves the lyric analysis of client’s songs after they have been written (ie. Aasgard, 2005; Baker, 2016; O’Callaghan & Grocke, 2009; McFerran, Baker & Krout, 2011; Roberts & McFerran, 2013). Conversely, the complexity of analysing song lyrics without the background contextual information has, at times, been identified as difficult for researchers (McFerran, Baker & Krout, 2011). While lyric analysis has been described as a useful method within music therapy, much of this research critically misses the process of brainstorming ideas and subsequently writing the song and the decisions that were made in deciding what to include and exclude from the final song lyrics. In this project, we included the data generated in brainstorming, including ideas that were ultimately not included in the final song to address this lack and provide more contextually sensitive findings.

**Songwriting as a collaborative research method.**

Since music is already such a prominent part of children’s lives, we consider that music has the capacity to be a meaningful and collaborative medium for engaging children in research as a way of representing their voices and experiences. This collaborative
songwriting approach to research mirrors the typical songwriting process used in music therapy practice, which often involves brainstorming on a theme, choosing the main ideas, developing song lyrics, creating melodies, beats and harmonies, and ultimately recording or performing the song (McFerran, 2004). However, using songwriting for research purposes also involves co-constructing knowledge with children around a specific topic in response to a guiding research question, which in this project was: ‘what does music mean to you?’.

Within the collaborative research process, brainstorming serves the purpose of data generation, choosing the main ideas and developing the song lyrics takes the form of analysis and interpretation, and creating the melody and recording the song involves the presentation of the findings in an arts-based way (see Figure 4.1).

The children understood that their participation was for research purposes, and therefore we introduced them to some of the basic concepts such as what research means and who it will potentially help, as well as what it means to analyse their ideas. As we were conscious that children might find it difficult to engage in the process of data analysis and interpretation, we adapted the ways that we presented the information to children throughout the workshops to assist them to understand what we were asking of them. As suggested by Lundy and colleagues (2011), we needed to ensure that the process was child-centred and offered creative ways of knowing so that children could contribute in a way that they found meaningful and relevant to them. Throughout the process of writing the song we emphasized several times that the children’s voices and ideas were most important and that they were the experts in their own lives. In this way, we wanted the findings to be grounded in the children’s ideas and experiences rather than representing adults’ interpretations of children’s experiences (Dockett, Einarsdottir & Perry, 2009), however the collaborative nature allowed us to co-construct knowledge by supporting children to talk about their experiences and
clarifying what they meant as required. The following section provides a detailed description of how the process of collaborative songwriting with the children actually occurred.

*Figure 4.1*

*Process of the Collaborative Songwriting Research Method*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data generation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brainstorming on the theme of music: What does music mean to you?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collaborative data analysis and interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Choosing the main ideas and co-creating the song lyrics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Presentation of the research findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Choosing a melody/style and recording the song</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Brainstorming on the research question (data generation).*

The brainstorming phase was similar to that of a focus group, in the way that children’s’ ideas were written down and explored further through a series of probing questions. Children were asked to share any ideas, words, feelings or thoughts about the theme in response to questions such as: ‘What does music mean to you? What types of music do you like? When do you listen to music? How do you feel while you listen to music? In what ways do you think music helps you? Are there any ways music does not help you?’.
children’s responses were all written up on the white board and grouped under different themes (headings) in consultation with the children. What distinguished this approach from typical focus group conversations was that children saw the method as a fun and meaningful way of being involved in research, as they knew that the purpose of the activity was to create their own song, and consequently they were actively engaged in the creative and research process. Each group participated in brainstorming for about 20 minutes and it was a dynamic discussion where they shared and reflected on each other’s ideas.

**Choosing the main ideas (collaborative data analysis).**

After brainstorming their ideas, the children were asked to look at the whiteboard and think about what the main message of their song would be and we discussed how this would become the chorus. We then asked the children to choose the main ideas that they wanted to include in the song, and each of these were circled and given a heading to describe what each verse was about. We expanded upon each of these ideas as required and decided which part they wanted to include in the song. For example, in the second group the children described various ways that music helped them such as making them ‘happy’ and helping them to ‘relax’. They also identified times that music was not particularly helpful to them such as when they are feeling ‘angry’ or ‘annoyed’. When choosing the main ideas for the song they circled both of these sections and subsequently decided to group these ideas together under one heading of ‘music helps and does not help’. In this way, children were engaged throughout the interpretation and analysis by collaboratively deciding upon the main ideas that they wanted to include in the song and through the development of headings to describe what they were talking about.

**Co-creating the song lyrics (collaborative data analysis continues).**

Once we had made a plan for which ideas would make up the chorus, and which ideas would go into the verses, we worked together to co-create the song lyrics. At this point we
had a discussion about what genre the song could be composed in and whether they wanted the different lines to rhyme with one another. Both groups decided that they wanted their lyrics to rhyme, so we decided upon a simple format of sung chorus and rapped verses for each of the songs. This structure is one that the first author has frequently used with groups of young people when writing songs in a single session because it is relatively easy for young people to participate in spoken word and raps.

Writing the song lyrics involved children and facilitators sharing ideas and bounced lyrics off one another while creating song lyrics. The children appeared to find the process of writing the lyrics difficult at times and started to lose interest and concentration when they couldn't think of a lyric and some children became frustrated with this. We worked sequentially writing the lyrics for one section at a time and provided encouragement and suggestions when children struggled to think of how to say certain phrases. We tried as much as possible to use the children’s original words from the brainstorming phase, however these did not always fit because of the request to make the words rhyme. At times the wording became simplified or lost context due to a desire from the children and facilitators to have a certain aesthetic quality such as rhyming and phrases fitting together in the song. An example of this was evident in the first group where the children brainstormed how music offered a way to ‘runaway’, ‘hide’ and ‘escape’ from what was happening in their lives. When this idea was developed into a song lyric the phrase became ‘so come and runaway with me’. As a result, the initial ideas may have not been fully present in the final song lyrics due to a innate desire to make words rhyme and be aesthetically pleasing.

**Co-creating the style and melody (presentation of the research findings).**

Deciding on a style and melody for the song provided an opportunity for the children to represent the findings in a creative and child-centred way. Similar to a typical songwriting process in group music therapy sessions with children, a number of styles and chord
progressions were presented to the children and they debated preferences until they reached an agreement about which one to use. The music therapy researcher accompanied the children using the guitar. The children did not play any instruments as the focus was on creating the song lyrics and the melody, and we felt that children would be distracted from the task if they were provided with instruments. As the process of creating the song was occurring over one session, the structures were kept simple and predictable so that children could easily participate in developing the melody and so that they could remember it as it developed. The melody was developed by the children improvising melody lines to the lyrics of the song or describing how they thought it should sound, and the first author reflecting a melody back to them. Within both groups, some children were comfortable to sing on their own to suggest a melody line, however less confident children participated by providing verbal feedback and suggestions for improvements. As the song developed, we noticed that the energy of the groups lifted and the children became excited as they were able to start singing along together and hear their ideas represented in the song.

**Recording the song (presentation of the research findings continues).**

Once the song was completed, we sang the song through together a number of times before recording it. As the songs were completed within 2 hours, the recordings of the songs represent the collaborative but unpolished nature of the songwriting process adopted in this study. The children received a copy of the song recording and song lyrics the following week via post.

**Results**

There were two separate groups that participated in the research on consecutive days. Eight children participated in the first group (Josh, Jamie Hayes, Nat Fyfe, Jasmine, Blue, Yoshi, King Bob & Riley) and seven children participated in the second group (Brosome, Jackson, Nikki, Sarah, Logan, Zantangabanana and TweedleDee). This section will provide
an overview of each group’s brainstorming process, their main ideas and the development of the song lyrics.

**Overview of Group One – ‘Music is everything’**.

The process of writing the song started with an introduction about what we were going to do and reminding them that we wanted to hear all of their voices and ideas. All ideas that were voiced by the children were written up on a white board and can be seen in Figure 4.2. The first question we posed to the children asked them to share any words that came to mind to describe music or what music means them. Music was described in general terms using words such as happy, loud, inspiration, love, joy, sad, scary and violence. One child suggested that music might offer solutions, and this idea was explored with the group and they discussed that music might help to stop the war, drugs and racism. Another child suggested that music helps to tell stories about life, clarifying later that she thought music told ‘sad ones’. Music was also described as ‘bad’ if the song was ‘depressing’, ‘scary’ or ‘when Lady GaGa sings it’.

We explored the ways that the children accessed music and with whom they shared it. When asked who they listen to music with, one child responded ‘my headphones’. There seemed to be a general consensus in the group that they mostly listened to music alone through headphones because it was ‘loud’ and ‘you don’t have to listen to other people’. The children identified that music helped them in several ways: ‘makes you feel good about yourself’ and ‘helps cheer you up when you are sad’. We explored this further, asking whether music is always helpful, and they discussed how sometimes music makes them feel worse if it’s ‘a depressing song’ and that it ‘could make you feel sad if you listen to sad music’. Responses to feeling sad from music included ‘I cry’, ‘Don’t feel good’ and ‘You don’t feel like yourself’. When asked what they think life would be like without music, one child responded ‘I would be dead without music’.
After brainstorming together for about 20 minutes, the group selected three ideas to include in the verses of their song: music tells stories, music offers solutions, and how it makes you feel. An overarching main theme emerged at this point when we asked children to think again about what music means to them. Responses to this question included: ‘I dunno everything’, ‘a way to pass time’, ‘a way to get away from people or stuff’, and ‘a way to express yourself’. We expanded upon the idea of ‘getting away’ to include words such as to ‘run’, ‘hide’, ‘ignore’, ‘escape’ and ‘to start a new life’. The group subsequently decided that they would like the main idea for the song to be about what music means to them and that ‘music is everything’. The lyrics of the song can be seen below. The bracketed words at the start of each chorus or verse represent the theme the children co-constructed to represent the main focus of each verse. The recording of both songs can be found at:

https://soundcloud.com/user-191682090/sets/njmt-article
“Music is everything” – Group One

CHORUS (What music means to us)
Music is everything to you and me
We can listen to the lovely beat
Sing as loud as can be
So come and run away with me

VERSE 1 (How it makes you feel)
Sometimes music makes me happy
Sometimes it makes me sad
Sometimes music is boring
Which makes me start snoring

REPEAT CHORUS

VERSE 2 (Solutions)
Music helps to make solutions
To stop the war and stop pollution
To stop disease and start a new life
So that we can stay out of strife

VERSE 3 (Music tells stories)
Music tells stories for different people
Whoever we are, we are all equal
Never stop, take a risk
Come on people, let’s do this!

REPEAT CHORUS

Overview of Group Two – ‘Headphones’.
The brainstorming session for the second group started with the same opening question that explored what music means to them. The ideas generated from this discussion can be found in Figure 4.3. The children used words such as ‘happy’, ‘excited’, ‘brilliant’, ‘awesome’, ‘sad’, ‘having fun’ and ‘emotional’ to describe music in the early stages of the discussion. We explored the idea of music being emotional, and one child said ‘if it's a sad song, it might get you sad because you might have the feelings that the person in the song has’. The children identified that they listen to music with a range of different people, such as ‘friends’, ‘family’ and ‘myself’. Similar to the first group, this group discussed how they listen to music with headphones when they are alone. One child stated throughout the discussion ‘I love music too much’.

When talking about the ways that music helps them, the group identified that ‘When you’re sad, you can get happy’, ‘when you’re sick, if you have to stay in bed you can listen to music’, ‘music can make you relax’ and music can help with ‘exercising when you jog or walk’. The idea of singing alone with headphones was discussed again at this point, with one child saying ‘if you listen alone you can sing it and don’t feel embarrassed’. They also described times when music is not helpful, such as if they are feeling ‘angry’, ‘annoyed’, ‘when there’s a song (they) don’t like’, or they get ‘bored’ if they ‘listen to it over and over again’. When asked how they felt while making music, they used words such as ‘awesome’, ‘great’ and ‘proud’. One child also said that ‘music makes you feel cool if you know all the words’. Another child described making music as ‘feeling the beat in my veins’.
After brainstorming ideas for the song, the group decided on three main themes for the verses in the song: music helps and does not help, feelings and feeling the beat. One child suggested that ‘maybe the chorus should be about putting on headphones’ and ‘listening to music’. She asked the other children in the group to vote for her idea, and since no one had any other ideas, they all agreed with her. Therefore, the main idea for the song was about listening to music with their headphones and the ways that this helped them in their lives.

“Headphones” – Group Two

CHORUS (Listening to music)
I put my headphones on and listen to a song I like
If I listen too much, then I might dislike
Sometimes music makes me feel nice
Then other times it might be alright

VERSE 1 (Feeling the beat)
I feel the beat in my veins
I hear the lyrics in my brain
When I make music I feel proud
Even if I’m a little bit loud

REPEAT CHORUS

VERSE 2 (Feelings)
When I listen to music I feel real happy
But sometimes music makes me sad
When I know all the words I feel so cool
But if I get it wrong then I don’t feel so glad

REPEAT CHORUS

VERSE 3 (music helps and does not help)
Music helps me to calm down
Mostly when no ones around
It cheers me up when I am sad
Reflections from both groups.

Two main themes emerged from looking across the results from both groups: 1) music offers hope and 2) music provides a way to escape from the outside world. The children in this study described a range of positive and negative aspects arising from their musical engagement, and they explored the multiple roles that music plays in their lives. The children identified the ways that music is helpful and sometimes unhelpful in their lives, and showed how they are able to make conscious decisions about what music to listen to at different times, and they seemed to have a basic understanding about how to use music to moderate their mood. The children described listening to music most when they are alone through their headphones, as a way of tuning out from the outside world and trying ignore what is happening in their lives. Therefore, the children identified music as a significant personal resource in their lives, and the songs created represent the capacity and strengths of children despite their experiences of transience and violence and provided a creative and arts-based representation of their experiences.

Discussion

Escaping through music.

A number of the children in this project described how listening to music offered an escape from the outside world by helping ‘to get away from people or stuff’ and by distracting them from what was happening in their lives. Coping by avoidance or distraction has been described as a common way for children deal with stress in their lives (Folkman & Lazarus, 1991), and may be viewed as a protective factor in the short term. Within a study exploring children’s responses and actions to family violence in the home (Överlien & Hydén, 2009), children identified that listening to loud music was a way of blocking out and
distracting them from the sounds of violence and family member’s fighting. Similarly within the foster care context, young people have described how listening to music is a way of forgetting difficult thoughts and avoiding having to deal with distressing past memories (Zanders, 2012). The children in this project discussed how they usually listened to music through their headphones when they were on their own and that music helped them to calm down ‘mostly when no one’s around’. This solitary music listening has been described in an adolescent music therapy study as a ‘musical cocoon’ where young people experience a sense of safety and containment when listening to music on their own (Cheong-Clinch & McFerran, 2016). Children in the homelessness and family violence context may never truly be able to escape from these experiences as they are usually reliant on their family members to keep them safe due to their age. However, listening to music may provide some temporary relief and a sense of safety in difficult times.

While the children described mostly positive ways that music provides an escape from what is happening in their lives, it is important to consider the possible future implications of escapism as pre-adolescent children progress into adolescence. Children who have experienced violence in their homes often develop a tendency to disassociate and distance themselves emotionally from the violence in an attempt to protect themselves and their loved ones (Överlien & Hydén, 2009). However, if children continue to use music as a way of escaping without having their needs addressed, it is possible that this practice may become problematic in later years (Hutchinson, Baldwin & Oh, 2006). Using passive coping strategies that involve trying to block out and ignore negative thoughts and memories rather than processing these experiences may be associated with the development of psychological difficulties as they grow up (Folkman & Lazarus, 1991). Additionally, if children are listening to music as a way of escaping from violence or difficult situations in their home, it
is possible they may then begin to associate this music with negative thoughts that may eventually become a trigger for a traumatic response in everyday life situations.

**Music offers hope.**

The children described aspects of music that instilled hope in their own lives as well as the broader society. They used phrases to illustrate the impact of music in their lives such as ‘music is everything’, ‘I would be dead without music’, ‘music helps to make solutions’ and ‘whoever we are we are all equal’. For children who have experienced challenging life circumstances, hope can be a crucial resource in helping them to find strength in the face of adversity (te Riele, 2010). Hoping for a better future, making and pursuing goals, and having an inner drive to succeed are all factors that may help children to develop healthy ways of coping with difficult situations by providing them something positive to focus on and look forward to (Hines, 2015). The possible dilemma here is that the idea of hope does not always address real problems (te Riele, 2010) and therefore may lead to disappointment if children are not able to navigate access to the resources they need in order to flourish.

The children also talked about the ways that they use music to change their mood. The second group described how when they are feeling sad they listen to music and it might make them feel happy, however they also acknowledged that sometimes music makes them feel sad if they can relate to what the song is about. In their descriptions of young people’s appropriation of music to improve their mood, McFerran and Saarikillio (2014) suggested that young people in their study who were experiencing difficulties seemed more likely to ruminate with music and remove themselves from their social networks as a way of escaping through music. They discussed how this might be problematic if this behaviour becomes persistent and impacts their ability to engage in everyday life. While some of the children in this project were able to identify that music was not always necessarily helpful to them, it was difficult to deepen this idea due to the group setting and differing developmental
maturity of participants. We believe there is a role for music therapist’s to play in this context by supporting children to develop conscious awareness about the ways they use music in their lives by providing a creative outlet to express themselves and to mutually develop healthy ways of coping.

**Critical reflections on the method.**

Children were viewed as collaborators and co-researchers in this project, with an underlying aim to capture and represent children’s voices. Therefore, analysis of the data occurred in collaboration with the children in the workshops throughout the co-construction of the ideas and subsequent song lyrics. The songs provided an arts-based representation of children’s contributions and provided a way for the children to also be involved in the presentation of the findings. The research process with both of the groups involved lively and dynamic discussions about what music means to them in their lives, and there were a number of group factors that impacted the ways that the ideas were shared and developed throughout the research process. Baker (2013) identified four group factors that influence therapeutic songwriting that are also relevant to the research process, including: group composition, group size, group conflicts and group cohesion. These factors were key considerations in this project so that all children felt comfortable to share their ideas and had the opportunity to have their voices heard.

Throughout the focus groups it was important to consider the power dynamics between the group members as some children had a tendency to dominate the discussion. Therefore, it was important to provide encouragement and space for the quiet members of the group to share their ideas to ensure that all voices were captured throughout the process. We noticed that the responses from some of the children were quite brief, including responses such as ‘I don’t know’, ‘not sure’ and simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’ responses, so it was crucial to take on a questioning role and to provide opportunities for children to reflect more deeply on what
they wanted to contribute. As suggested by Powell and Smith (2009), children often provided
non-verbal cues to show that they were feeling uncomfortable or unsure such as becoming
quiet, removing themselves from the group, looking distracted or changing the topic. As a
result, the first author’s university training and professional experience of working as a music
therapist in this context was crucial in order to respond to children’s changing presentations
and to manage group dynamics while facilitating the songwriting process. Therefore, it is
important that future researcher’s using this collaborative method have expertise in music
therapy and songwriting prior to facilitating focus groups.

The level of group intimacy and trust has been described as important factors in
therapeutic group songwriting within music therapy (Baker, 2013, 2015). Only some of the
children in the music workshops knew each other prior to attending, which we believe may
have impacted the way children participated and contributed to the research. Perhaps if
children felt more comfortable and we had a longer time to establish a sense of safety and
containment to share their ideas, the results might have reflected a deeper understanding.
However, we believe that the collaborative songwriting method provided a sense of
familiarity and predictability to the children as each of them had previously participated in a
group songwriting process due their past participation in a music therapy group with the first
author. MacDonald and Viega (2011) have described how music was the unifying factor in
the creative process of a songwriting program for young people from low socio economic
backgrounds. Similarly, in this project, it was the music that brought the children together
and created a sense of unity amongst the uncertainty and chaos.

While co-constructing the song lyrics, we noticed that the children’s original ideas
sometimes lost context due to trying to make the lyrics rhyme or trying to make them fit into
certain phrases of the song. This paradox has been described in the music therapy
songwriting literature, where common lyric writing techniques such as rhyming or repetition
may take precedent to improve the aesthetic quality of the song rather than expressing a particular idea as it was originally expressed (McFerran, Baker & Krout, 2011). For future researcher’s using this songwriting method we would recommend trying to lose the rigidity of focusing on making lyrics rhyme so that participants can focus on expressing their ideas in the purest form.

**Implications for practice.**

This collaborative project was an important first step in understanding the ways that children are using music as a personal resource throughout their experiences of homelessness and family violence. Equally important was the recognition of the creative resources that the children brought to the research through the collaborative songwriting method. The children described the ways that music offered an escape from the outside world, while also providing hope for the future. These concepts provide an important insight into the ways that children use music and provide a basis for music therapy practice and research with children similar circumstances in the future.

Engaging children in the arts-based and collaborative process of songwriting provided a way of understanding children’s resources, and this method could also be adapted for music therapy practice. Many music therapists already use songwriting as a method within their work, however the resource-oriented songwriting method provides an opportunity to identify and explore resources, and this would be helpful in the early stages of engagement. Akin with resource-oriented approaches in music therapy (Rolvsjord, 2010), this recognition of what children are already doing in their lives to cope would assist with developing a focus for future music therapy practice.

**Conclusion**

The collaborative group process with the children in this project needed to be framed in a child-centered and fun way, but this was not without its challenges due to the ages, group
dynamics and high energy of the children. Multiple prompts were needed throughout the process to ensure that each child had an opportunity to contribute and to encourage children to stay on track with the songwriting task. Akin to therapeutic songwriting in music therapy practice, the children had opportunities to decide what to include in their song, as well as what not to include, and this is a process that has been described by Baker (2015) as offering a sense of agency and control.

A major challenge in child-centered and collaborative research is that children’s participation may not be taken seriously or given due weight (O’Kane, 2017). The children’s participation in the research throughout the data generation, collaborative analysis and presentation of the findings draws upon four key concepts that align with the United Nation Convention of the Rights of Child (1989), as described by Lundy and colleagues (2011). First, children were provided with a safe and inclusive space to express their views. Second, children’s voices were given priority even though they needed support and time to communicate their ideas, and they sometimes struggled to find the right words to express what they wanted to say. Third, children’s views were given an audience and were listened to respectfully, and lastly, children’s views and ideas had an influence and were acted upon and responded to appropriately (Lundy, McEvoy & Byrne, 2011). Although some might question the degree to which these children were able to engage meaningfully with the analytic parts of the collaborative process, we argue that this fails to value the meaningfulness of these contributions and is grounded in an assumption that research must look and sound ‘grown-up’ in order to be taken seriously.
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doi: https://doi.org/10.1017/cha.2016.46


Pinter, A., & Zandian, S. (2015). ‘I thought it would be tiny little one phrase that we said in a huge big pile of papers’: Children’s reflections on their involvement in participatory research. Qualitative Research, 15 (2), 235-250. doi: 10.1177/1468794112465637


Bridging Material

The next chapter shares the stories and songs of 10 children who chose to contribute further to the research through individual songwriting interviews that explored what helps them to ‘do well’ in their lives. In order to offer a creative and meaningful way for children to explore their resources more broadly, the collaborative songwriting research method described in the previous chapter is developed further in this chapter. Using this arts-based method in individual interviews provided an opportunity for the children to contribute at a deeper and more personal level, in comparison to the previous chapter that ultimately represented group consensus. The personal stories and songs shared in this chapter represent children’s resources and capacities, while also identifying some of the gaps in their family and service systems in providing appropriate opportunities and responses to what they identify is important to them. Readers are encouraged to engage with the recorded material provided while reading this chapter in order to reap the full benefits of understanding children’s experiences.
Chapter 5

Individual Songwriting Interviews and Results

Introduction

As described in the critical review of the literature in Chapter 2, there has been a vast amount of research focusing on the myriad of challenges faced by children throughout their experiences of homelessness and family violence (Fairchild, McFerran & Thompson, 2017). The research about the impacts on children has been integral for building the knowledge and evidence base about the possible risks for children living in these situations, and trauma-informed practice has been described as an important framework for professionals working in this field (Evans & Coccoma, 2014; Hopper, Bassuk & Olivet, 2010). While this research has demonstrated the need for additional services and support for children in this context, the dominant narrative focusing on difficulties only represents one part of children’s experiences (Fairchild, McFerran & Thompson, 2017; Fairchild & Bibb, 2016). Similarly, Överlien (2016) has critiqued the predominant descriptions of children as victims or bystanders in the face of family violence because this assumption fails to acknowledge children’s own resistance to violence. In an attempt to balance the representation of children in this context, this chapter seeks to explore children’s resources and capacities despite their experiences of homelessness and family violence.

In a large-scale qualitative study exploring children’s emotional competencies, Callaghan and her colleagues (2017) critiqued the representation of children experiencing family violence as emotionally incompetent and dysregulated. They argued that the extensive documentation regarding the negative psychological impacts on children underestimates the complexities of children’s emotional responses in the face of violence. Their research aimed to explore some of these complexities by deepening the knowledge about how children understand their own and others’ emotions as well as how they cope with the range of emotions throughout their experiences of family violence. Semi-structured interviews were
conducted with 107 young people (aged 8-18) across Greece, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom. The children participating in the study described ways that they expressed their emotions through symbolic and embodied means and explored a range of strategies that they use for coping with difficult emotions such as listening to music, doing physical activity and using creative techniques. Callaghan’s research (2017) is similar to the current study in the way that children are viewed as active beings, rather than passive, in the ways that they cope with family violence internally and with the support of their family and supportive systems.

Akin with the approach described in the previous chapter, my project collaborated with children as co-researchers and sought to understand children’s resources from the perspective of children themselves. Therefore, what underpins this part of the project is a participatory and rights based approach to research with children. Alderson (2007) has critiqued children’s lack of involvement in research because while adults who participate in research are assumed to be competent contributors unless they have proven otherwise, the opposite is evident with children who are often assumed incompetent or excluded completely from research due to the possible risks associated with their involvement. While it is undeniably important for children’s participation in research to be safe, ethical, respectful and child-centred, this does not mean that they should not be given the same opportunities and rights to have their voices heard, understood and responded to. Lundy and colleagues (2011, 2012) have argued that under the United Nations Convention of the Child, it should not be the child’s responsibility to ‘prove’ that their contributions are valid. Instead, what is needed is a shift in our understandings of what is means to contribute capably to research and to adapt our ways of researching with children so that they have the appropriate creative and child-centred conditions available so that they can express their views in a way that is meaningful to them. Therefore, the inclusion of songwriting as a research method in this
project aimed to provide a creative way for children explore their resources and what helps them to ‘do well’ in their lives

**Method**

**Project aims.**

As an extension of the aims in the previous chapter which were to explore children’s use of music as a resource, this part of the project aimed to: 1) Explore the range of resources that children describe drawing upon throughout their experiences of homelessness and family violence, and 2) Engage children as co-researchers and represent their voices and experiences in mutually empowering ways. As discussed, children’s voices are central to this project and it is hoped that embedding their voices into the current discourse will impact the ways they are viewed and responded to within the homelessness and family violence system.

**Arts-Based Research.**

As I have discussed, this project was informed by principles of arts-based research in the way that songwriting was used as a collaborative research method to explore children’s resources. In this project, the songs co-created by the children in the individual interviews represent the essence of the research findings.

Arts-based research has been described as an approach that has the capacity to explore critical perspectives by shedding a new light on previously unspoken concepts (Barone & Eisner, 2012). Finley (2012) has described a social justice approach to arts-based research that explores multiple and diverse ways of knowing, through making use of embodied and emotional responses and representing research in creative ways. Viega and Forinash (2016) and Beer (2016) have suggested that this approach extends the capacity for readers to experience a sense of empathy for the often-silenced voices in society. Through engaging in the creative outputs in this project, I was intending to expand the conscious awareness of readers by drawing them into the children’s experiences. In this chapter, the presentation of
each child’s song individually seeks to provide an avenue for deepening understandings and ways of knowing, while demonstrating the subjective and diverse elements of children’s reflections and experiences about the resources that exist in their lives.

**Recruitment.**

Children were invited to participate in the songwriting interviews following their participation in the group songwriting process described in the previous chapter. The children and parents had already signed an informed consent form prior to the music workshops that covered their participation in both projects if they chose to participate, however children were also reminded that they were able to withdraw from the research at any time. They were first given the opportunity to express their interest in participating in the individual songwriting interviews through a written evaluation completed after the group workshop. The children who indicated that they were interested were then contacted by phone where they could indicate whether they were still interested in being involved. Ten children chose to contribute further to the research through individual interviews. To assist with developing a sense of safety and control about their interview, the children were given the option of meeting at their home, school or at the community organization for their interview. Interestingly, none of the children chose to have the interview at their home. This may have been because they wanted to have uninterrupted time away from their family or privacy for what they wanted to speak about.

**Interviews with children.**

This project acknowledges children’s rights to participate in research and a commitment to representing children’s voices in respectful ways. As suggested by Grieg and colleagues (2012), I took the utmost care was taken to ensure that children understood the purpose of the project and what would be expected of them throughout the interview. Throughout the recruitment and research process, children were reminded that their
participation was voluntary and that they were the experts in their own lives so there were no right or wrong answers. As I had already worked with these children in a music therapy group and in the music workshop, we had an existing therapeutic relationship and I felt that this contributed to their willingness to participate in the project. However, I was also conscious that these children hadn’t participated in individual sessions with me before so it was important to help them to feel as safe and comfortable as possible and to emphasize that this was an opportunity to talk about their own experiences. In order to help children to feel comfortable in the interviews, I provided an opportunity to talk informally with each child before and after the interview, and also provided snacks for the children to eat throughout the interview.

Participatory research approaches with children seek to provide opportunities for children to speak openly and freely about their experiences, and one way to achieve this is through creative forms of research which may come across as less overwhelming to children (Ansell et al., 2012). While it is impossible to completely eradicate power inequities in research with children, Horgan (2017) has suggested that researchers need to acknowledge these possibilities and strive to minimize power imbalances as much as possible by taking on a ‘lesser adult role’. Therefore, in this project, the use of the collaborative song-writing method sought to provide a mutual space to co-construct knowledge together while striving for children’s views and voices to be represented in the ways that they wanted them to be.

**Representing the co-researchers.**

As described in the critical interpretive synthesis (Fairchild, McFerran & Thompson, 2017), there is a need to consider the ways that children are represented throughout the research process so that we do not further stigmatize those who have already experienced marginalisation. Table 5.1 describes the 10 children who were co-researchers in this project and their contributions through exploring their resources and writing their own song.
Table 5.1

Co-Researchers, Identified Resources and Songs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child selected pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Resources described</th>
<th>Song title</th>
<th>Song creation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zantangabananana</td>
<td>11 years</td>
<td>Sport, family, wanting to be an actor, wanting more money</td>
<td>Good things</td>
<td>Autorap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Josh</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>Friends, pets, sport, wants more money</td>
<td>My awesome friends</td>
<td>Launchpad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jasmine</td>
<td>12 years</td>
<td>Friends, family, school, wants to do karate</td>
<td>Friends and family</td>
<td>Autorap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>14 years</td>
<td>Thinking positive, friends, family, music, food</td>
<td>Don’t let bad things take over who you are</td>
<td>Original tune with guitar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riley</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>Encouragement and strength, thinking positive, family, friends, sport</td>
<td>What keeps me happy</td>
<td>Original tune with guitar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nat Fyfe</td>
<td>13 years</td>
<td>Music, friends, family, food, strength, wanting to get a job</td>
<td>I am strong</td>
<td>Autorap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TweedleDee</td>
<td>11 years</td>
<td>School, reading, journal writing, family, friends, wanting to study psychology</td>
<td>Thinking about the future</td>
<td>Garageband</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>Pets, family, wanting to be a zookeeper, cleaning, drawing, school</td>
<td>Friends, family and pets</td>
<td>Autorap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King Bob</td>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>Wanting to get a job, lego, family, fishing, sport</td>
<td>When I get older</td>
<td>Original tune with guitar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logan</td>
<td>9 years</td>
<td>Sport, keeping fit, friends, music, drawing, family</td>
<td>Good Choices</td>
<td>Garageband</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table demonstrates an alternative to the often problem-focused representation of children in the homelessness and family violence context, by purposefully thinking about
what was important to include (and not include) to respectfully represent the children who were co-researchers in this project. Therefore, as I adopted a resource-oriented approach within my research as well as in my everyday music therapy practice with children, I felt that it was important that I represented the children in a way that was congruent with this. The first column includes the child-selected pseudonyms that children chose to represent them in this project. Interestingly, the children’s favourite fictional characters, friends, colours or sporting heroes, often inspired the names that they chose to use as a pseudonym. The second column represents the children’s ages, which I felt was important in order to represent the varying ages of the participants. On the other hand, I decided that the children’s gender was not important to include in the summary table. The third column has intentionally been represented as the largest column, to show how the resources that the children identified themselves were integral to this whole research project. The fourth column communicates the song title that the children chose, which was often the main message of their song. The final column shows the various musical methods that children decided to use to create the melody and accompaniment for the song, which included Garageband, Launchpad, Autorap, or an original song accompanied by myself on the guitar.

**Individual songwriting process.**

The process of writing the songs in the individual interviews was described in Chapter 3, along with an illustrative example. As a reminder, a visual representation of the process is provided in Figure 5.1. This method is similar to the group songwriting process described in the previous chapter, however the individual nature allowed for more personal and subjective reflections.

As the researcher, I took on a questioning role, regularly asking children to further elaborate and clarify what they were trying to say. Often responses from the children were quite brief, including responses such as ‘I don’t know’, ‘Not sure’ and simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’
responses. Therefore, encouragement and space were important to provide opportunities for child to reflect more deeply on what they wanted to have heard. I also noticed that some children needed more emotional support to explore difficult experiences, and at times some children were observed to ‘shut down’ in response to particular questions about family and supports. Therefore, my university training and professional experience of working as a music therapist in this context were crucial to enhancing my capacity to attune and respond to children’s changing presentations throughout the interviews.

*Figure 5.1*

*Collaborative Songwriting Process*

| Data generation | Collaborative songwriting process
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brainstorming on the topic of 'what helps you to do well in your life?'.</td>
<td>Choosing the main ideas and co-constructing song lyrics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All ideas written on a piece of paper and grouped into similar ideas. Additional questions: What are some things that you like to do, what helps you to cope, who do you go to for support, what are some good things in your life, what else would help you to do well?</td>
<td>Discussion about the main message of the song. Main ideas circled and given more detail. These main ideas used to co-created lyrics. Each main idea given a heading (theme).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Presentation of the findings</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Choosing a melody and recording the song</td>
<td>Discussion about different ways to create the melody. Decision between original tune with guitar or using iPad apps such as Garageband, Autorap or Launchpad. Record song together.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Individual Stories and Songs

The following section will share the individual case stories and songs of the 10 children who participated in the project. Throughout the process the children were consistently reminded that their individual contributions were important and that their voices and songs were crucial to helping us to understand their experiences. Therefore, when deciding how to represent the results I felt that it was important to first represent each child and their song separately, to illustrate the subjective qualities of their individual stories and their personal understandings of their resources as well as their hopes and needs. Sharing the children’s individual experiences contrasts with the intentions of the previous chapter that aimed to represent a group consensus about what music means to children in the context of homelessness and family violence. For each child, I have included the brainstorming pictures, a narrative of the resources they identified, and the final song lyrics that were created by the children. The bracketed titles within the song lyrics are the themes that children identified themselves throughout the songwriting process. The recordings of the songs can be found in a SoundCloud folder at: https://soundcloud.com/user-191682090/sets/individual-interviews

Zantangabanana: ‘There’s lots of good things in my life’.

Zantangabanana, an 11-year-old girl, was a creative and expressive young person who said that she wanted to be an actor when she grows up. She spoke with various accents throughout her interview and this was something that she often did in everyday conversations. At the start of the interview, Zantangabanana provided very concrete answers to the question of ‘what helps you to do well in your life’, including ‘food… because if I don't have food I could die’ and ‘water… cause you’ll survive’. Zantangabanana identified that school helps her to do well because ‘it helps you learn’ and ‘makes you smart’. Following on from this, I asked why she thought going to school helped her and she responded ‘so (I) can get a job… like you’. When we explored what type of job
Zantangabanana thought she would like to have, she replied ‘I don’t wanna work anywhere. I just want to go around the world and explore places. Do other stuff’.

While Zantangabanana was willing to contribute to concrete discussions about school and food, I noticed that she withdrew when I asked her to think of ways that she coped in her life when she was feeling upset or angry. She responded with answers such as ‘I dunno’, ‘I don’t care’ and ‘whatever’, and stated that ‘I just keep doing what I’m doing’ when having a bad day. It is possible that this was due to the framing of the question that she didn’t quite understand what I was asking or perhaps Zantangabanana might have needed more time to feel comfortable in the interview before answering these types of questions. As a result, I decided to ask Zantangabanana a more general question ‘what are some of the good things in your life?’ and she responded with excitement ‘my mum!’. She discussed that her mum is ‘fun’ because she ‘talks weirdly… in her little baby voice’ and she thought it was ‘funny when she tries to impersonate us cause she can’t do them properly’.

Zantangabanana discussed that she likes to ‘paint’ because she likes to ‘experiment’ with different combinations of pictures and that she often does this at home. She also identified her birthday was a good thing in her life, because ‘I get presents and I get to choose what’s for dinner’. When I asked her how often she gets to choose what to have for dinner she stated this was ‘every year’ but then clarified it was very ‘rare’ for her to get to choose what to have for dinner other than on her birthday. Zantangabanana discussed that she likes to play football, soccer and hockey and that she also likes acting. As Zantangabanana seemed to be more comfortable in the interview at this stage, I asked her who she goes to if she needs to talk about something. She replied ‘nope’ to suggestions of friends, school, mum and her sisters, and instead stated she talks to ‘no one’ because she thinks ‘its too much effort’. When I asked why she thought it was too much effort, she responded ‘I don’t know I just felt like saying that’ and laughed. Zantangabanana then discussed that she doesn’t think she has any
reason to talk to people at school about anything, saying that ‘no one’s mean to me… if their mean to me I just do it back’. We then talked about what else she would like in her life to help her to ‘do well’. She identified that she would like more ‘sport equipment’, ‘more money… so we can get more things’ and to be able to ‘go on more holidays’.

After this discussion, Zantangabanana stated ‘I can’t think of anymore’ so we decided to move onto the next stage which involved choosing the main ideas she wanted to include in her song. She decided that she wanted the main idea for her song to be ‘good things’ and to also include verses with the headings ‘what I wish for’ and ‘when I grow up’. She chose the song title: ‘There’s lots of good things in my life’. We worked together to develop the song lyrics and she decided she wanted her song to rhyme, which sometimes made it difficult to reflect her original words in the song. Zantangabanana chose to use the ‘autorap’ app on the
iPad to develop the recording for her song, discussing that she didn’t want to sing but was comfortable to speak into the app by herself.

‘There’s lots of good things in my life’
Written by Zantangabanana

CHORUS  (Good things)
There’s lots of good things in my life
Riding on my long board, that’s alright
My birthday is my favourite day
Because I get to have a say
There’s lots of things I like to do
Like football, soccer and hockey too
Mum makes voices that are fun
And likes to include everyone

VERSE 1 (What I’d wish for)
I wish I could have more money
So that I can get more things
And have sports equipment
Like a spinny wheely thing
I want to live in a 2 story house
Like a little baby mouse
Holidays are lots of fun
Especially with everyone
Verse 2 (When I grow up)
I wanna be an actor when I grow up
Or be in the circus with a spinning cup
I want to travel the world and see lots of places
Go on a plane and meet some new faces

CHORUS (Good things)
There’s lots of good things in my life
Riding on my long board, that’s alright
My birthday is my favourite day
Because I get to have a say
There’s lots of things I like to do
Like football, soccer and hockey too
Mum makes voices that are fun
And likes to include everyone

Tweedledee: ‘Thinking about the future’.
Tweedledee, an 11-year-old girl, was the oldest child of a large family and her mum had remarried and had additional children. However, this relationship had ongoing challenges due to family violence that resulted in the family entering the homelessness system.
Tweedledee had weekly access with her biological father who had also remarried and while this access was sometimes unpredictable due to her father often cancelling on her, she appeared to have a close relationship with him and his new partner. Despite these uncertain family circumstances and ongoing relationship breakdown with her mother, Tweedledee presented as a confident and articulate young person with a lot of ideas to share and she had extensive plans for a successful future. Tweedledee discussed how going to school helped her
by ‘being with friends…we can basically talk about anything’ and ‘learning keeps my mind off other things… because I’m focusing on my learning and trying to get good grades so I’m concentrating a lot’. Tweedledee identified that she thought it was important to do well at school so that she could ‘get a good degree when I’m older’ and said she wasn’t sure whether anyone else in her family had been to university before.

Tweedledee also identified ‘being around my family a lot’ as a positive resource in her life, discussing how her younger brothers and sisters are ‘helpful… well their not really helpful…but you’ve always got them… like I can always be around them and stuff like that’. She also discussed that she could ‘talk to (mum and dad) at any anytime which is really good… it’s just like being around them… getting a good vibe from them and all that’. She talked about how its helps to ‘get stuff off my chest’ when she talks to her mum and dad. Tweedledee also identified her dad’s new partner as a positive person in her life, stating that ‘she’s really nice and she’s loyal to everyone… and you can talk to her about anything and she won’t judge you or anything like that’.

Tweedledee discussed strategies that she uses when she is feeling upset to include: ‘I go into my room and I’ve got this book like a journal and I can write down all my feelings and thoughts… it’s just for me’ and ‘I like to read too… I like real life stories because it’s got no pictures I can kind of picture in my head and that takes my mind off being upset’. She described how writing down her feelings helps to ‘let everything off’ and makes her feel ‘stress free’. Tweedledee discussed that these kinds of activities calm her down and identified that she chooses to do this rather than sport because sport makes her feel ‘worked up’. She also discussed that sometimes she will ‘go outside and sit down on the front porch or whatever’ and that this helps because of ‘the fresh air and like thinking and everything… just clearing my head’.
School
- being with my friends
- teachers are funny - brighter up my day
- learning - keeps my mind off a lot of things
- focusing on learning
- trying to get good grades
- concentrating a lot
- so I can get a good degree when I'm older
- want to go uni

Being around my family
- lots of siblings - helpful
- always get on
- can talk to mum & dad at anytime
- really good vibe
- gets stuff off my chest
- go out special place - Wentbee waterpark
- sometimes have lazy day at home summer

Want to get a job
- want to study psychology
- people can always talk to me
- good listener
- friends go to me to talk
- would need to go through to Year 12
- get good enough grades
- work hard, concentrate like lamium
- go to uni / TAFE

Journal
- write down feelings & thoughts
- just for me
- let everything off
- stress free
- takes every thing off
- diary of anything
- real life
- true story
- takes my mind off being upset
- calms me down

Go outside
- fresh air
- thinking about everything
- upset, can talk to friend
- makes me laugh
- fire for here at CP the day

What I'd wish for:
- always wanted to live on a farm
- have horses & sheep
- win the lottery
- move & when older
- want to go to Japan
- sightseeing
- always wanted a robot so don't have to do chores - that looks like me - so I can relax
- more choice in pocket money
After this conversation, I asked Tweedledee to think about how her life would look in a ‘perfect world’ if she could do anything she wanted. She discussed how she wanted to study psychology when she gets older because she is often told she is a good listener. She said her friends and siblings often go to her if they need to talk or if they are feeling upset. She stated that ‘they can always talk to me and they know that’. Tweedledee identified that in order to be able to study psychology she would need to finish school, ‘get good enough grades so I can pass’, ‘work hard’ and ‘concentrate like I am now’. Tweedledee also identified some hopes that she had for her future, such as living on a farm, winning tattslotto, travelling to Japan and having more choice about what to spend her pocket money on because her mum often decides this for her.

After writing down all of her ideas, we discussed what she would like to focus on and include in her song. Tweedledee decided that she would like the chorus to be ‘about studying psychology and going outside and thinking about everything. Like, I’ve thought about studying psychology and going outside and clearing my head’. She also decided that she wanted to include the ideas about school, being with her friends and family, reading and writing in her journal. Tweedledee decided that she would not like her song to rhyme and actively contributed to developing the song lyrics, based on the ideas and words she had already shared during the brainstorming phase. Tweedledee discussed she already had an idea of how she would like the song to sound, and decided to create the backing track for her song using the loop function on GarageBand. Once she had completed the backing track, she mostly developed the melody independently and confidently recorded this by herself.

'Thinking about the future'

Written by Tweedledee
VERSE 1 (What I'm doing now)
When I come to school, I always see my friends
We can talk about anything
It's really good to be with them
I love to learn and get good grades
Learning keeps my mind off everything

CHORUS (Thinking about the future)
I've been thinking alot about what I wanna do
I wanna study psychology when I get older
I need to work hard and listen to my thoughts
About what I wanna do when I grow up
People always tell me I'm a good listener
And I work hard and concentrate

VERSE 2 (Feelings and thoughts)
It really helps to write down feelings and thoughts
Its just for me and it lets everything off
True stories are the one's I love
It calms me down and makes me stress free

CHORUS (Thinking about the future)
I've been thinking alot about what I wanna do
I wanna study psychology when I get older
I need to work hard and listen to my thoughts
About what I wanna do when I grow up
People always tell me I'm a good listener
And I work hard and concentrate

VERSE 3 (My family)
Brothers and sisters have a good vibe
And I can talk to them at anytime
Mum and dad are always there for me
They help me talk and get stuff off my chest

CHORUS (Thinking about the future)
I've been thinking alot about what I wanna do
I wanna study psychology when I get older
I need to work hard and listen to my thoughts
About what I wanna do when I grow up
People always tell me I'm a good listener
And I work hard and concentrate

**Jasmine: ‘Friends and family’.**

Jasmine, a 12-year-old girl, was an articulate young person who been through the family violence and homelessness service system several times. Her mother had a complex relationship with her ex-partner (not Jasmine’s father), with a regular cycle of leaving and returning to the abusive relationship. Jasmine had openly identified that she wanted to live with her biological father due to a breakdown in the relationship with her mother, however at the time she was spending equal time between her mother and father’s house. Jasmine identified that her friends and family help her to ‘do well’ in her life, and described both
groups as being ‘caring and supportive’. She said her friends are always ‘there for me’ and identified this was ‘in different sorts of ways’. Jasmine said that her friends ‘stick up for me when I’m in a fight’, that she can ‘talk to them’ and ‘trust them’, and that she ‘feels happy… being around people that I care about and they care about me’. When I asked what it would be like for Jasmine if she didn’t have her friends in her life, she responded ‘it would be lonely and depressing without them’. While Jasmine identified that her friends played an important role in her life, it is equally important to note that prior to the interview starting Jasmine had discussed a recent incident of bullying at school involving her friends.

Jasmine explored various ways that her family helped her including: ‘they make sure I am safe’, ‘look after me when I’m sick’ and ‘they love me’. When I asked how she knows that her family loved her, she responded ‘because they tell me everyday’. Jasmine labeled her dad as a supportive person, discussing how she goes to him when she needs to talk and that
he ‘finds different ways to deal with problems’. She also identified her school counselor as a positive support and that it helps to talk about what is happening in her life.

Jasmine struggled to identify anything else in her life that she liked to do or that she felt supported her to cope in her life. However, when I asked her what else she would want to do to help her in her life, she said she wanted to do karate. She said she wanted to learn self-defence, so that she can protect herself is someone tries to hurt her. Jasmine discussed that she didn't think school was a positive resource in her life, because of ‘kids that are bullies’ and she felt the school wasn’t doing enough to protect her from this. Jasmine identified that she thought the school could improve their responses to the bullying if they talked to the students more. After we had brainstormed her ideas, I asked Jasmine what she would like to focus on for her song and what were the main ideas. She decided to focus on the ‘My Friends’ and ‘My Family’ headings and about how they are ‘caring and supportive’, specifically choosing not to include information about wanting to do karate and other things that she wished for. Jasmine chose to use ‘autorap’ to record her song, and tried out several different backing tracks before deciding on a backing track to Meagan Trainor song.

‘Friends and Family’
Written by Jasmine

CHORUS (Friends and family help me)
My friends and family help me in different ways
They make sure I am safe
They are always there for me
And they really care for me
VERSE 1 (Family look after me)
My family looks after me
They say they love me everyday
They find different ways to protect me
I go to them when I need someone to talk to

VERSE 2 (Friends make me happy)
My friends make me feel happy
And they make me feel safe
I can trust and talk to them
It would be lonely and depressing without them

CHORUS (Friends and family help me)
My friends and family help me in different ways
The make sure I am safe
They are always there for me
And they really care for me

Logan: ‘Good choices’.
Logan, 8-years old, was a quiet but friendly child who had experienced homelessness and family violence. He regularly moved between his mum and dad’s house with his siblings. Logan appeared nervous and hesitant within the interview, and often responded with comments such as ‘I’m not sure’, ‘Um…’, ‘I can't think of anything’ and ‘I don’t know’. At times he seemed uncomfortable when he didn’t know what to say, and as a result he required a lot of encouragement and reassurance throughout the interview. Logan identified some things that he liked to do, including ‘running’, ‘walking’, ‘exercise’ and ‘sport’. He discussed
that these things help him to ‘get nice and fit’. He described how his ‘mum and dad’ help in concrete ways such as ‘by feeding us’ and ‘taking us to school’. He identified he helps his parents ‘by giving them hugs’, ‘buying them something’ and ‘taking them out for dinner’. He discussed that his friends help ‘if you fall over they can get a teacher’ and that ‘teachers help you learn’.

Logan identified that playing ‘the paper game’ at school which involved picking up rubbish was something that he liked to do when he was feeling upset and that this ‘makes me happy’. He also identified other activities that make him happy such as ‘going in the playground to play with other people’, ‘painting a picture for my mum and dad’, ‘drawing’ and ‘listening to music’. When I asked Logan what else would help him in his life, he said that he sometimes feels ‘sad if no one lets you play’ and described instances where he had no one to play with at lunch time and he ‘wished (he) could play with them’. He identified that he would also like to do ‘more walking’ and ‘learning more timetables’. Lastly, he said ‘I wish I was a grown up… so I can drive a car and have a license’.
Logan decided to call his song ‘good choices’, with the chorus being labeled ‘how to look after yourself, and the verses being ‘things I like to do’, ‘how people take care of each other’ and ‘if I’m left out’. When we were co-constructing the lyrics, Logan became frustrated because he wanted his song to rhyme but he found it difficult to express what he wanted to say. I found myself making a lot of suggestions to support Logan and also suggested that the song didn’t have to rhyme in an attempt to make the task easier for him. While he still was adamant that he wanted the song to rhyme I sense that this contributed to a loss of interest in the activity. Logan chose to use GarageBand to develop a backing track for his song. However, while he seemed to enjoy using the loop function to create the track, he seemed overwhelmed at the thought of making up his own tune and struggled to make a decision about how he wanted the melody to sound. At this point, I took more responsibility over creating the tune by offering options for him to choose from. He eventually decided that he didn’t want to sing on the recording, and instead asked that I record it for him.

‘Good Choices’
Written by Logan

CHORUS (How to look after yourself)
There’s lots of things I like to do
I like running and walking too
Soccer and cricket are so cool
To watch on TV and play at school
I like to be nice and fit
And I like to eat a bit
VERSE 1 (Things I like to do)
Songs and drawing make me happy
Games at school also make me happy
I like painting pictures for dad and mum
Playing on the playground with my friends is really fun

VERSE 2 (How people take care of each other)
I like to look after mum and dad
By giving them hugs when they are sad
Mum and dad look after us too
By feeding us and taking us to school

CHORUS (How to look after yourself)
There’s lots of things I like to do
I like running and walking too
Soccer and cricket are so cool
To watch on TV and play at school
I like to be nice and fit
And I like to eat a bit

VERSE 3 (If I’m left out)
I get sad if no one lets me play
Sometimes I just walk away
I wish they would play with me
And get up and just play with me
CHORUS (How to look after yourself)
There’s lots of things I like to do
I like running and walking too
Soccer and cricket are so cool
To watch on TV and play at school
I like to be nice and fit
And I like to eat a bit

Josh: ‘My awesome things’.

Josh, a 10-year-old boy, was living with his mother and older brother in a public housing property due to the family having to move away from their father due to family violence. Josh’ mother had also recently had treatment for cancer and was in remission at the time of the interview. Josh was an expressive and talkative young person, who often spoke in different voices in everyday conversation as well as in this interview. Josh first identified that sport helped him in his life because ‘it keeps me fit and if I’m fit I’m not fat, and if I’m not fat I can do things better than I can if I am fat. And sport is fun’. Josh listed a number of sports that he liked to do including long jump, golf, football and soccer. He discussed that he plays soccer with his friends, and he plays football at school as well as outside of school during the football season. Josh described how he felt ‘confident’ when he was playing sport and that it ‘makes me take my mind off things that are bad that I don’t want to think about’. At this point, Josh appeared to withdraw slightly and I could sense that he did not want to talk specifically about what he was referring to. However, I gave him the option to explore further by saying ‘did you want to say what kind of things’ and he replied ‘nah’. As Josh had become quiet at this point and he indicated he wasn’t ready to explore these feelings we decided to move on from this conversation.
Josh identified that his friends help him in his life, saying that ‘they make me happy when I’m sad’ and ‘they tell me jokes or do something funny’. He discussed how his friends ‘let me play games with them’ and that ‘if I’m hurt they go get a teacher’. Josh also explored how ‘listening’ helps him at school, saying that ‘when you listen, most of the time you learn new things’ and this helps him to ‘get good scores on my reports… and when I’m older it will help me get a job and stuff’. He discussed how he had two dogs and they go everywhere with him and make him ‘happy’. He identified that he goes to ‘mum and dad’ or ‘the teacher’ if he needs to talk and they help because ‘they are older than me so they know what to do’.

After this discussion, I asked Josh to think about what else he would want in his life and if there is anything else that would help him. He discussed that he would like a ‘pot of gold’ so that he could ‘get heaps more money… which I could buy things with… which would help with learning devices and stuff like that’. He also suggested he would buy a ‘cool car’, stating that ‘mums car is a bit squishy… so that would help’. To conclude the
brainstorming, I asked Josh to think about what it would look like for him to be doing well and he identified that he would ‘be getting good scores on my tests’, ‘be way ahead of everyone else’, and ‘people would tell me’. Josh then clarified that his ‘teacher’ and ‘friends’ often tell him he is doing well.

Josh decided he wanted his song to focus on his friends and ‘how they help me and stuff and how they’re nice to me’. He also wanted to include a verse about his dogs so that he could talk about ‘how I play with them… they make me happy to play with them’. He also decided to include a verse about sport, stating that he wanted to include this ‘because we worked so hard on it’. Lastly, he chose to include his ideas about ‘what else would help’ in his life. At the start of the interview, Josh had already identified that he didn’t want the song to rhyme because he had found this difficult in the group songwriting workshop to make his ideas fit. He had also already told me that he wanted to use his own iPad to create the backing track for the song, using an app called ‘Launchpad’ that he had been using to make his own beats at home. After creating the lyrics together, Josh showed me a backing track that he had created and chose to use this for his song. He freely improvised over the backing track, incorporating DJ effects in the breaks between the verses and chorus. He chose to call his song ‘my awesome things’.

'My awesome things'

Written by Josh

Chorus (My awesome friends)

My friends make me happy when I'm sad

They tell me jokes or do something funny

When all my friends play fun games I play too
And they're even nice to me when we aren't at school

Verse 1 (My two awesome dogs)
I love playing with my two awesome dogs
They are fun to play with, even if they are inside or outside
One of my awesome dogs is called 'Pugsly'
The other one is called 'Bindle'
I never get bored when I'm playing with them
Cos there's always something to do

Chorus (My awesome friends)
My friends make me happy when I'm sad
They tell me jokes or do something funny
When all my friends play fun games I play too
And they're even nice to me when we aren't at school

Verse 2 (Sport is fun)
Sport is fun it keeps me fit
I like to play long jump, golf, football and soccer
Because its fun to play with friend
And it takes my mind off things that I don't want to think about

Chorus (My awesome friends)
My friends make me happy when I'm sad
They tell me jokes or do something funny
When all my friends play fun games I play too
And they're even nice to me when we aren't at school

Verse 3 (Something that would help)
I wish I had a pot of gold
I could get anything I want
Things for learning and even a new car
Because mum's is too squishy when we have to drive far

Chorus (My awesome friends)
My friends make me happy when I'm sad
They tell me jokes or do something funny
When all my friends play fun games I play too
And they're even nice to me when we aren't at school
YEAH!

Blue: ‘Don’t let bad things take over who you are’.

Blue’s story and song was used as an illustrative example in Chapter 3, however it is provided here again in order to represent her as a part of the broader group of children. Blue, a 14-year-old girl, has had a long history of involvement with my organization and had participated in two 15-week music therapy groups herself and her younger siblings and mother also attended a parent/infant music therapy group. Blue was an articulate young person who seemed happy to re-connect with me since I saw her over a year ago and to tell me about everything that had been happening in her life. Throughout her interview, Blue was proud to tell me that she had been elected school captain this year and that she had recently been offered a job at a local fast-food shop. Blue also discussed how she and her best friend
had been writing songs together as her friend plays guitar, so she said she was looking forward to writing her own song as part of the interview.

After discussing the positive things that were happening in her life, Blue started to talk about how her violence step-dad had recently re-entered her families’ life because he had just been released from prison. Blue described an incident the week prior to the interview, where she had called the police and child protection services because her step-dad had attended her family home intoxicated and he was being verbally abusive and making threats towards her mother. Blue identified that it had always been her role to protect her younger siblings when her mum and step-dad were fighting, by taking them into another room and trying to distract them. Blue described these incidents in a matter-of-fact tone and did not report feeling unsafe, however expressed a sense of frustration that her step-father had re-entered their lives after they were starting to feel settled. Throughout the interview, Blue took ownership over the process and decided to write down all of her ideas herself.
In talking about the people who helped her in her life, Blue identified her friends as a resource because they ‘get me out of the house’ when her mum and ex-partner are fighting. She discussed that she can talk to her friends about her problems and that they ‘help forget anything’s wrong’, ‘give good hugs’ and ‘give me something to do’. She described her family as resource and that they help her, but that they also ‘help each other’. Blue discussed how she and her younger siblings often talked to each other about the violence and what was happening in their lives, however she also acknowledged that they didn’t have the same level of understanding as she did because they were much younger. She talked about how listening to music was the main activity that she could think of that she liked to do, and that music ‘makes me forget’ and is ‘an escape’ from the outside world. Blue discussed how music ‘calms me down’ and labeled music as a ‘constant’ because it has always been there for her. Blue also identified that sport and art were not activities that she found particularly helpful or interesting. She also described food as a ‘constant’ and ‘distraction’ in her life and that it ‘makes me happy’. However, Blue also recognized that this was a short-term coping strategy and understood that this may not necessarily be a helpful way of coping as she grows up.
When I asked Blue what else would help her to do well in her life, she talked about how she wished she had a better dad. The perpetrator of violence was not Blue’s father and she had only met her biological father a few times even though she wanted a relationship with him. She talked about how she wished her dad was ‘better’ so that she had somewhere to go when her mum and step-dad were fighting or when she felt like she needed to get away. After we had written down most of the ideas, I asked her how she thought she was able to be so resilient and so successful despite what she had experienced. Through this discussion she decided to make the main idea for her song ‘Don’t let bad things take over who you are’. She described how ‘positive thinking’ was really important to her and that she knew ‘its not the end’. Blue thought that it was helpful to have ‘confidence’ and ‘courage’ and to ‘stand up for yourself’. She talked about not wanting people to think there was a stigma on her just because she had experienced family violence, and she wanted to prove to everyone that she was more than this.

As Blue’s family was no longer engaged with Bethany at the time of the interview, I arranged for a women’s family violence case manager to ‘check-in’ with Blue’s mother following the interview due to her disclosures of current family violence following her mum’s ex-partner being released from prison. Blue’s mother did not respond to the several phone messages offering support.

‘Don't let bad things take over who you are’

Written by Blue

CHORUS (Don't let bad things take over who you are)

Don't let bad things take over who you are

Keep being positive and don't think it's the end
Don't get mixed up with all the wrong people
Stand up for yourself and be confident in who you are

VERSE 1 (The way friends are)
Friends can help in lots of ways and make you forget what's wrong, with a simple hug
They can take you away from the drama and listen to your problems
They'll give you good advice and buy you lots of food

CHORUS (Don't let bad things take over who you are)
Don't let bad things take over who you are
Keep being positive and don't think it's the end
Don't get mixed up with all the wrong people
Stand up for yourself and be confident in who you are

VERSE 2 (People who help)
There's always that one person who knows when something's wrong
They can handle the situation better than anyone else and give the best advice
They're closer than any friend because they everything about you

VERSE 3 (What I want)
I wish I had a better dad to go to when times get tough
Someone that would save me from the ongoing battle of love and hate

CHORUS (Don't let bad things take over who you are)
Don't let bad things take over who you are
Keep being positive and don't think it's the end
Don't get mixed up with all the wrong people
Stand up for yourself and be confident in who you are

VERSE 4 (Music is a constant)
The one thing that's pulled me through
Something that's helped me forget, is music
It's always been there, helping me cope and escape from reality

CHORUS (Don't let bad things take over who you are)
Don't let bad things take over who you are
Keep being positive and don't think it's the end
Don't get mixed up with all the wrong people
Stand up for yourself and be confident in who you are

King Bob: ‘When I get older’.

King Bob, an 8-year-old boy, was a confident and talkative child who had experienced family violence that resulted in moving through the homelessness system and subsequently into public housing with his mum and siblings. Despite his experiences of family violence, he reported having a positive relationship with his father who he saw on weekends and he and his siblings were well linked into the community. King Bob started the interview by thinking of people that help him in his life, stating that his mum ‘helps me with the clothes… putting them away’ and that ‘mum helps me with the food and we help her too’. He discussed how his brother helps him play video games and ‘dad helps me in sport’. He also spoke about how it is his job at home to ‘feed the dog’ and how he has helped his ‘dad with the trampoline… a couple times when the trampoline breaks’.
King Bob identified ‘athletics’ as something that helps him because it ‘helps to improve my speed’ when he’s playing games at school with his friends. He discussed he thought this helped him in his life by ‘getting fitter… so you don’t die like really young’. He also described how soccer, cricket and swimming helped him to develop his skills. He discussed how swimming helps because it ‘encourages you going into the water’ and ‘gives you more confidence when you jump off the diving board’. King Bob said that ‘smartness’ helps because ‘when you’re trying to get a job… you need to have certain skills to the job that you want’. He discussed how ‘writing’ was important because ‘if you’re really good at writing then you’re like… I’ll get that job’.

When talking about people who he could talk to, King Bob identified that at school he would ‘go to my friends and see what they say’ but ‘if it’s like a big problem I’d tell my teacher’. He also identified that if he was at home and he injured himself he would ‘ask mum or dad to find like a bandaid or something that I need on it’. King Bob described how he feels being around his friends by saying ‘I don't feel like I’m alone… I’m not like a friendless
guy’. He also discussed that he would feel ‘lonely’ if he didn’t have friends because ‘there’s no one to play with and you’d be doing nothing and just sitting around’. He also identified how his friends ‘encourage’ and ‘support’ him and that this makes him feel like ‘I can do this’. King Bob identified he liked to play with ‘lego’ because ‘I feel really creative’ and he also likes to go fishing with his dad and siblings but ‘we don’t really catch much’. King Bob identified several things that he would wish for when he gets older such as ‘work’, ‘some money to get a house or car’ and a ‘good education’. He thought these things would help to ‘get a better job’ so that he can ‘get paid better’ so he could ‘get more stuff’.

After writing down all of his ideas, King Bob decided to make the main part of his song to be about ‘getting older… what you want to be when you grow up’. The title of King Bob’s song is ‘when I get older’ which was also the heading for the chorus, and the main ideas that he chose to include were ‘everybody helps each other’, ‘its nice to do something in your spare time’ and ‘its good to play sports’. He decided to include the guitar and singing when developing the musical elements of the song and that he wanted it to be ‘not too fast
but not too slow’. After writing the song, King Bob reflected on what it was like being involved in the songwriting process and said that he thought it was ‘good’ because he was ‘actually getting something… not wasting your time and getting to know what’s good in your life… like then you know when you get older what you want to do’.

‘When I get older’

Written by King Bob

CHORUS (When I get older)

I need to be smart, to have certain skills
So that I can get a job when I get older
I need to work hard, to do well at school
So I can get more money to buy something important

VERSE 1 (Everybody helps each other)

I help dad to fix the trampoline
And dad helps me with sport
Mum helps us to make the food
And helps us decide what to eat

VERSE 2 (It’s nice to do some things in your spare time)
Lego is good when you play it with your friends
You can make what you want and it’s creative
I like to go fishing with my dad on the weekend
It takes a while but it’s worth it

CHORUS (When I get older)
I need to be smart, to have certain skills
So that I can get a job when I get older
I need to work hard, to do well at school
So I can get more money to buy something important

VERSE 3 (It’s good to play sports)
It’s nice to play sport with my friends
Teammates help each other to score the winning goal
My friends and I like to play down ball
Don’t be a show off and boast all the time

CHORUS (When I get older)
I need to be smart, to have certain skills
So that I can get a job when I get older
I need to work hard, to do well at school
Nat Fyfe: ‘I am strong’.

Nat Fyfe, a 13-year-old girl, was a quiet young person who required encouragement at times to elaborate on her ideas as her default response was often ‘I dunno’. I had worked with Nat Fyfe over a year ago in a music therapy group, and since then she had moved from living with her mother to living with her father full-time. I am not aware of the reasons why she had moved, however was aware of the long history of involvement with the homelessness and child protection service system for both parents.

Nat Fyfe identified that ‘music’, ‘friends’ and ‘food’ were important resources in her life. She discussed how music helps her because ‘you can get ideas from peoples lyrics… about anything’ and this ‘helps to be a strong person’. She also talked about how ‘when people get angry they listen to music to calm down’ and she ‘sometimes’ does that. She discussed that music helps ‘because you can just lay down and listen to music’ and that you ‘don’t have to do much’. She discussed how her friends will be ‘with you all your life… and
they can help you out when you need it’. She identified that her friends can help with
‘anything’ and that they ‘go everywhere together’, ‘talk about people or anything that you
like talking about’ and ‘eat heaps of food together’. She described how her friends have
similar interests to her such as fashion and that they can talk about ‘family issues’ together.

Nat Fyfe explored how her ‘education’ will help her so that she can ‘get a job’ which
will help her to ‘get money and to live’. She discussed some ideas for what she wanted to do
in the future, including ‘baby sitter’, ‘child care worker’ or a ‘photographer’. She discussed
how going to school ‘makes you smarter’ and that she goes to her friends if she needs to talk
about anything at school. Nat Fyfe identified that her ‘mum’ and ‘family’ help her with
‘anything’. When I asked how her mum helps her, she replied ‘to buy clothes’ and could not
think of other ways that her mum helps. I asked her to consider how her personality helps her
to do well in her life and she discussed that she is ‘brave and funny at times’. She suggested
that ‘when you’re brave you can do anything you’re scared of’. She also identified that she
would like to have ‘more money’ and ‘more friends’ in her life. After completing the
brainstorming phase, Nat Fyfe decided for the main idea and title for her song to be “I am
strong’ and that she also wanted to include the ideas about music, friends and what it would
look like for her to be doing well. After some exploration of the various apps on the iPad, she
decided to use the Autorap app, using the backing track of one of her favourite artists ‘Fetty
Wap’.

'I am strong'

Written by Nat Fyfe

CHORUS (I am strong)

I am strong, I can do anything
When you're not there, I'll be your friend
Someone to lean on when you need help
Don't worry about what other people say
And just be yourself

VERSE 1 (Friends are family)
Wherever I go my friends go too
I can tell them anything
We share heaps of food together
We help each other when we need it
We like fashion and ask each other for their opinions
They'll always be my side

CHORUS (I am strong)
I am strong, I can do anything
When you're not there, I'll be your friend
Someone to lean on when you need help
Don't worry about what other people say
And just be yourself

VERSE 2 (Music helps with anything)
Music helps with nearly anything
It makes you relax sometimes
It helps me to be a strong person
I listen to music to calm down
All I have to do is lay down and listen
Music also makes me energetic

BRIDGE (What I want to do)
I want to get a job
To get good money
I need to work hard at school
So I can be what I want

CHORUS (I am strong)
I am strong, I can do anything
When you're not there, I'll be your friend
Someone to lean on when you need help
Don't worry about what other people say
And just be yourself

Sarah: ‘Friends, family and pets’.
Sarah, 10-years old, was a quiet and caring child who regularly moved between her father, mother and grandma’s house, and she had experienced family violence perpetrated by her mum’s ex-partner (not Sarah’s father). When I asked Sarah to think of what helps her in her life, she excitedly talked about her pets. She stated that ‘when I get scared sometimes… I hold Bruce’ who is her blue tongue lizard and that this ‘makes me happy’. She identified that ‘when I’m sad I hold Squirt and he makes me laugh…cause he does funny things’, and explained that Squirt is her turtle. She identified various people who she can talk, including ‘dad’, ‘mum’, ‘nanny’ and ‘my aunties’, however she struggled to articulate the ways that they helped her. After taking some time to think, she identified that that they help her with
‘what happens at school’ and ‘nan helps me understand things… like when I ask questions’.

She identified one friend as well as a teacher at school, stating that ‘when I come in all sad they ask what’s wrong and I tell them’.

Sarah identified several things that she likes to do in her spare time, including ‘cleaning’, ‘drawing’ and ‘writing and reading’. She discussed how she likes to ‘clean’ her room and her pet’s tanks because ‘it gets me busy so I’m not bored when I’m at home’. She discussed that drawing was something she did ‘mostly by myself… but sometimes with other people’ and that she feels ‘happy’ and ‘relaxed’ when she is drawing, however sometime its ‘makes me feel bored’. She perceived that reading and writing were important skills to practice ‘so that it can help with my spelling and reading… so if I wanted to be a teacher one day I can read books and spell properly’.

When I asked Sarah what she would like to do when she grows up, she excitedly discussed how she wants to ‘be a zookeeper’ because ‘I love animals and know everything about animals’. She discussed how she would like to look after ‘reptiles’, just like the pets she currently has. Sarah and I explored other things that she wished for in her life that would help her to do well, and she discussed that she would ‘like to live in the bush again’ as this is where her and her parents used to live together before the family separated. She discussed how ‘I cant hear any cars of anything… just crickets and wind…and the kangaroos’ and she thought this would ‘help with my sleeping’. She also discussed that she would ‘like to have friends come over’ to her house because she thinks this would help them to ‘know more about’ her. She discussed that she doesn’t like ‘going to other friends houses without mum or dad or someone’ because ‘I would cry to go back home because I don’t like staying away from my family… because I get worried about them’. She expanded on this to say that she gets worried they would ‘go somewhere without me’. She also discussed that she wished she could have more pets again, like the dog and cat she used to have in her old house.
Once she had written down all of her ideas, Sarah decided to focus her chorus on ‘friends and family’, and chose the headings ‘my friendly pets’, ‘cleaning, drawing, reading and writing’, ‘zookeeper’ and ‘I wish my friends could come over more’. Sarah’s song is
titled ‘Friends, family and pets’ and she decided to use the Auto-Rap app to record her song, and chose a One Direction backing track for this.

‘Friends, family and pets’
Written by Sarah

CHORUS (Friends and family)
My friends and family always help me when I'm sad or hurt
They always cheer me up
My friends always play with me and make me happy
And my friends always ask if I am okay
I always sleep with my nan
And it helps me to be calm and safe

VERSE 1 (My friendly pets)
I love to play with my pets
They make me very happy
And they always make me laugh
I love to look after my pets and take care for them
'Bruce' is my blue tongue lizard
He makes me calm and he always sleeps
'Squirt' the turtle always does funny stuff
When I put him on the floor he jumps like a frog
He bangs his head against the window when he eats
VERSE 2 (Cleaning, drawing, reading and writing)
I like to clean so I'm not messy
It keeps me busy so I'm not bored
I feel happy when I'm drawing
But sometimes it makes me bored
I love to read and write at school
And I love to work hard at school

VERSE 3 (Zookeeper)
I love animals and I want to work with them
I want to be a zookeeper when I'm grown up
I really want to work with reptiles
And I love looking after animals

VERSE 4 (I wish my friends could come over more)
I wish my friends could come over more
Because I never have friends come over
Then they could know more about me
And I wish I could live in 'the bush' again

Riley: ‘What keeps me happy’.
Riley, a 10-year-old boy, was a positive and bright child that had experienced family violence and a period of homelessness with his family. At the start of the interview after I had discussed what the aim of the interview was, Riley replied ‘yeah that's good because before this I was thinking… when I was getting ready I was thinking of a few songs myself’ and ‘how encouragement and strength keeps me going… and keeps me happy’. He discussed that
encouragement from other people ‘makes me think of good comments’ and how it ‘makes me think to myself, yes I can do this and try my best and everything’. He also articulated how encouragement of himself was ‘probably the same thing’ and that ‘strength’ comes from ‘encouragement of myself… good moods… positive thinking and all that’. When we explored how this helped him in his life, Riley said that ‘if you think bad it makes you wanna give up or wanna quit… when you say oh I suck at this and everything’. He said he thought that instead it helped ‘if you think positive… it gives you a good attitude and makes you think that you could win this and I’ll try my best’. He said that if he wasn’t positive that he would be ‘grumpy’ and would ‘never do anything and just stick to the same routine’. He concluded that ‘if you were positive… you will always have a go and never give up… and all that’.

Next, Riley discussed the people in his life that helped him, including his parents and friends. He described how his parents ‘encourage you all the time to do everything’ and that if ‘they’re not encouraging you, it’s telling you there’s something wrong about this and its to
keep you safe’. Riley gave examples of this to include ‘jumping off a cliff’, ‘going too high’ and ‘hanging off the edge of the playground’. He talked about how his parents help him with ‘getting through stuff… like a test or homework for school’ and said that they help because they ‘make it easier for you… if you say its too hard, they’ll adjust it so you can do it’. On the other hand, he also suggested that his parents ‘make it hard if it’s too easy… so we can learn more’. Riley described the ways his friends help him and stick up for him because they say ‘hey stop he’s my friend… stop picking on people’. He discussed how this was a mutual thing that he and his friends do for each other by saying ‘its good… cause you could do the same for them… so then you learn what to do and what not to do’. He also discussed that his friends often cheer him up ‘when they see you and you’re looking down’ and that they ‘tell you jokes and hang around you’. He described how playing with his friends ‘makes them happy and bright’.

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**Friends**

- stick up for you if someone’s teasing you
- help each other
- if looking down, they notice
- cheer you up
- tell jokes around you
- encourage each other
- make happy and bright

**Sport**

- helps keep stronger
- learn new things
- play with friends
- meet new people
- cricket, footy, gridiron
- would be boring & dull without it
- wouldn’t get to know new people if didn’t have it
- wouldn’t be fit: wouldn’t play computer all day

**What else would help?**

- try new things (food, new experiences)
- bigger house - more room to play, own bedroom

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Riley talked about he likes playing ‘different sports’ such as football, cricket and gridiron and he perceived that this helped him to ‘be stronger’, ‘learn new things’, ‘meet new people’, and ‘get a chance to play with friends’. He suggested that his life would be ‘very boring’ and ‘dull’ if he didn’t play sport, and that he would ‘just be imagining things and playing on the computer all day’, ‘not getting to know new friends’ and not getting ‘fit’.

When I asked what else would help him to be the best person he could be, he replied ‘I’m not sure…I’ve never thought of that before’. He suggested that he would like to ‘try new things’, ‘new food’, ‘have a go at new experiences’ and live in a ‘bigger house… so there’s more room to play’.

After writing down all of his ideas, Riley decided to call his song ‘what keeps me happy’ which was also the heading for the chorus, and he developed the following headings to describe each of the verses: ‘how my guardians help me’, ‘my favourite thing to do’, ‘my friends are there for me’ and ‘what I want for my future’. He decided that he wanted to develop a song using the guitar and singing, and when I asked how he thought the song should sound he replied ‘I dunno… all I’ve been thinking about is the words, not the style’. He suggested that ‘we could use the same one that we did for the music workshop’ and I put forward we could use a similar style but make it slightly different so that it was his own song, and he agreed to this as long as it was ‘only a little bit different’. After writing the song, I asked Riley what it was like to be involved in the songwriting process, and he said ‘I felt really good about myself at the end… I said to myself yes I’ve written a song in just 1 hour’. He discussed how he preferred the individual interview compared to the music workshop, because ‘there’s no silliness… you get straight onto the work … you don’t really have to compromise’.
‘What keeps me happy’

Written by Riley

CHORUS (What keeps me happy)
Encouragement and strength keeps me happy
It helps to keep me going
I won't show any fear and I'll try my best
Thinking positive keeps me strong
I'll give it a go and I won't give up

VERSE 1 (How my guardians help me)
My parents encourage me all the time
Do this, not that, but never be shy
They help me to get through stuff
They make things easier if gets too tough

VERSE 2 (My favourite thing to do)
I love sport so much because it makes me stronger
I like cricket, footy or even soccer
We meet new people, we never be shy
If we didn't play sport, we'd play computer all day and night

CHORUS (What keeps me happy)
Encouragement and strength keeps me happy
It helps to keep me going
I won't show any fear and I'll try my best
Thinking positive keeps me strong
I'll give it a go and I won't give up

VERSE 3 (My friends are there for me)
My friends always stick up for me
If you're a girl they give you daisies
They cheer me up when I am down
Friends are great to stick around

BRIDGE (What I want for my future)
If I really wanted, I would try new things
I want a bigger house so there will be more room to play

CHORUS (What keeps me happy)
Encouragement and strength keeps me happy
It helps to keep me going
I won't show any fear and I'll try my best
Thinking positive keeps me strong
I'll give it a go and I won't give up

Contextual Analysis
Representing the children’s songs in the individual and arts-based format sought to present the subjective elements of children’s understandings of the resources that exist in their lives. While in arts-based research it is possible to represent the arts-based findings in and of themselves (Viega and Forinash, 2016), I chose to enrich the understanding by doing
another level of contextual analysis, by looking across all of the songs for common themes and discussion points. Throughout the process of writing the songs with the children, I realized that it was equally important to consider what the children chose to exclude from their song, as it was to understand what they had chosen to include in the final lyrics. If I had chosen to only analyse the song lyrics or the songs, as is common in music therapy research (Baker, 2015), there is a lot that we would have missed. I felt that it was important to take responsibility as an adult and a researcher in this space. Not only to share the children’s songs, but also to deepen our understanding behind the hidden meaning of children’s contributions and the often unspoken moments when children were trying to protect themselves or others by changing the subject or choosing not to elaborate on certain topics. While it is still powerful and meaningful to hear these children’s songs and their voices on the recordings, I felt that it was important to do another level of contextual analysis. This process allowed me to become more immersed in the data and make meaning from looking across all of the children’s songs.

The contextual analysis involved reflecting on the process of brainstorming for the songs, understanding the children’s language and the extent to which their initial thoughts were present in the final song lyrics, tuning into my own embodied responses from the interviews as well as while listening to the songs, and trying to make sense of anything that I felt was unsaid in the interviews. The embodied and emotional responses were particularly poignant throughout the research process, as I felt my self becoming emotionally affected during the interviews as well as in the analysis and write up of the results. I felt a sense of heavy responsibility in needing to provide an adequate response to what children had told me, and at times I needed to take some time away from the data to clear my head and understand why I was being affected in this way. The songs created provided a musical memory that was often hard to escape, and I often found myself struggling to sleep and replaying specific song
lyrics in my head. Therefore, the contextual analysis was important to reflect on my own subjective responses and to explore their relevance to the children’s contributions. To capture my own reflexive process, I wrote several songs throughout the research process that explore my own responses to being the researcher and this helped me to make meaning from this experience. These songs will be explored in chapter 7.

Results & Discussion

Six themes emerged from the contextual analysis that explored the role that the children’s resources played in their lives: Seeking refuge, wanting to feel safe, hoping for a better future, feeling cared for, being self determined, and protecting self and others. This section will provide a contextualisation of these results with relevant literature regarding children in the homelessness and family violence system.

Theme 1: Seeking Refuge.

Throughout the interviews, the children described a range of resources such as music, friends, journaling, cleaning, food, sport and cleaning that provided an escape, outlet and distraction from what was happening in their lives. Josh stated that he liked to play sports because it ‘takes my mind off things that I don’t want to think about’. Blue discussed that music ‘makes you forget’ and ‘music is a constant’, and Nat Fyfe described how she can ‘just lay down and listen’ to music. TweedleDee identified journaling as an opportunity to ‘let everything off’ and Sarah discussed that cleaning keeps her ‘busy’ when she’s at home. Blue described her friends as a positive resource because they ‘get me outta the house if mum and (ex) are fighting’ and that this ‘makes me forget anything is wrong’.

The term seeking refuge refers to a child’s attempts at getting away from difficult thoughts and emotions, and actively trying to self soothe and cope with what is happening in their lives. Children within the family violence context have previously reported that they think it is important to let their feelings out and creative mediums were identified as helpful
strategies for containing and expressing their difficult emotions (Callaghan et al., 2017). As discussed in the previous chapter, music has been described as a resource for children to escape from the outside world (Fairchild & McFerran, under review) and to forget difficult memories from the past (Krüger & Stige, 2014; Zanders, 2012). Callaghan and colleagues (2017) also found that children within the family violence context reported using music as a form of self-soothing and becoming lost in the music. Similarly, Överlien & Hydén (2009) also reported that children experiencing family violence reported listening to loud music as a way of blocking out the sounds of family members fighting. Callaghan and colleagues (2017) identified that some children described listening to loud music while self-harming as a way of coping with family violence in the home. Therefore, while the children in this project described conscious strategies of using music that helped them in their lives, it is important to note that some of these strategies may not be helpful in the long term.

Physical activity such as sport was identified as an important outlet by half of the participants: Josh, Riley, Logan, Zantangabanana and King Bob. Some of these children identified that sport was a helpful way of keeping active and connecting with their friends, whereas Josh articulated how it was a form of distraction from what was happening in his life. Similarly, in a study by Callaghan and colleagues (2017) physical activity was also identified as a form of release and expressing emotions. While the children described conscious attempts at using the resources as a way of coping, we must also recognize a tendency for children in this context to dissociate and distance themselves emotionally as a way of a form of self-protection (Överlien & Hydén, 2009). Therefore, this highlights the importance of working collaboratively with children to understand the ways that they are using these protective strategies and to bring awareness to the possible long term implications of escapism and distraction in the future if their support needs are not recognized and understood.
Theme 2: Wanting to feel safe.

In talking about the resources in their lives, some of the children reflected on how the people in their lives helped them to feel safe and protected them. Jasmine identified that she wanted to do karate so that she could ‘protect myself in a fight’ and also discussed how her friends ‘stick up for me’ and that family ‘keep me safe’. Sarah discussed how she liked to sleep with her nan who often looked after her, and stated this helped to make her feel ‘safe’. Blue also described how her brother ‘protects’ her and ‘keeps me safe’, however this brother was incarcerated at the time of the interview so may not have actually been able to protect her.

MacMillan, Wathen and Varcoe (2014) have recommended that safety discussions with children go beyond physical safety to ensure that children have a right to emotional safety that protects them from exposure to any type of abuse that instils feelings of fear, self blame, guilt and uncertainty. It is important to note at this point that even though these children described resources in their lives that helped them to feel safe and a desire to feel safe, some of them were still exposed to ongoing family violence and as a result their safety was not always guaranteed. This highlights the responsibility of adults and the service system to keep children safe and to hold perpetrators of violence accountable, rather than placing the responsibility on the child to protect themselves.

Theme 3: Hoping for a better future.

Themes of hope were present in many of the interviews, with children talking about how they wanted to finish school, to get a job and to travel the world when they were older. Some children had particular ideas for what they wanted to do for work when they were older such as TweedleDee wanting to study psychology, Zantangabanana wanting to be an actor and Sarah wanting to be a zookeeper. Other children such as King Bob and Nat Fyfe had an idea that they wanted to get a job so that they could earn more money to do the things they wanted to do such as buying more toys and clothes or living in a bigger house. Hines (2015)
posits that hoping for a better future provides something positive to focus on and look forward to in times of crisis. Te Riele (2010) has suggested that having hope as a resource may help children to find strength in the face of adversity, however also warns against the possible dilemmas of depending on hope as a resource as it doesn’t always address the real problems at hand. Perhaps the focus on hoping for a better future was influenced by the questions we were asking the children such as what helped them to ‘do well’ and to explore the ‘good things’ in their lives. However, this focus on hope for the future is also something I have noticed in music therapy practice with these children, where children often choose to focus on what they want to do in the future and who they want to be, rather than to write about their experiences of violence and transience.

**Theme 4: Feeling cared for.**

The children described a range of people such as friends, family members and teachers, as well as animals in their lives that helped them to feel cared for and supported. All of the children mentioned their friends as a positive resource in their lives, however some chose to focus on this much more than others who only briefly mentioned their friends. When describing their friends, they were mostly referring to children they went to school with or children involved in sporting teams. Josh said ‘my friends make me happy when I’m sad’. Sarah discussed that she has one friend at school as well as her teacher who she can talk to, stating that ‘when I come in all say they ask what’s wrong and I tell them’ and Nat Fyfe identified that she can talk to her friends ‘about anything’. Blue included the following lyrics in her song about her best friend: ‘there’s always that one person who knows when something’s wrong, they can handle the situation better than anyone else and give the best advice, their closer than any friend because they know everything about you’. Similarly, Jasmine identified that her friends are always ‘there for me’ and she ‘feels happy being around people that I care about and they care about me’.

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Family members were also identified as important resources in children’s lives, however often the support they provided was practical rather than emotional. For example, Logan identified ways that his parents help him in concrete ways such as providing food and transporting him to school, but also identified that he helps his parents by ‘giving them hugs’ and ‘buying them something’. TweedleDee identified her siblings as consistent people in her life, saying ‘you’ve always got them’. Riley discussed how his ‘parents encourage’ him and help him to make the right decisions about what to do in his life. Two of the children described their pets as being important to them. Sarah described how her pet lizard and turtle make her happy when she is feeling scared or sad, and Josh discussed how his dogs ‘go everywhere’ with him and he ‘never gets bored when playing with them’.

As described by many family violence researchers such as Changmugam and Hall (2012) an important part of working with children in the family violence system is safety planning with children so that they can identify positive people in their lives who they can go to for emotional support and to help them to cope with stress. A metasynthesis of family violence literature focusing on children’s resilience and coping conducted by Hines (2015) found that building supportive networks was crucial for children and interventions with children should work towards building a network of formal and informal supports including friends, extended family, other important adult figures and pets. However, it is equally important that these external resources are emotionally available and able to act as a supportive person as required.

**Theme 5: Being self determined.**

Four of the children’s interviews had distinct themes of self-determination and strength that carried through their songs. Nat Fyfe’s song was titled ‘I am strong’ and included lyrics such as ‘I can do anything’ and ‘music helps me to be a strong person’. Blue’s song was titled ‘Don’t let bad things take over who you are’ and included song lyrics such
‘keep being positive and don’t think it's the end’ and ‘stand up for yourself and be confident in who you are’. TweedleDee’s song focused on ‘thinking about the future’ and how she wants to study psychology when she get’s older. Her song included lyrics such as ‘I need to work hard and listen to my thoughts about what I want to do when I grow up’ and ‘I’ve been thinking a lot about what I wanna do’. Riley came into his interview with a preconceived idea that he wanted to write a song about ‘how encouragement and strength keeps me happy and keeps me going’. His song included lyrics such as ‘I won’t show any fear and I’ll try my best’, ‘thinking positive keeps me strong’, and ‘I’ll give it a go and I won’t give up’. These results are comparable to research in family violence whereby self-determination has been described as children being persistent and having an ‘inner fire to succeed’ in the face of adversity (Hines, 2015).

**Theme 6: Protecting self and others.**

The final theme of protecting self and others emerged from my embodied responses and attunement with the children within the interviews as well as during the analysis. I noticed that it was just as important to reflect on what had been unsaid or not included in the songs, as it was to include the resources that children spoke at length about. Josh discussed that sport ‘takes my mind off things that I don’t want to think about’, however shut down when I asked if he would like to expand on what these things were. Similarly, TweedleDee described how writing in her journal ‘lets everything off’ but also didn’t want to elaborate further on what she meant by this. When deciding what to include in her song, Jasmine purposefully chose not to include the details about wanting to do Karate so she could ‘protect’ herself if ‘someone tried to hurt’ her. She also chose not to take home a copy of her brainstorming to her mother because she didn’t want her to see it due to the ongoing exposure to family violence from her mother’s ex-partner. Hines (2015) has described how children exposed to family violence often take on the role of both protector and victim within their
family. In one way, they take on the responsibility for protecting their parents and siblings, and are often intertwined in a cycle of secrecy and commitment to their family members. On the other hand, they are victims of violence in their own right and the results of this project have shown how children often hope for a better future however struggle to identify how things could change immediately. Some of the children in this project appeared to be adopting protective strategies when they felt like they might have been revealing too much about what was worrying them in their lives. The children were able to reflect on the positive aspects of their lives such as their friends, sporting activities, music and healthy coping strategies. However, it also became clear that some children could not fully escape from feelings of fear and uncertainty that they had been exposed to throughout their experiences of family violence and homelessness.

**Resource-oriented songwriting as an engagement tool**

Using songwriting as a research method in this project offered a way out of silence and an opportunity for children to identify the resources that they have in their lives. Writing the songs provided a way of drawing out children’s voices and representing them in meaningful and respectful ways, and this is also an approach that could be useful in the initial stages of engagement with children in this context in music therapy practice. King Bob reported that he found the process of exploring his resources through songwriting helpful, describing it as ‘good… getting to know what’s good in your life’ and Riley discussed that he ‘felt really good about (himself)’ after he had finished writing the song. The resource-oriented approach to songwriting provided a way to engage the children in creative and child centred ways. This approach provided a way to understand them within their individual context and to identify the resources they already have in lives, as well as what they want, hope for and need to assist them to thrive in the face of adversity. Finkelstein and colleagues (2005) have suggested how discussions that help children to identify resources, supports and
strategies may act as a buffer and increase their capacity to cope with the challenges associated with family violence. Therefore, it seems there is a greater role that music therapists could play within this context by using the resource-oriented songwriting method in practice as a way of identifying children’s existing resources and subsequently facilitating access to additional resources as required. This concept will be explored further in the Chapter 8.

Conclusion

This project has highlighted the importance of understanding children’s resources in the context of homelessness and family violence, from the perspectives of children themselves. Contrary to the dominant narrative regarding the challenges experienced by children, this project has demonstrated how children are able to make conscious decisions about the ways they draw upon their internal and external resources to assist them to thrive in the face of adversity. Therefore, I believe that it is crucial to recognize, understand and respect the resources that children bring with them throughout their experiences of transience and violence. Equally important is the acknowledgement that it is the responsibility of adults, policy makers and professionals invested in this field to provide the social opportunities for children to express these resources and to ensure children’s rights to access meaningful and child-centred supports are fulfilled.
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Bridging Material

The next chapter is a collaborative case reflection that is co-authored by an 11-year-old child (Malakai Mraz) who had participated in short term individual music therapy. In the final session, Malakai identified that learning to play the drums in music therapy had changed his life and expressed that he wanted to share his story. After reflecting on Malakai’s comments, I invited him to co-author an article with me as a way exploring our experiences and the range of conditions at play that contributed to his growth at this time.

The chapter builds upon the initial aims of the research, which were to collaborate with children and to understand their resources. The inclusion of this collaborative paper intends to build upon our understandings of children’s resources, and to demonstrate the collaborative process of integrating Malakai’s voice into the academic literature. The chapter was written for publication was published in *Voices: A World Forum for Music Therapy* in March 2018.

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Chapter 6

"Everything Changed When I Got Those Drums”: A Collaborative Case Reflection

Abstract
Children accompanying their families through the family violence system are often described through the lens of risk. In contrast, there are minimal narratives that describe the interplay between how children’s existing resources can be enriched through engagement in therapeutic programs. This article describes a collaborative case reflection exploring the experiences and actions of a music therapist (Rebecca Fairchild) and an 11-year-old boy (‘Malakai Mraz’) who was accompanying his mother through the family violence system. Following involvement in short term music therapy, Malakai expressed how receiving a drum machine and learning to play the drums had changed his life. We decided to collaborate in writing this article together to describe our personal reflections about the various stages of our engagement in music therapy together and to explore the range of conditions and resources at play that contributed to Malakai’s growth and development. We will also share a song that was written as part of the collaborative process as a way of providing an arts-based and child-centred representation of our experiences. Critical considerations for writing collaboratively in this way with participants in therapeutic programs will also be discussed.

Keywords: child welfare, collaboration, music therapy, family violence, resources
Introduction
The possible impacts of family violence on children have been well documented in recent years (Holt, Buckley, & Whelan, 2008; Rossman, Hughes, & Rosenburg, 2013). Children accompanying their families through the service system have also been recognized as clients in their own right and therefore entitled to access individualized and child-centred support as required. However, children are often described in the literature through the lens of risk, focusing on the perceived ‘problems’ and ‘challenges’ associated with their experiences (Fairchild, McFerran, & Thompson, 2017). While these challenges are part of the reality for some children in this context, we believe this is only part of their story. As a music therapist working in the family violence system (Rebecca) and an 11-year-old child who has accompanied his mother through this system (Malakai) we believe our perspective offers further depth to the sometimes singular story that is assumed for all children in this system. There is also theoretical support for our positions, since strengths-based approaches emphasize that children are capable and contributing members of society (O’Dell & Brownlow, 2016), and therefore it is equally important to document stories of children’s hope and resilience.

Children who have been exposed to family violence often develop their inner resources so that they can cope with the adversities in their lives (Mastropieri, Schussel, Forbes, & Miller, 2015). Many children develop these internal resources through the active use of creative mediums such as music and art to cope with challenging situations. Other sources of resource development include external supports such as school, family, recreational activities and friends (Hines, 2014). Some children benefit from involvement in therapeutic programs that support them to identify and build upon the existing resources they have in their lives. Importantly, children in family violence situations continue to show that

1 Child-selected pseudonym to protect the families’ safety and confidentiality
they can also advocate for themselves and what they need through embodied acts of resistance (Larkins, 2014), such as going into another room while their parents are fighting or listening to music in an attempt to escape from the outside world. We believe that listening and responding to children’s voices is integral when working in this context.

Children who have experienced adversity often identify music as an important resource in their everyday lives, despite their experiences of transience, violence, or disadvantage. Engaging in music supports children to tell their stories and express their emotions in creative ways (Krüger & Stige, 2014), such as getting their anger out onto an instrument or listening to music that relates to their own experiences. As children grow up, music plays a role in the development of identity and provides a means for connecting and relating to others (Krüger & Stige, 2014; Beckmann, 2013). Within the child welfare context, children have described how listening to music often serves as a calming tool, by assisting them to cope with ongoing exposure to trauma and loss in their lives (Zanders, 2012). In addition, many children use music as a way of expressing their agency and resilience in dynamic and profound ways (Emberly & Davhula, 2016). Hence music can play an important role in supporting children to cope with adverse experiences.

Like many other forms of therapeutic practice, music therapy has traditionally been an expert-led practice. Thus the therapist typically designs programs that use music to support the achievement of non-musical goals such as increasing self-esteem, promoting emotional development, and encouraging the acquisition of communication and social skills (Bruscia, 2014). Recent developments in the field have seen the introduction of a critical perspective that challenges the assumption of expertise and increases the emphasis on collaborative and participatory approaches to practice (Rolvsjord, 2010, 2014; Stige & Aarø, 2012; Stige, Ansdell, Elefant, & Pavlicevic, 2010). Although music therapy has always been a strengths-oriented field, contemporary approaches privilege the existing resources of participants in
music therapy and have an inherent focus on how people can strengthen their pre-existing relationship with music in order to reap greater and new benefits.

Although there is increasing emphasis on client participation and collaboration in music therapy and across a range of fields that focus on child well-being, there is still a tendency to emphasise weaknesses when representing children in academic literature (Fairchild, McFerran, & Thompson, 2017). One way to counter this tendency and to amplify the voices of young people is to share the academic tradition of writing with those young people who provide the experiences on which the writing is based. Although this is not necessary or appropriate in all cases, sometimes an opportunity arises where this collaboration may be feasible, appropriate, ethically sound, and mutually empowering for all those concerned.

The idea for this article emerged from a reflective discussion between Rebecca and Malakai following an 8-week period of involvement in individual music therapy. Malakai (11-years old) expressed how receiving a drum machine and subsequently learning to play the drums in music therapy changed his life. As Malakai reflected on how his life had changed throughout his involvement in music therapy, he said “everything changed when I got those drums.” Malakai’s comment prompted a discussion about how learning to play the drums in music therapy helped him to build upon his engagement in music as well as further develop his musical identity and create a positive outlet for expressing himself. At the time of commencing music therapy, there were a number of other changes happening in his life, such as leaving a family violence refuge, moving house, and changing schools, however he identified that the drums were integral part of his story at this time. After reflecting on this conversation, Rebecca invited Malakai to co-author this article as a way of representing multiple perspectives and deepening understandings about how and why this short-term involvement had such an impact at various levels. Malakai agreed to collaborate in writing
the article, and written consent for the publication of this collaborative case reflection and accompanying song recording was provided by Malakai’s mother as well as Malakai himself. Malakai’s mother was present throughout all of the article discussions and assisted by providing some further insights about his experiences. The aim of this article is to describe our collaborative reflections from our engagement in music therapy together and to explore the range of conditions at play that contributed to Malakai’s growth and development.

**Method**

This article presents a collaborative single case reflection exploring the actions and experiences of a music therapist and a child who participated in music therapy. Scholars suggest that single case studies have the capacity to provide opportunities for exploring in depth, unique and context-dependent examples that we can learn from (Miles, 2015). Case studies often include diverse methods of data generation such as interviews, observations, and artwork. Although they are typically written from the perspective of the researcher or practitioner, case studies are considered to provide a holistic representation of a certain time, event or therapeutic encounter that they deem to be significant. While the author may collate multiple perspectives from their interactions with the client or group being described in the case study, it is typically the author’s responsibility to determine how the clients will be represented in the write up of the case (Fairchild & Bibb, 2016). Through co-authoring this article together, we have attempted to challenge and expand upon the traditional discourse by representing both of our perspectives as the therapist and the participant involved in music therapy.

**Ethical considerations.**

Our approach to writing this article is informed by United Nations Conventions of the Rights of the Child (1989) that acknowledges children’s rights to be heard, to feel safe and protected, and to have access to resources and opportunities that allow them to express their
views in meaningful ways. In this way, children are understood to be active agents in their own lives and ongoing efforts are needed to ensure that children’s views are taken seriously and that their rights to be heard are being upheld (O’Kane, 2017). While research with children in the context of family violence often focuses on the risks and potential dangers of their involvement, authors such as Överlien (2010) and Morris, Hegarty, and Humphreys (2012) have advocated for equal emphasis to be placed on the opportunities for collaborating with children and highlighted the potential positive outcomes in children’s lives as well as for the broader community as a result of their involvement. Lundy and colleagues (2011) have advocated for an approach that values children as experts in their own lives and suggested that involving children in the representation of research ensures that new knowledge is grounded in the perspective of children themselves, rather than adults providing interpretations of children’s experiences. Therefore, engaging Malakai as a co-author and giving him due credit for this acknowledges the active role that he played in contributing to this article and highlights the importance of representing rich and subjective narratives of our experiences.

Contemporary approaches to music therapy have called for ongoing reflexivity in the form of ongoing dialogue with participants and communities as well as personal and critical reflection to address power imbalances (Stige & Aarø, 2012). Similarly, Edwards and Hadley (2007) encouraged music therapists to consider how privilege, power, and social status contribute to the ways they approach the research and how this informs the decisions that they make. Muhammad and colleagues (2015) have asserted that academia has the tendency to represent notions of power and privilege within the institution, as well as with the production of knowledge and what knowledge is seen to be most important and ‘credible’. In order to reduce the possibility of perpetuating systemic inequality between an adult professional and a child who had received therapeutic services, it was important to
acknowledge and reflect upon the possible power imbalances in order to move towards a more balanced and child-centred approach to collaboration.

**Writing the article.**

Over a period of three months, the authors met six times to dialogue about the process that would be described in this article. These meetings took place in Malakai’s family home, which was a decision made based on convenience for the family, travel costs and time, and other younger siblings often being at home during the discussions. The meetings were audio recorded to best represent Malakai’s original wording and Rebecca also took notes throughout these discussions. To assist us to reflect on our experiences, we developed a visual timeline that helped us to represent the different states of our engagement together, including what happened before, during, and after the sessions. Malakai’s mother was also present for all of the article discussions and was able to assist with providing some additional details and reflections. After each discussion, Rebecca identified the themes that were emerging and created a narrative text of what Malakai had said. She also included descriptions of her own reflections and personal experiences of working with Malakai. Each time Rebecca returned to meet with Malakai and his mother, they read through each of the narratives together and discussed expansions upon the story and clarified pieces of information.

Collaborating with Malakai to write this article was a rare opportunity that should not be underestimated. Malakai’s maturity, resourcefulness, genuine interest in helping people to understand his experiences, and his mother’s support were all factors that made this process possible. In addition, it was important for Rebecca to take responsibility for directing the process, to explain what we were doing in child-friendly ways, to protect Malakai and his family from any harm arising from their involvement, and to provide a collaborative space where Malakai felt that his views were central and that they would be respected and taken
seriously. As Malakai had experienced family violence and due to his young age, several strategies were put in place in order to protect Malakai and his families’ confidentiality and safety throughout the process of writing and publishing this article. These protective strategies were discussed in depth with Malakai and decided upon together and they included: using a pseudonym to represent him as an author in the article, not disclosing the location of the organization where this work took place, not discussing his cultural background, making conscious decisions about the information we chose to include and not include in the article, and using an image drawn by Malakai to represent him visually in the author biographies.

We believe that writing our reflections in this collaborative way provided an opportunity for both of us to decide how we would like to be described and represented. At times, Malakai discussed some sensitive information that he may not have been comfortable sharing in a public forum. Having the opportunity to return to Malakai through the development of this article provided an open forum for having these discussions and allowed Malakai the space to make a conscious decision about what he would like to include. We also discussed the order that the information would be presented in and the language that we would use to describe our experiences. These discussions acknowledged the idea that people come to music therapy with multiple stories and various reflections on their experiences (Fairchild & Bibb, 2016), and in this article we prioritized Malakai’s decision in choosing which part of his story he would like to tell. Therefore, what follows is an individualised and contextualised representation of a music therapist and an 11-year-old drummer’s collaborative engagement together.

**Collaborative Reflections**

Throughout this section we have included personal reflections from each of our perspectives about various stages of our engagement together, as a way of demonstrating the ways that we approached and learned from this experience. In a traditional research article
this section would be titled Results, however as we were writing a collaborative case reflection and exploring our own experiences we felt that the heading Collaborative Reflections was more fitting.

**Malakai’s reflections on his pre-existing relationship with music.**

Since I was a little kid, it was my dream to be able to play the drums. I used to get the pots and pans out and play for ages. We always had the radio playing in the car and I used to tap on the back of the seat and pretend I was playing the drums. We used to listen to music all the time as well, and my brother and I used to dance while mum did the cleaning or jobs around the house. As I got older, we sometimes listened to music on the computer but only when we were allowed to. My mum's ex-partner would often get angry at us when we were on there and tell us he was busy and had to use it. It used to be really scary when he started yelling. At this time in my life, I probably spent less time listening to music because I didn't really have any other ways to access it.

When we got to the family violence refuge I started listening to music more because I got mum's old phone when she got a new one from a worker who was helping us. I was searching for ways to get back into music because I really wanted to be able to listen again. I was so excited when I got the phone. I wasn’t able to download any songs to begin with, so I used to listen to 30-second samples off the Internet. After a while, I figured out how to record music off the radio onto my phone and this made it easier to listen to music and I could listen whenever I wanted.

**Malakai’s reflections on his time in the family violence refuge.**

We had to stay at a family violence refuge for about 6 months because my mum’s violent ex-partner had been trying to find us and we had to move around a lot so that we could be safe. It was hard living at the refuge because I had to stay in the same room as my mum and younger siblings. There were some other kids staying there at the same time as
us and they would always follow me around and it would get really noisy. It felt like our room was the only place I could go to get away from everyone else. I liked playing with the Lego there and it was a quiet activity that I could do on my own. Sometimes I would get angry when I’d had enough of being at the refuge and I would feel like yelling and smashing things, but I would usually just go into our family room and try to go to sleep. At night I used to get really scared and wake up with a nightmare that he (mum’s ex-partner) had found us and it was really hard to get to sleep because I often thought I could see him in the dark.

I had to start a new school when we moved to the refuge. The only kids at the school that I knew were also living at the refuge and they left after a few weeks. It was really boring at lunchtime because I didn’t really know anyone so I just played by myself most of the time. I really liked doing the sport and art subjects at this school though. They had a school camp but I didn’t want to go because it was a scary thing to me. I was worried about leaving my family and about who would look after mum if I went away. I didn’t really want to socialize much at this time and I just wanted to stay close to my family.

**Rebecca’s reflections on meeting Malakai.**

I started working with Malakai after a children’s worker at the refuge referred him to a music therapy group that I run for pre-adolescent children. The children’s worker identified that Malakai liked music and thought that this would be a creative way to engage him, as he didn’t feel comfortable engaging in traditional talk-based therapies. The group had already started and there were unfortunately no vacancies for Malakai to join, however I offered some individual sessions as an alternative. The refuge they were living at was high-security in an undisclosed location, and Malakai’s mother had no car at this stage, so we decided the sessions would commence once they moved into more permanent accommodation.

Malakai’s younger siblings and mother were already attending a group that I run for infants, and Malakai had the day off school one day, so was able to attend with his family. I
took the opportunity to talk with him after the session and suggested some of the things we may be able to do together in music therapy. Malakai and his mother talked about how he had always wanted to play the drums, and I suggested that this could be a focus for our sessions and that we may be able to purchase a drum machine through some brokerage funding. He still seemed unsure at this stage about whether he felt comfortable attending sessions with me, but he agreed to try it.

**Malakai’s reflections on meeting Rebecca.**

When we were at the refuge, mum and the children’s worker told me that I might be able to do some music sessions with another worker. I said that I didn’t want to at first because I felt too nervous. I thought I would be meeting other people and I didn’t feel ready for that. I got to go to my younger sisters’ music group when I had the day off school. It was cool to see them in the group and how much they loved the music and instruments. I felt shy when Rebecca started talking about doing the music sessions with her. We talked about how I might be able learn to play the drums and I liked the idea of that because it is something I have always wanted to do, but I was still a bit unsure. I ended up just saying “yes” because I felt awkward and it was so quiet while they were waiting for me to make a decision.

**Rebecca’s reflections on making music with Malakai.**

Malakai described how music was already an important resource in his life, but it was clear that he needed some practical assistance so that he could develop these interests and continue to use music as a way of coping and expressing his emotions. I suggested that we could apply for funds for a drum machine for Malakai through the Homeless Children’s Brokerage Program, which is funded under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness and aims to support children to engage in social, emotional, and recreational opportunities within their community (Statewide Children’s Resource Program, 2016). As it
happened, he received the drum machine around the same time as his family moved from the refuge into transitional housing.

I dropped off the drum machine to Malakai when he and his family were in the process of moving into their new house. I remember Malakai being very excited and he instantly set up the drum machine in the lounge room and started to explore the sounds. I also had some instruments for his younger siblings, and there were other workers visiting at the same time, so it was a busy visit. I was only able to briefly show him a basic rock beat on the drums and said I would show him more at our first session the following week. A week later when I returned, Malakai had already mastered the beat I had taught him and showed me a song he had made up using the melodic sounds on the drums. I remember feeling very impressed by how he had progressed in such little time and feeling excited that he had made up his own song without any prompting from me. He talked about having to start another new school and feeling nervous because he doesn’t know anyone there. In the first session we explored a few different drumbeats and played along to a couple of his favourite songs. I was playing the guitar and Malakai was on the drums. While we played, I talked to Malakai about some of the things we might be able to do together in the rest of the sessions and suggested we might be able to write a song together. I remember Malakai was hesitant about this idea and said he wouldn’t know what to write about. We discussed some other songs that he would like to learn next time, and he showed me a few songs he had recorded onto his phone so he could listen to them.

In the second session Malakai initiated a discussion about songwriting, saying he had been thinking about the idea of writing a song. Together we brainstormed some ideas for what we could write about. He identified the important things in his life to be family, school, and music. Malakai talked about feeling “normal” around his family and about how they have fun together. He also talked about starting his new school and that he felt “weird” when other
kids were misbehaving and swearing at the teacher. Malakai talked about feeling free from everything around him when he is playing or listening to music. He spoke about how he had been using the drums as a way of “cooling down” if he was feeling stressed or angry. Over the next few sessions, we worked together on a range of drumbeats, and he learnt to play along to several different songs. Malakai decided to focus his song on his experience of starting a new school, writing about how it was “stressful” and “hard” to start at a new school. The song explored ways of making new friends and wanting to stick with the right people so he doesn’t get in trouble. For the remainder of the sessions, we worked towards recording this song along with the song he had created by himself on the drums. We created a CD that he could give to his family members.

Throughout the process of working together, Malakai talked about how he had been playing the drums at home when he was feeling angry and he thought this was a helpful way of expressing his emotions. He talked about how he had also been listening to music more when he was having trouble sleeping when he was thinking about other stuff and that he would often listen to calm songs with his headphones, and this would help him go to sleep. Each week, I gradually noticed he became more confident and comfortable to talk about his experiences. He described me as his “drum teacher” when he introduced me to his family members or friends when they were at his house during our sessions. Towards the end of our sessions together, he started to ask for more complicated drumming exercises and was really keen to develop his skills.

**Malakai’s reflections on playing the drums.**

I love playing the drums. It feels like magic when I’m playing. When I play at home it’s like no one else exists and it gives me time out from everything else that’s happening. I can just go into my room whenever I’m feeling angry or stressed, and I come out an hour later with a smile on my face. I like being creative and making up my own tunes and beats
too. It allows me to do things that I’ve never done before and I get so excited to show my mum what I have learnt.

We moved into a new house and I started a new school at around the same time that I got the drum machine. We had just been on a family camp and it was really fun so I was feeling pretty happy. A couple weeks after starting at the new school, I asked my teacher if I could bring the drums to school one day to show my class. I wanted to show them my skills and my personality as a drummer. I showed everyone how I could play on the drums and also showed them a song I made up. Everyone seemed pretty impressed at what I could do and asked me to have a turn on the drums. Later on at lunchtime lots of kids came up to me to talk about the drums. I think that bringing the drums to school shared a part of myself with the kids at school and this helped me to make new friends. I also realized there’s another kid at school who plays the drums, so we often play together now. If I hadn’t gotten the drums, I think that my life would be so boring. I don't think that I would have been able to make as many friends at my new school because at my old school, no one wanted to talk to me and I never wanted to do anything.

I’ve also been showing my mum how to play the drums. Every week after my session with Rebecca, mum would ask me to show her what I’ve learnt. It made me feel happy to be the teacher, and it makes me imagine what it would be like to be a grown up and to be teaching other people.

Rebecca’s reflections on the support provided by Malakai’s mother.

Throughout the process of working with Malakai, it became clear that he and his mother had a very strong relationship and shared a lot of similar interests. Malakai’s mother always seemed to offer a lot of support and encouragement to Malakai and would let me know of his achievements each week, such as winning events in the school athletics or being chosen to play the drums at school assembly. She told me how she loved listening to Malakai
playing the drums and how she would often ask him to take off the headphones while he was practicing so that she could listen too. While we were in the process of writing this article, she reflected on how her father used to play the guitar to her when she was little, and since the music therapy sessions were over she had been trying to teach one of these songs to Malakai on the guitar. I sensed that her active engagement in Malakai’s life greatly contributed to his growth throughout my time working with him.

**Malakai’s reflections on the music therapy sessions.**

I think the sessions helped me to learn how to play the drums. I always felt really happy afterwards. I wish that I could have had more sessions because I was really disappointed when it ended. I wanted to be able to develop my skills more. But even though I wish I could have continued with the sessions, I’m still able to be involved in music in other ways. I’ve joined the brass band at school now and we're also learning drums at school next term. At home, I also like to drum along to music videos and to look up drummers on YouTube®. I think I'm more confident now and I feel more comfortable to move on from things that happened in the past.

**Discussion**

There is a growing body of literature focusing on young people’s use of music as a health resource and the exploration of music’s potential to regulate emotions and promote wellbeing (Bonde, 2011; McFerran & Saarikallio, 2014). The act of listening to music has been described as a common coping strategy for children (Frydenberg, 2008). However, researchers have also cautioned that some young people may use music in unhealthy ways, particularly if they have been exposed to challenging life circumstances or are experiencing mental illness (Cheong-Clinch & McFerran, 2016; Hense, McFerran, & McGorry, 2014; McFerran & Saarikallio, 2014). Malakai had a pre-existing relationship with music, however this had been disrupted at a time when he was living in the family violence situation and his
mother’s ex-partner did not allow him to listen to music on the computer. When Malakai moved into the family violence refuge, he was provided an opportunity to access music again through the provision of a phone from the refuge worker, which he used to record songs off the radio. When the family moved again into temporary accommodation he received the drum machine and also had his own space at home where he could listen to music and play the drums. As Malakai described earlier, he would often go into his room to engage in music and this would assist him to calm down and cope with his experiences of starting a new school and a number of other life changes. Malakai’s reflections are comparable to research within the foster care context, where young people described how music helped them to cope with what they had experienced and to forget difficult memories from the past (Zanders, 2012).

Traditionally, the majority of literature about therapeutic processes and subsequent outcomes has focused on what the therapist is doing and how the participant in therapy responded to their interventions (Bohart & Wade, 2013). However, along with the rise of collaborative approaches in fields such as music therapy and psychotherapy, there has been recognition of participants as active agents in the therapeutic relationship and thus as active contributors and drivers in the therapeutic process (Bohart & Wade, 2013; Rolvsjord, 2015b). Rolvsjord (2015a) explored clients’ agency within music therapy and identified four key examples of ways that clients actively contribute to the therapeutic process, including: to take initiative within sessions by suggesting activities and songs; to exert control by negotiating ways of working together and protecting the therapist at times; to be committed to the therapeutic relationship by considering the therapist in their decisions; and to further their engagement with music by seeking musical opportunities outside of the music therapy sessions. These contemporary understandings acknowledge that clients are active agents in the therapeutic process (Bohart & Wade, 2013) and therefore recognizes that their views and
understandings about the ways that they contributed are equally as important as the therapist’s perspectives.

The music therapy sessions provided some of the conditions for Malakai to develop his musical identity and his musical skills. Yet, it was Malakai himself who generated many of the conditions for growth outside of the sessions via creating opportunities for connecting with others through music. For example, Malakai's independent decision to take the drum machine to school to show his classmates demonstrates his agency and active engagement in the therapeutic process. This event happened early in the therapeutic process, so we had not even discussed the idea of sharing his music with others in our sessions. Hence this moment was a crucial part of Malakai’s story and provided him with many opportunities as a result such as connecting with new friends and finding out about music programs available at his new school.

The support provided by Malakai’s mother throughout our engagement together was an important part of this story. A key protective factor for the development of resilience is having caring, trusting and supportive relationships within and outside the family (Hines, 2014). Hardaway and colleagues (2016) described how parental involvement incorporates attitudes and practices that promote positive parent-child relationships as well as providing emotional and practical support. A supportive parent privileges opportunities to communicate and connect with their child over their interests and needs (Collins et al., 2000). These positive relationships contribute to a child’s capacity to develop a positive identity and to develop healthy coping strategies in times of adversity (Aceves & Cookston, 2007). Malakai’s mother displayed a genuine interest in Malakai’s development over the sessions as well as his experiences of starting the new school and moving house. She regularly celebrated his achievements and strengths, however also respectfully voiced her concerns as needed. While balancing the needs of her younger children, she still managed to structure individual
time with Malakai to ensure she was able to maintain her positive relationship with him and the drums provided further ways of connecting and interacting, with Malakai often playing for her and teaching her what he had learnt.

While participatory research with children has flourished over recent years, there are still gaps in the literature about everyday experiences and personal reflections from children’s perspectives (Cahill, 2016). Writing the article collaboratively provided a space for multiple perspectives to be represented. In fact, it wasn't until we started to meet to discuss our experiences after the music therapy sessions had finished that a lot of these reflections came about. Malakai’s mother was present for all of the discussions about this article, and her contributions and reflections helped us to shape and provide further insight into our experiences. Prior to this, our music therapy sessions had focused primarily on building upon Malakai’s drumming skills and developing his existing coping strategies. Therefore, the process of writing together allowed us to explore the range of resources and contextual influences at play throughout our therapeutic engagement.

The opportunity for co-writing this article emerged organically out of a discussion following our involvement in music therapy together. Engaging in collaborative writing with young people requires a negotiation of the underlying power dynamics that exist between a therapist and participant in music therapy, as well as the imbalances that are inherently present between an adult and a child who is ultimately dependent on familial and systemic structures to protect him and keep him safe. Therefore, it was crucial in the early stages to emphasize the collaborative nature of this project, by recognising Malakai as an equal contributor to the project and that we discussed the ways that his views and perspectives were central to the entire development of the article. It is important to note that writing the article together was not about achieving a general consensus about what had happened, but more so to represent both of our experiences and to explore the evolving process of engaging
musically together, as well as what occurred outside of the sessions. In addition, it was important that the process of engaging Malakai was meaningful and mutually empowering.

While we were working together to write the article, we discussed some of the ways that we could provide a keepsake for Malakai to remember what he had shared in a creative and child-centred way. We decided to write a song together that summarized Malakai’s experience of learning to play the drums and developing as a person throughout the process of music therapy. Songwriting is a method that many music therapists use in their everyday practice as a way of helping people to tell their stories and to talk about their own experiences. Songwriting creates opportunities for people to develop, discover, or reinforce a sense of self and personal identity (Baker & MacDonald, 2013) and to describe life narratives and reflect on what is important to them (MacDonald & Viega, 2012). Within music therapy, a sense of achievement, pride and satisfaction is often observed through the process of writing a song and creating something meaningful and personal (Baker, 2015). The inclusion of writing the song throughout the process of collaborating on this article intended to be a creative way of actively engaging Malakai and privileging his voice to be heard and represented in multiple ways. The song is called “Everything’s changed” and uses many of the words and phrases included throughout our personal reflections in this article (see Figure 6.1 for song lyrics). We recorded the song together as a way of providing an arts-based representation of our experiences. Malakai is playing the drums and singing on the recording, and Rebecca is playing the guitar. The song is influenced by Malakai’s interest in the music of Jason Mraz, an American singer-songwriter. The recording of the song can be found in a Sound Cloud recording at: https://soundcloud.com/user-191682090/everythings-changed
**Figure 6.1**

“Everything’s changed” song lyrics

**VERSE 1**

It was my dream to play the drums

When I was young I played on pots and pans

I liked listening to music but sometimes I couldn’t

Did everything thing I could so I could listen some more

**VERSE 2**

I moved away so I lost all my friends

I felt angry I just wanted to scream

I had to start a new school and make new friends

I was really shy I didn’t know what to say

**CHORUS**

It feels like magic when I’m playing the drums

It gives me time out if I’m angry or stressed

It’s like no one else exists I can do what I want

Now everything’s changed and school is the best

VERSE 3

When I got my drums I felt so happy

I played everyday and I made new beats

I took them to school to show them what I could do

VERSE 4

Then everyone wanted to be my friend

When I learn new beats mum wants to learn too

I feel like I’m the teacher when I show her what to do

If I didn’t have the drums my life would be so boring

I want to be a drummer when I grow up

REPEAT CHORUS
Conclusion

Reflecting on our experiences and writing this article collaboratively together has impacted us both in various ways. Writing this article together allowed us to consider the ways that we wanted to be represented and provided an opportunity for us to explore, which stories we felt were important to tell to help readers understand our experiences. Therefore, what emerged is a narrative account about how learning to play the drums in music therapy provided a way of fostering Malakai’s relationship with music, developing new ways of coping, and making connections with his family and peers. However, as we have discussed, it was the interplay of what happened within as well as outside of the music therapy sessions that contributed to Malakai’s growth and development throughout this time. As a music therapist working in the family violence system and as a child receiving support from this system we are very aware of the challenges that many children and families experiences, however we know that this is only one part of their story. We hope that through sharing our collaborative reflections we have provided an alternative representation of children and ways of working with them so that we can provide them with the best opportunity to rebuild their lives through fostering their resources.
References


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Bridging Material

As I have discussed, my embodied and emotional responses throughout this research have been an integral part of the process of generating knowledge and new insights. However, at times, these responses became overwhelming and this had an impact on my personal and professional life. In order to process what I was feeling, I used songwriting as a way of exploring my experience of being involved in this research and becoming immersed in children’s experiences. The next chapter provides a personal reflection on the ways that songwriting helped me to process experiences of vicarious trauma and vicarious resilience throughout this research. Readers are encouraged to engage with the recorded material provided and to reflect on how their own experiences of research might relate to the experience I describe.

This sole-authored chapter is written for publication and is currently under revised-review with an arts-based research journal. It is written for child welfare researchers and creative therapists. The paper uses the Harvard referencing style to remain consistent with the requested formatting style of the journal submission.

Chapter 7

Personal experiences of vicarious trauma and resilience within child-welfare research: An arts-based reflection

Abstract
The emotional impacts of being a researcher within the field of child welfare are often unrecognized or underreported, despite extensive discussions of vicarious trauma and vicarious resilience within the therapy literature. This paper provides an arts-based reflection on my experience of undertaking doctoral research that explored children’s resources in the context of homelessness and family violence. Songwriting was used as a reflexive method throughout my research to explore my intense emotions, feelings of helplessness, sense of responsibility and desire to change the way that children are viewed, understood and responded to within their family and the service system. Four songs are shared throughout the reflexive discussion as a way of describing the research journey and exploring the ways that the arts-based process uncovered new meaning and understandings. Implications for researchers in similar fields are explored.

Keywords: child welfare, arts-based research, music therapy, vicarious trauma, vicarious resilience, family violence
I can’t sleep, can’t get these words out of my head
What’s going through my mind is everything they’ve said
Is it a cry out for help or have I just misread it?
I think about it so much never gonna forget it

(Excerpt from song written ‘Enough is enough’)

Rationale
Working and researching with children in the child welfare context is a complex and often emotional undertaking. The literature regarding research with children in these vulnerable circumstances emphasizes children’s safety and protection, and the process of gaining ethical approval to conduct research in these contexts is often challenging (Morris, Hegarty & Humphreys 2012). However, as Coles and Mudaly (2010) have identified, there is little attention given to protecting researchers and acknowledging the emotional impacts of hearing and immersing one’s self in children’s stories of abuse, hopelessness, poverty and violence. I have been a music therapist working with children and families in the homelessness and family violence system for over seven years. However, as a novice researcher embarking on a doctoral research journey, I was unprepared for the impact that this research would have on my professional, social and personal life.

The children involved in my doctoral research wrote songs about what helps them to ‘do well’ in their lives, as a way of exploring their resources and strengths despite their experiences of homelessness and family violence (Fairchild & McFerran, under review). In talking about what helped them in their lives, the children also identified their worries, fears and painful experiences, as well as their hopes for a better future. The songs the children wrote became an inescapable memory that would spontaneously enter my mind. At times, I was struggling to sleep and to function in social and professional situations. As a way of
processing my thoughts, feelings and embodied responses to what the children had told me, I decided to write my own songs to assist me to express the ways the research had impacted me and to explore what I thought needed to happen within this complex system. This article will explore my journey of reflecting upon my experiences of researching with children in the context of homelessness and family violence through the arts-based method of songwriting.

**Vicarious trauma in therapists.**

As a music therapist working with children and families in the homelessness and family violence system, I have experienced first-hand what it is like to empathize with children’s stories, to feel helpless at times, and to take on a sense of responsibility for improving children’s lives. Stern (2002) has described empathy as the capacity to experience what others experience, by relating to them and having a sense of how they might be feeling. Rothschild (2006) explored how empathy helps therapists to understand the needs of others and focused on the ways that the therapist’s brain and body is impacted while responding to trauma. Trondalen (2016) has described how helping professionals are often burdened at the ‘cost of caring’, and warns therapists not to put their own needs aside while relating to the experiences of the people they work with. While empathy is a crucial quality of a successful therapist, there may be times when the process of hearing and relating to peoples stories over and over becomes problematic for therapists. As a result, they might start to experience trauma symptoms in response to their work. Saakvitne and Pearlman (1996) describe this as a ‘human consequence of knowing, caring and facing the reality of trauma’ (pp.25) and identify that this cumulative process may negatively impact a therapist’s personal and professional life if not addressed.

Throughout this article I use the term vicarious trauma to describe my own experiences of being emotionally affected throughout the research process. While there are other terms in the literature that describe similar concepts such as ‘compassion fatigue’,
‘burnout’, ‘emotional exhaustion’ and ‘counter transference’ (Dunkley & Whelan 2006), vicarious trauma is a term that specifically refers to working and researching with people who have experienced trauma and therefore best represents the contexts I am describing. Pearlman & Saakvitne (1995) have described vicarious trauma as a process that involves a transformation in the therapist’s inner and personal experience that is a direct result from empathic engagement with clients who have experienced trauma and the material they share. A commitment or a responsibility to help is a key driver in therapists becoming immersed in people’s experiences.

The reactions experienced in response to vicarious trauma often mirror first-hand experiences of trauma. Wasco (2003) has divided these trauma reactions into three categories: intrusive, avoidant and hyper-arousal reactions. Intrusive reactions involve having dreams, nightmares, flashbacks and persistent thoughts about the traumatic experience. Avoidant reactions involve becoming numb in response to the trauma and avoiding it. Hyper-arousal reactions involve becoming hyper-vigilant and having difficulty concentrating. Pearlman and Saakvitne (1995) identified other ways of being affected by vicarious trauma including losing a sense of meaning and purpose, loss of identity, feelings of hopelessness, reduced tolerance to difficult situations and a loss of connection with others. Risk factors that might contribute to a therapist’s experience of vicarious trauma might include a lack of support from organizational settings, limitations in the therapist’s capacity to respond in appropriate ways and a lack of support from professional colleagues (Dunkley & Whelan 2006). As therapists might lose balance in their lives while they are working with people experiencing trauma, Pearlman and Saakvitne (1995) suggest that therapists need to have a strong support system within their professional setting as well as in their personal life.

**Vicarious resilience in therapists.**

While experiences of vicarious trauma are prevalent among many therapists working
in trauma contexts, Pearlman and Saakvitne (1995) explored how witnessing clients overcome challenges and flourish in the face of adversity can also lead to growth in the therapist. Bartoskova (2017) challenged the literature regarding the adverse impacts of vicarious trauma and suggested that, despite the challenges of working with people who have experienced trauma, these interactions provide opportunities for therapists to develop resilience in their professional and personal lives. Therefore, it is possible the therapist may be positively transformed by their experiences of vicarious trauma. According to Hernández, Engstrom and Gangsei (2010), therapists may experience improved relationships, explore new possibilities for life, develop new ways of helping others and increased recognition and appreciation for their own personal strengths. This concept has been defined as vicarious resilience and suggested this may co-exist with experiences of vicarious trauma (Hernández et al., 2007, 2010). Vicarious resilience has been described as an important process that helps therapists to find new meaning in their lives.

In their research with trauma therapists working with torture survivors, Hernández-Wolfe and colleagues (2015) explored co-existing experiences of vicarious trauma and vicarious resilience. The therapists in the study described impacts of vicarious trauma that included sleep disruption, nightmares, fatigue, irritability, flashbacks, intrusive thoughts, hyper-arousal and disassociation. In talking about experiences of vicarious resilience, they identified experiencing a change in goals and priorities, increased hopefulness, increase in self-care practices, increased resilience and perspective in taking on their own challenges in their personal lives, and increased awareness of oppression, privilege and marginalisation. The researchers concluded that the therapeutic process of becoming impacted in various ways by the clients experiences and recognising their strengths increased their capacity to respond in compassionate ways.
**Impacts on the researcher.**

Within research, the process of becoming intertwined and immersed in people’s stories often becomes even more complex. Dickson-Swift and colleagues (2007) identified challenges associated with balancing the role of the researcher with experiences of being a therapist. Coles and Mudaly (2010) have recognized the challenges of remaining objective when researching subjective experiences, particularly regarding sensitive topics such as abuse, violence and poverty. Similarly within feminist research, Blakely (2007) has described how embedding thought processes with embodied responses has the capacity to take the research to a deeper level. Dwyer and Buckle (2009) have differentiated between the process of qualitative research to that of quantitative research, discussing how qualitative researchers are not able to be separate from the research and rather they are present throughout all aspects of the research process. Therefore, the voices and the stories of the participants are at the forefront of researchers minds and they carry these with them throughout the analysis. The researcher becomes a part of the process that impacts and shapes the research, and the analysis and the participant’s stories may shape and change the researcher. This phenomenon is described as intimate process where researchers occupy the space that exists between an insider and outsider.

Coles (2006) described how emotional content expressed in her interviews with woman and children experiencing abuse stayed with her throughout the whole process of the research. Researchers such as Dickson-Swift and colleagues (2007) and Warr (2004) have described this process as ‘living with’ the data. Coles (2006) discussed needing to take time away from the data at times because the interview data was too painful and upsetting. She discussed how hearing the participant’s voices when analysing the interview transcripts transported her back to images of the participants and their feelings of pain and fear for their children’s safety and wellbeing.
The practice of self-care is often described within the literature regarding working therapeutically with people in challenging contexts, and a range of practices are recommended. Researchers such as Clementes-Cortes (2013) and Rager (2005) have suggested that recording thoughts, concerns and feelings in a reflexive journal might help therapists and researchers to cope and process their experiences. For researchers working in the field of abuse and violence, Coles and colleagues (2014) recommended strategies such as supervision, regular debrief, preparation and self-care practices that provide opportunities for creativity. Trondalen (2016) recommended music therapists might benefit from using music in their personal life as a means of expressing difficult emotions and experiences to reduce the possibilities of burnout and compassion fatigue.

**Using the arts as a way of processing research experiences.**

The arts have long been used as a therapeutic medium for helping people to overcome trauma, develop a sense of identity, establish healthy coping strategies and process difficult feelings. In my music therapy research and practice I have used songwriting as a creative method for helping children to talk about what is important to them, to express how they are feeling, and to provide creative ways for their voices to be heard (Fairchild & McFerran, Under Review). Comparably, McCaffrey and Edwards (2015) have suggested that arts-based approaches may also be used by researchers as a way of extending the capacity for reflexivity and expanding analytic processes.

As my doctoral research was an arts-based project using songwriting as a collaborative method to co-construct knowledge with children, it seemed fitting this creative approach could also be used as a way of reflecting on my own experiences of being involved in the research. Music therapy scholars have defined arts-based research as an umbrella term encompassing art as a primary method in the research process as well as an overall methodology (Viega & Forinash, 2017). Barone and Eisner (2012) have described the
process of arts-based research as shedding a new light on hidden and previously unspoken concepts. McCaffrey and Edwards (2015) have emphasized the artistic process does not have to be the primary goal of the research but could also be used as a way of deepening the researchers understandings. Beer (2015) suggested that music therapists undertaking arts-based research might benefit from using music as a way of processing their research experiences.

According to Hernández (2010) and Rothschild (2006), attending to embodied and emotional responses in therapeutic work with people experiencing trauma may promote well-being and enhance self-care practices. Within the research context, it is suggested this embodied approach has the capacity to expand reflexivity processes and support researchers to process difficult material. Finley (2012) has posited a critical and social justice approach to arts-based research that involves drawing upon embodied responses as a way of exploring multiple ways of knowing. Further to this, the process of sharing arts-based reflections with wider audiences aims to expand the conscious awareness of listeners and to draw them into a particular experience or emotion (Viega & Forinash 2017).

**Arts-Based Reflections**

This section will provide a reflexive discussion of how writing songs about my experiences of being a researcher helped me to explore intense emotions, feelings of helplessness, and a desire to change the ways that children are viewed, understood and responded to in the context of homelessness and family violence. While I was writing songs with the children in my research, I experienced some traumatic responses as I attempted to hold and contain the children’s experiences. The songs the children wrote became a constant reminder of what they had said. They would often come into my head uninvited and unexpectedly. At times, I struggled to sleep, focus and to think of anything else and sometimes I needed to take time away from the data and the children’s songs in an attempt to
distance myself and to process why these emotional responses were so intense. At other times, these emotions and feelings of uncertainty were used to drive change and generate new knowledge.

While the aim of my research was to explore the resources that exist within these children’s lives, the children also identified resources and support they wish they had access to. As they described their hopes and dreams for what they wanted to achieve in their lives, they also hinted to feelings of helplessness around the things they couldn’t change. I completed ten interviews within two months, which meant I was trying to process what the other children had said while continuing with the remaining interviews. As I had previously worked with all of the children in my role as a music therapist, I was aware of their stories, experiences and family challenges. While the majority of children were no longer receiving support from my organization at the time of the project, several children were still exposed to ongoing risk within their families. I came to the realisation that some children were still in crisis and the bleak reality of some of their family lives became clear.

The children participating in the research seemed to appreciate the opportunity to collaborate and talk about what was important to them. They often talked in matter of fact ways about the challenges in their lives with little emotional language. However, I often found myself feeling confused as to why I was becoming emotionally affected by the children’s songs and their stories. I started to realize it was equally important to focus on what the children hadn’t said as it was to focus on what they had shared in the interviews. I felt a great sense of responsibility and pressure to meaningfully share what the children had contributed to the research so that I could change the ways children are responded to in this system. Yet, I also felt helpless and didn’t know what I needed to do to make things better.
Song 1: ‘Enough is enough’.

The first song I wrote is called ‘Enough is enough’ and was written at a time when I was struggling to sleep and to get the children’s songs out of my head. I had just completed all of the interviews over about a 2-month period, and I remember going into a meeting with my research supervisor and her instantly noticing something was wrong and that I wasn’t coping. I talked about how difficult I was finding it and how I was having flashbacks of the children’s voices and their songs. I was struggling to concentrate at work because the children I was working with spoke about similar concepts to the children in my research. I was constantly reminded about how important and central these ideas were to these children’s lives. I felt angry and frustrated at the system and I was conflicted between wanting things to change for these children while not really knowing what to do. I found it difficult to write down how I was feeling in a reflexive journal as the complexities of the emotions that I was feeling was something I struggled to articulate and understand.

My research supervisor suggested I use songwriting as a way of creatively expressing myself and this method was congruent with my approach to research with children. At this stage I had no intention of sharing these songs, however it was a way to put into words how I was feeling. When I sat down to write the song, I ended up writing a rap that expressed my frustration and anger at the system in supporting these children. The lyrics expressed my experiences of talking to children and sensing feelings of injustice about how they were viewed and how they were treated. While the song articulated some of the challenges with the system in supporting children, it also built to a positive message that expresses the importance of creating opportunities for children’s voices to be heard. I used the iPad app ‘Launchpad’ that a child participating in my research had introduced me to, and I created a hip-hop inspired backing track using a looping function. I then recorded myself rapping and singing with this backing track using the GarageBand app. The lyrics for the first song are provided below.
The recordings of all of the songs written can be found at
https://soundcloud.com/user-191682090/sets/arts-based-reflections-songs

‘Enough is enough’
I’ve been talking to kids about what helps them to ‘do well’
We’ve been writing some songs and they’ve got stories to tell
Of times when they flourished and times when they felt
That they needed some protection from this pain and hell

I can’t sleep, can’t get these words out of my head
What’s going through my mind is everything they’ve said
Is it a cry out for help or I have I just misread it?
I think about it so much, never gonna forget it

All I want to do is to make a difference
These kids they have a right to speak and we need to listen

It makes me so angry that it’s so unfair
These kids are really trying but there’s so much despair
Will anybody listen, does anybody care?
We need to make it better so that someone’s always there

Why the stigma, can’t we just see kids for kids?
After all it’s not their fault that they had to go through this
They wanna be heard and they got lots that they would wish for
To have a better life so they got something to live for
Whose job is it to make sure kids are alright?
In some ways it's the system, that’s never on their side
So many kids who are scared for their lives
Every day, the same thing, fighting to survive

Family are meant to be the ones you can turn to
But when life is so chaotic, can they truly respond to
The worries and fears that make kids want to escape to
Another place so they can forget what they’ve gone through

All I want to do is to make a difference
These kids they have a right to speak and we need to listen

Hearing all their stories it was so tough
Even though they showed courage they found it hard to trust
It makes it hard to take in when you care so much
It just isn’t right and enough is enough

So what can we do to make everyone see
That we have so much to learn about what kids need
Unless we listen then we’ll never believe
That we can make a difference and create a new reality

All I want to do is to make a difference
These kids they have a right to speak and we need to listen
Song 2: ‘Responsibility’.

The second song I wrote is called ‘Responsibility’. At this time, I was struggling to know what to do with the songs that the children had written. I had taken some time away from the data due to feeling overwhelmed. The song explores my experience of holding onto the responsibility of protecting children and wanting to make things better for them. While I was trying to process my emotional responses I accessed professional therapeutic support, as well as support from colleagues, friends and family members. I struggled to articulate how I was feeling and I received a range of responses regarding the ways this had impacted me. Some people suggested that I should ‘try not to think about it’ or ‘forget about it’, or that it wasn’t my responsibility to ‘fix’ the situation for these children. Some proposed to focus on the positives and the strengths of the children. One person even recommended that in the future I might reconsider my decision to talk to children in research because it was just ‘too difficult’ for me. While I struggled to know what I was going to do with the research, there was no part in my mind that made me feel like it wasn’t worthwhile. I was committed to the cause, but because I was seeing it every day in my work and in my research there was no escape from it. The song cycles between feeling a sense of responsibility and not knowing what to do, but also wanting circumstances to change for children in this context. I developed this song using the Garageband app by incorporating some looping functions and DJ effects in an RnB style.

‘Responsibility’

It’s such a big responsibility on me
What am I supposed to do to make it better
How am I supposed to know how to make it right
It is just so unfair that you had to go through this
I wanna help but I don't know what I’m gonna do
I’m feeling like there’s a weight on my shoulders
Something that I just can’t shake
I want to make a difference
And I don't wanna mess this up
So many kids relying on me
To make the right decisions
I don’t know which way to turn
Or if I’m heading in the right direction

I don't know…It’s such a big responsibility on me

I’m feeling like there’s a weight on my shoulders
Something that I just can’t shake
I want to make a difference
And I don't wanna mess this up
So many kids relying on me
To make the right decisions
I don’t know which way to turn
Or if I’m heading in the right direction

I don't know…
It’s such a big responsibility on me

**Song 3: ‘Is this what it’s like?’**
The third song I wrote is called ‘Is this what it’s like?’ and it was written at a time when I was trying to incorporate what I had learnt from my research into my music therapy
practice within a community organization. However, I felt like I was not being listened to and
I felt alone on my mission to change the ways we were working with children. I sensed that
the managerial patriarchy at my workplace was perpetuating the silencing of children by not
listening to the people who were advocating for them. Even though the current services that
were being offered to these children were generally successful and worthwhile, I felt the
organizational goals of meeting statistical and program requirements was prioritized over
improving our responses to children in this context. I was reminded about what it might be
like for children living in difficult home situations where they have no control and are reliant
on their families and the system to protect them. I was an articulate and educated adult, yet
still I felt like no one was listening to me. I could only imagine what it must be like for
children. The song expresses my conflicted feelings of helplessness and voicelessness, as
well as my determination to keep on advocating for the rights of children. I wrote this song
using the guitar and vocals, then recorded this track using Garageband.

‘Is this what it’s like?’

Is this what it’s like, to feel like no one is listening

It just isn’t right, to feel like you don’t matter

Is this what it’s like, is it how it’s always gonna be

But we keep up the fight, and hope that one day things will change

Is this what it’s like, is this what it’s like

What does it take to see that what we’re doing is just not enough

We bury our heads in the sand and pretend that it’s all taken care of

What does it take to show that we care and we want to make it better

Not just because that is what we are told but because we really see you
And what this means, and what this means

Is this what it’s like, to feel like no one is listening
It just isn’t right, to feel like you don’t matter
Is this what it’s like, is it how it’s always gonna be
But we keep up the fight, and hope that one day things will change

Is this what it’s like

Is this what it’s like, to feel like no one is listening
Is this what it’s like, to feel like no one is listening

**Song 4: ‘At least we’re doing something’**

The final song I wrote is called ‘At least we’re doing something’ and was written towards the end of my doctoral journey. I started to reflect on what I had learnt from the research and how much my music therapy practice with children had changed throughout this process. I also reflected on my own personal growth and how much I had changed as a person. Even though the research had been challenging at times and there had been times that I wanted to give up, there was still a reason why I was doing this and why I wanted to keep going. As I was continuing to work with children throughout this period, I was constantly reminded of their positive responses to music and how much it meant to them. While I felt like I could have done things differently and I was constantly fighting an uphill battle, I felt like it was worth it and I was making a contribution. I wrote this song using the guitar and vocals and then recorded the song using the Garageband app.

*‘At least we’re doing something’*

So many sleepless nights, so much I wanted to say
So many times I went into battle for you, so many times that I failed
So many times that I wanted to quit, so many times it felt too hard
So many times that I felt voiceless, but so many reasons to just keep going for you

It doesn’t matter how long it takes we must keep on fighting
It doesn't matter how hard it gets, nothing compares to what you’ve been through
It doesn’t matter how many times, it takes for you to be heard
All that really matters is that at least we’re doing something

So much that's left unanswered, so much more to say
So much to take in so much to learn, so much that we don’t know
So much we cannot do to keep you safe, what I would give so this could be
So much more that you have to give, and so much more that we need to do

It doesn’t matter how long it takes we must keep on fighting
It doesn't matter how hard it gets, nothing compares to what you've been through
It doesn’t matter how many times, it takes for you to be heard
All that really matters is that at least we’re doing something

**Discussion and Recommendations**

Using songwriting as a way of processing my experiences provided an avenue for expressing feelings of anger, helplessness, confusion and hope throughout the research process and this approach led to new insights and understandings. Through my reflexive discussions with academics and doctoral students I have identified that other researchers have had similar experiences to those I have described. However, few people have taken the time to make these experiences known to others and to acknowledge the challenges of research in this field.
As I had previously worked with the children in my capacity as a music therapist, I was aware of their stories and their experiences of family violence and homelessness. As a result, it was difficult at times to reconnect with children a year or two later for the purpose of the research and to realize some of them were living in unstable home situations and were still exposed to ongoing family violence. My experience is comparable to Coles and Mudaly’s research (2010) with children and mothers experiencing abuse, where the researchers found it difficult to hear painful and sensitive stories of abuse as they knew the participants prior to the research and as a result struggled to remain objective and detach from these experiences. Coles (2006) recommended strategy for managing these emotional responses was to distance herself from the data at times when it became too painful or upsetting. Similarly, I found myself needing to take time away from the data due to overwhelming feelings of distress about my memories of these children’s stories and unresolved trauma.

The voices and songs of the children participating in my research travelled with me beyond my office and research spaces, often coming into my head when I least expected it such as when I was going to sleep, driving or when I was exercising. As a result, I carried these stories with me through an ongoing cycle of reflection in formal and informal capacities and sometimes led to new knowledge and understandings, often when I was least expecting it. The link between music, memory and emotions has been explored within the music therapy literature (Clark & Tamplin 2016; Schneck & Berger 2006), though we have not yet explored the impact this phenomenon might have on the music therapist or the researcher who is involved in co-creating songs with people who have experienced trauma.

Pearlman and Caringi (2009) articulated the challenge for therapists of engaging empathically with stories of trauma and suggested that these responses and changes in their sense of self might parallel those who have experienced the direct trauma themselves.
Mahoney (2003) posited how this repeated exposure to stories of tragedy, hopelessness and pain might challenge a therapist's internal mechanism for hope and faith in people and systems. The first three songs I wrote had common themes of hopelessness and frustration with the systems surrounding children that were not always protecting them and providing opportunities for their voices to be heard and responded to in appropriate ways. I started to lose hope that what I was doing was going to change anything, and at times I felt like giving up. The song ‘is this what it’s like?’ described what it felt like to be unheard by the system, and this confusion and frustration is reflected in the sound of the song. Akin with arts-based research approaches described by Viega and Forinash (2016), these songs were written to reflect how I was feeling at the time and sharing these songs is a way of communicating these emotions to others and bringing their awareness to these issues.

Contrary to the experience of traumatic responses as result of exposure to client or participant material, Pearlman and Caringi (2009) has also posited how therapists might be transformed on a personal level in a positive way, which might increase their connection with people and develop a greater awareness of all parts of life. The following quote by Jenmorri (2006) illustrates the complex nature of vicarious trauma and resilience:

“Developing meaning and purpose, cultivating an awareness of human resilience in general and client strengths in particular, and believing in the possibility of growth and recovery, may be factors which enhance practitioner resilience in the face of secondary trauma. The experience of vicarious traumatization itself, when met with reflection and meaning making, may become a ‘crisis of opportunity’.” (pp. 50)

Likewise, Hernández and colleagues (2007) have described how a therapist might be positively transformed in response to witnessing the client’s resiliency, which may in turn lead to positive meaning making and growth of the therapist or researcher. As my research focused on the resources that children identified in their lives, what gave me hope was the
determination and agency that children demonstrated in thinking positive and hoping their lives would be better in the future. At times when I felt like giving up I found it helpful to remind myself of the resilience of the children and to remember my responsibility as an adult in this situation to make a constant effort in improving outcomes for children in these contexts.

Coles, Astbury, Dartnall and Limjerwala (2014) have suggested that researchers who use their research as a tool for positive change in people’s lives is an important protective factor in coping with difficult research topics. My research has been informed by Hart and colleagues (2016) latest understandings of resilience that involves uniting principles of resilience with social justice. This approach to research provides a way to explore and address the inequities in society that often place the responsibility on oppressed individuals to overcome their experiences of adversity. As my project was informed by principals of social justice and a desire to make children’s voices heard and responded to appropriately, when I was feeling upset by the research process I found it helpful to revisit the reasons why I was doing this and the ways I wanted the system to change to best meet the needs of children.

The challenges associated with conducting research in these contexts may deter some researchers from pursuing this type of research as a way of protecting themselves from the emotional burden. As discussed earlier in the article, direct research with children brings about many ethical considerations in order to prove that children will be safe and protected as a result from their participation (Morris, Hegarty & Humphreys, 2012). Yet, there are also ongoing challenges associated with taking on an advocacy role in speaking up for children’s rights and ensuring their voices are taken seriously and responded to appropriately (Bradbury-Jones & Taylor 2015; Lundy, McEvoy & Byrne 2011; Överlien 2010). Despite the challenges of researching in child welfare, this does not mean children should miss out on the opportunity to contribute to research and to have their perspectives acknowledged. In
Australia, statistics show that family violence impacts at least 25 percent of the child and adolescent population (Flood & Fergus, 2008), which makes it a significant societal issue. Therefore, avoiding this topic is not an option and the ongoing prevalence in society emphasizes the importance of a commitment from researchers to continue their critical work in this area. Thus, it is timely to acknowledge and explore alternative methods of researching with children and to develop mechanisms for protecting researchers throughout this process.

**Final Reflections**

The arts-based method of songwriting provided a way to explore and express my emotional responses to the data and knowledge generated through my doctoral study, and this approached helped me to make meaning from this experience. Songwriting is one example of how researchers might use creative mediums as a form of reflexivity to enhance understandings of difficult and emotional content. Due to the nature of my background in music therapy and the use of songwriting within my research, this method was most fitting in this project. However, readers are encouraged to draw upon their own creative resources and find a medium that is suitable for them. This creative process has the capacity to provide a space to reflect on the ways the research might impact and change the researcher’s life, and acknowledges the central and often emotional role of the researcher in hearing, interpreting and sharing people’s stories. It is hoped that through sharing my own personal experience other researchers might feel validated in their experiences and know they are not alone in their research journey.
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Bridging material

The next and final chapter will provide some reflections on my learning’s throughout the research and draw together the various projects and emergent ideas. As I have discussed throughout this thesis, I have spent a long time thinking about how I can best understand and respond to children’s voices in a way that is mutually empowering and respectful of children’s resources and what they bring to research and music therapy practice. Through these efforts to collaborate with children, I have identified systemic challenges that often act as a barrier to children having the opportunities to be heard within the context of their family’s experience and for children to be taken seriously in their contributions to this research. The next chapter will provide an overview of the key findings from this research and explore the ways that children were engaged in participatory processes through songwriting and co-authoring an article. I will also share my recommendations for improving responses to children through addressing the complexities in the homelessness and family violence system, exploring music therapy approaches within the context of child welfare, and advocating for children to have opportunities to be heard and represented through collaborative research.
Chapter 8
Discussion and Recommendations

Overview of the Research Findings

This research aimed to co-construct knowledge with children using a collaborative songwriting method to understand the range of resources they draw upon throughout their experiences of homelessness and family violence. Throughout this thesis I have shared my motivations for hearing and understanding children’s voices in research and this approach is also a central part of my music therapy practice. Throughout their experiences of homelessness and family violence, children often live in silence within their families and have minimal opportunities to talk about their experience. As a result, the discourse regarding children experiencing homelessness and family violence has emphasized the importance of children having opportunities to be heard so that their needs can be acknowledged and addressed (Morris, Hegarty & Humphreys, 2012). In addition, the homelessness and family violence service system often privileges the perspectives of mothers by supporting them to identify and meet their children’s needs, rather than working directly with children themselves to explore what is important to them. Therefore, in deciding to collaborate with children in this research I sought to provide opportunities for embedding children’s voices into the current discourse and to emphasize the value of this approach.

This research sought to give voice to children’s experiences through the use of collaborative and arts-based approaches and was informed by the United Nation Convention of the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1979). McGee (2000) identified that children living in family violence situations often feel powerless because they have little control over what is happening in their lives, hence why valuing children’s rights to be heard in this research was significant. When Mullender, Hague and Iman’s (2010) explored children’s perspectives on their experiences of family violence, they identified two critical issues that contributed to children’s ability to cope in the face of adversity. First, children need to be
listened to and taken seriously in regard to their perspectives and experiences of family violence. And second, children need opportunities to be actively involved in decisions regarding issues that affect them and in finding strategies for managing what is happening in their lives. These considerations were also important throughout this research in ensuring that children’s voices were represented and understood in way that was respectful to children in this context.

**Shifting the focus to children’s resources.**

The critical review of the literature described at the start of this thesis highlighted the tendency for authors to focus on describing bleak statistics, poorer outcomes and challenges often experienced by children in this context. I noticed there was little acknowledgement of their strengths and resources in times of adversity. By shifting the focus to children’s resources in this research, I sought to provide a creative medium for children to explore and identify the resources that were important in their lives, rather than focusing on the problems and challenges that resulted in them entering the homelessness and family violence system. Ogden and Fisher (2015) described how people who experienced trauma often have many resources that go unnoticed or unrecognized, and this lack of acknowledgment can result in feelings of hopelessness and a lack of confidence in their ability to cope. Thus, providing a space to explore resources and strengths can provide a more balanced perspective and support children to recognize their innate capacities, as described in Randi Rolvjd’s descriptions of resource oriented music therapy and what clients bring to music therapy (Rolvjord, 2010, 2015). Therefore, in this research providing a space to explore their resources is a way of valuing their conscious attempts to draw upon the range of resources at their disposal to try to cope with their experiences of violence and adversity.

**Using songwriting as a collaborative research method.**
The collaborative songwriting method that was used throughout this research provided a way of engaging children through an approach that drew upon my own resources as a music therapist. Additionally, the arts-based approach to this research provided a way for children use music as a way of expressing themselves and telling their story. The method was intended to provide a creative way for children to explore their resources, as opposed to a typical talk-based interview involving questions and answers, which may have lacked personal meaning for the children. However, this approach to research did not come without its challenges and required ongoing reflexivity regarding the ways that children’s voices were fostered and represented throughout the research.

The participatory approach to writing songs was framed within a child-centred and fun orientation, yet the children still required support at times to feel comfortable and safe to express their ideas. To do this, I presented a curious and questioning attitude, regularly asking children to elaborate and clarify what they were trying to say. Responses from the children were often quite brief, including responses such as ‘I don’t know’, ‘Not sure’ and simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’ responses. Therefore, encouragement and space were important to provide opportunities for child to reflect more deeply on what they wanted to contribute. As suggested by Powell and Smith (2009), children often provided non-verbal cues that they are feeling uncomfortable or unsure such as becoming quiet, looking distracted or changing the topic. As a result, my university training and professional experiences of working as a music therapist in this context was crucial to enhancing my capacity to respond to children’s changing presentations throughout the interviews.

Akin with approaches to arts-based research, the songs that the children wrote became the primary way of sharing the findings. When I shared the songs at music therapy conferences and with professionals working in the field, audience members often reflected on the ways they were emotionally affected by hearing the children’s songs and shared how this
impacted the ways they understood children in this context. In this way, the arts-based approach provided a creative way to engage a variety of senses in order to deepen understandings about children’s experiences.

I also noticed that it was important to reflect on my embodied responses throughout the interviews, as well as during the analysis and write up of the results. I sensed that it was just as important to reflect on what had been unsaid or not included in the songs, as it was to consider the resources that the children spoke at length about. For example, Josh discussed that sport ‘takes my mind off things that I don’t want to think about’, yet he shut down when was asked if he would like to expand on what these things were. Several children appeared to be adopting protective strategies when they felt like they might have been revealing too much about what was worrying them in their lives. While they were able to reflect on the positive aspects of their lives such as their friends, sporting activities, music and healthy coping strategies, it became clear that some children could not fully escape from feelings of fear and uncertainty that they had been exposed to through their experiences of family violence.

**Understanding music as a resource through group songwriting.**

Through the group songwriting project, I prompted the children to explore what music meant to them and the ways that music supported them to cope. The children described how music offered an escape and distracted them from what was happening in their lives. In this way, music provided a sense of safety and temporary respite during difficult times. The children also identified how music provided a sense of hope within their own lives, as well as for the community. The children also discussed how music was both helpful and unhelpful in their lives and showed insight into the ways that they were able to make conscious decisions about how and when they listened to certain music. Considering these findings, a key recommendation arising out of this project was that music therapists in this
field could play an important role in supporting children to understand the ways they are using music in order to foster healthy ways of coping.

**Exploring a range of resources through individual songwriting.**

Through the individual songwriting interviews, the children identified a range of resources in their lives that supported them to cope and ‘do well’ in their lives, including listening to music, but also more broadly: connecting with friends, family and pets; art, journaling and drawing; positive thinking; cleaning; and playing sport. These resources served a range of purposes for the children, such as providing a way to seek refuge, to feel safe, to be hopeful for the future, to feel cared for, and to be self-determined. The children also appeared to adopt protective strategies when deciding what they chose to share and not to share throughout the interview process, and as a result I also reflected on my own embodied responses and the children’s changing presentations throughout their research participation. The results from this part of the project emphasized the active efforts that children were taking in order to cope with what was happening in their lives. Thus, these new understandings demonstrate the importance of supporting to children to identify their resources in the early stages of working with them to provide a basis for therapeutic work.

**Collaborative writing with Malakai.**

The decision to collaborate with Malakai Mraz was based upon comments that he had made following his involvement in music therapy about wanting to tell his story and to help other children to have the same opportunities that he had. Writing the article together was a way of responding to Malakai’s wishes to be heard, while also extending what I had learnt from the group and individual songwriting sessions about the ways that children draw upon resources in their lives. This process did not come without its challenges, due to ongoing negotiations of power, ethics and advocacy. Through this experience of writing together, we were able to explore the range of conditions at play that supported Malakai to flourish within
and outside of the music therapy sessions. The support provided by Malakai’s mother was identified as a primary external resource and highlights the importance of children having access to positive people in their lives to support them in times of adversity. In addition to writing the article together, we also shared a song that we had written as a way of providing an arts-based and child-centred representation of our experiences. This collaborative process with Malakai provided a unique opportunity to model how to represent children in a way that is respectful of the resources that they bring with them, while also exploring our perspectives of engaging in music therapy together.

**Arts-based reflections on being the researcher.**

Working in the field of child welfare can have an immense emotional impact on researchers and I described my experiences of vicarious trauma and vicarious resilience in Chapter 8. Through writing songs about the ways that I was being impacted by the research, I was able to explore feelings of anger, helplessness, responsibility and determination. The process of writing the songs was a way of generating new knowledge and expressing what I thought needed to change within the system. As I was working in the field, as well as completing my research outside of this role, I felt like I had no escape from these feelings and therefore needed to take active efforts to protect myself from burning out. Therefore, engaging in this creative method during difficult times was integral and provided me with a sense of perspective at times when I felt like I didn’t have the emotional energy to continue with the research. As a result, I have advocated for new researchers in this field to have appropriate avenues for support while also drawing upon their own creative resources to process their experience of being involved in child welfare research.

**Understanding Escapism**

Something that struck me throughout the group and individual interviews was children’s discussions about how they were drawing upon their resources to escape or to seek
refuge from what was happening in their lives, with children identifying conscious strategies such as listening to music, going to a friend’s house, cleaning, playing with toys, journaling, playing sport, going for a walk and reading. Malchiodi (2008) describes escapism as a way to avoid thoughts or feelings that are associated with a memory of a trauma, as a way of protecting oneself from a painful experience. The concept of escaping is commonly described across family violence and trauma research whereby children identify practical strategies that help to distract themselves while violence is occurring in the home, such as trying to block out the sounds of fighting through watching television, listening to music, art activities and playing video games (Mullender, Hague & Iman, 2015; Callaghan et al., 2017; Överlien & Hyden, 2009; Överlien, 2010, 2016). However, it is important to recognize that these strategies might not be as helpful in the long term if children do not have access to appropriate therapeutic supports to process and understand their experiences, since they may develop a tendency to dissociate and develop unhealthy behaviours in response to these strategies, such as self-harming or substance use.

Ogden and Fisher (2015) have identified escapism as a survival resource, describing this as a conscious attempt to help tolerate a stressful situation and to cope with what is happening. These strategies might include isolating oneself, withdrawing, becoming preoccupied with fantasy and engaging in creative methods such as drawing, music, writing and reading. Consequently, identifying the ways that these resources have helped children to survive is an important first step in their recovery from traumatic experiences and acknowledges the active efforts they have been taking to be able to cope. Through the discussions with the children in my research, we were able to start exploring the ways that these resources were helpful and unhelpful in children’s lives. Further therapeutic work might have focused on developing additional creative resources so that children could develop more constructive and helpful ways of coping in the long term. For example, in Blue’s songwriting
interview she described how food was a ‘constant’ and helped her to feel better, however, she admitted she had a tendency to binge eat in stressful situations which sometimes made her feel worse afterwards. Through discussing the ways that this was a helpful or unhelpful coping strategy, Blue was able to recognize that this might not always be a constructive way of coping in the future. Ongoing therapeutic work with Blue might have expanded her conscious awareness of the ways that she was using these strategies, and worked towards developing more creative resources to use in place of her survival resources in the long term. Thus, acknowledging and honouring the types of survival resources that children were using was central in understanding their experience in the moment, but further support is also needed that uses this as an important basis for subsequent therapeutic work.

**Taking Action in Response to the Research**

Hearing children’s perspectives and fostering their voices through participatory methods was an integral part of this research. However, it is equally important to consider the appropriate responses that are needed to address these new understandings. Within the resilience discourse, Hart and colleagues (2016) have described an approach that involves uniting principles of resilience with theories of social justice. In this way, researchers are called to address the numerous systemic issues that contribute to children’s exposure to adversity and to think critically about how their research can contribute at a wider systemic level. These understandings have been an underlying motivator in advocating for children throughout this research. This section seeks to explore the various efforts that I sought to take action in this research to create social change for children in these circumstances.

**Ethics and research with children.**

The process of gaining ethics approval to conduct research in this area is understandably a lengthy process, to ensure that we are protecting children and not exposing them to any risk as a result of their involvement. It is important that researchers in this area
have the appropriate skills and expertise in engaging with children in order to support children to feel comfortable and safe to express their views. While protecting children is a primary concern, it is often not acknowledged that there can also be positive outcomes as a result of children having creative and meaningful opportunities to express their views and contribute to the knowledge base. Morris, Hegarty and Humphreys (2012) have reflected upon how research with children who have systemically been unheard by oppressive systems may lead to positive outcomes in children’s lives as well as in the broader community. Similarly, Överlien (2010) has stressed that equal emphasis needs to be placed on the opportunities that may arise from children’s collaborative contributions to research, in addition to the important consideration of the potential risks of their involvement.

Throughout the process of completing this research, I have experienced various challenges in relation to children’s voices not being taken seriously or their rights to be heard not being fulfilled due to academic and systemic barriers. While I appreciate that it is crucial to ensure that children are protected children from harm and exploitation in their involvement in research, I believe that further work is needed to ensure that children have opportunities to express their views and perspectives in various forums in a way that is meaningful to them.

**Advocating for children’s voices in academic forums.**

The process of publishing the article co-written with 11-year-old Malakai Mraz is an example of a time when systems and power structures reduce opportunities for children’s voices to be heard and responded to appropriately. As Malakai and I discussed in our collaborative article earlier in this thesis (Fairchild & Mraz, 2018), the process of writing and reflecting on our experiences together was a mutually empowering experience. Malakai and his mother regularly told me how much they had enjoyed participating and that they felt valued throughout the whole process. Each time I went to their house it was clear how invested they were in the article and that they had been thinking about their ideas in between
our sessions, as seen by writing down thoughts and memories, practicing the song or drawing pictures. After we had finished writing the article, they also asked if they could be considered for further collaborative opportunities in the future. Following on from this experience, Malakai’s mother decided to become actively involved in the client participation committee at my workplace and participated in a range of forums that informed the service, including presenting about her experience of accessing family violence support at an all-staff meeting and contributing to the development of new family violence programs.

Throughout the process of submitting our paper for publication it became clear that there would be systemic and academic barriers due to the nature of the article being co-authored by a child. We clearly stated in the article that Malakai was writing under a pseudonym, that we had lengthy discussions about what he would like to include and not include, and that he and his mother had provided written consent for their contributions in the journal (including the song recording) to be published in academic forums. As we were preparing to submit the article, I put a lot of thought into the type of journal that would be most suitable for this type of paper and specifically sought out journals that had a focus on children in the welfare sector and stated in their journal descriptions that they were committed to children’s wellbeing and understanding their experiences. However, the article was rejected twice by two child-focused journals. The first journal did not provide a reason for the paper not being accepted other than that it did not fit the aims of the journal. Yet, in another unsuccessful submission to a child-focused Social Work journal the reviewer who was described by the editor as ‘an expert in the field’ suggested that the only solution to make the article ‘ethical’ was to remove Malakai as a co-author and to include his contributions as a case study instead. These comments were in direct opposition to what we were trying to demonstrate in writing this article together, through collaborating and attempting to shift power imbalances while providing him a space to decide which part of his story he would
like to tell. While I understand that academic publication is a competitive and rigorous process, I believe that, in this instance, these journals denied Malakai’s rights and wishes to be heard by considering only the perceived risks of his involvement and not recognising the various positive outcomes that had come from Malakai and his mother’s contributions to the project. If we had the opportunity for open dialogue with these journals we could have worked on the article together to make it suitable for publication, while still valuing Malakai’s important contributions as a co-author. This open dialogue was achieved in the process of submitting and being accepted to publish in *Voices: A World Forum for Music Therapy*, and the editorial feedback allowed us to expand upon the ethical considerations and reflexivity regarding power dynamics that were central to the article.

Given my experience of publishing with Malakai and collaborating with the children in this research, I believe there is a lot more work to be done to ensure there are appropriate forums for children’s views to be represented and subsequently responded to in a timely and meaningful way. Therefore, part of the role I have taken on within my research and in my music therapy practice is to continually find ways to advocate for children’s voices to be heard within this complex system. These forms of advocacy were undertaken in both formal and informal capacities during my candidature, including presentations, publications, conversation’s with other professionals and academics, sharing insights on children’s experiences with families and supporting communities, informing practice and the development of new programs, and using social media as a platform to share perspectives in a wider forum. This is congruent with ideas coming from some advocacy oriented academics, as the following quote from social worker Donna Baines (2008) illustrates: “An important way to resist practices that suppress difference and dissent is to constantly defend and develop ways to give voice to the voiceless and to bring the needs of marginalized clients and communities to the attention of decision makers” (p. 130). Similarly, Sue Baines and Jane
Edwards (2015) describe a need for participants to be viewed as colleagues and co-researchers and for their contributions to be valued and credited. Kannen (2008) asserts that the anti-oppressive approach seeks to combat and challenge the oppressive barriers that prevent marginalized voices from being heard and responded to. Considering there are ongoing challenges associated with taking on an advocacy role in speaking up for children’s rights and ensuring that their voices are taken seriously (Bradbury-Jones & Taylor 2015; Lundy, McEvoy & Byrne 2011; Overlien 2010), I felt an underlying need and responsibility to continue to advocate for children across a range of forums.

The development of the music therapy in child welfare network.

As I was undertaking my research in a field with limited music therapy literature and more often grappling with knowing where to locate myself within music therapy literature and more broadly within the field. In an attempt to increase my connections and deepen my understanding of my work and research in this context, I decided to reach out to other music therapists around the world to develop a network of people working and researching in the broader field of child welfare, including child protection, child abuse, family violence, homelessness and foster care. I started by emailing experts in the field who had published about music therapy in child welfare contexts, with the support of my supervisors to identify relevant people and to increase my networks. From here, we shared ideas for collaboration in the future that included presenting roundtables focusing on child welfare at music therapy conferences and developing a Facebook page for music therapists around the world to connect informally. It was interesting that some of the academics in this network had not previously connected regarding their research in this area, despite the similarities in their approaches and thinking. To date, I have coordinated two roundtables at international conferences that have provided a reflexive discussion about the role, approaches and future directions for music therapy in child welfare and continued collaboration through roundtables and conferences that have provided a reflexive discussion about the role, approaches and thinking. To date, I have coordinated two roundtables at international conferences that have provided a reflexive discussion about the role, approaches and thinking. To date, I have coordinated two roundtables at international conferences that have provided a reflexive discussion about the role, approaches and thinking.
and publication is an ongoing aim of our network. We also initiated a special issue for the online, open access refereed journal, Voices: A World Forum for Music Therapy, that focuses on representing the Child Welfare context, which has resulted in 25 abstract submissions being accepted for possible publication in November 2018. I have been invited to serve as a co-editor for this special edition along with Sue Hadley. Some of the authors submitting to this special edition have not yet published their work or research in this context, so providing this open forum for sharing their ideas has clearly encouraged practitioners to become involved. This level of advocacy at an international level has provided another avenue for representing children and young people’s voices and experiences, and will significantly increase the number of music therapy publications focusing on child welfare. I hope that these ongoing collaborative opportunities will positively impact the ways that children are responded to within these systems, and that ultimately it will increase the availability of music therapy services within child welfare contexts.

**Recommendations**

The results from this research have the capacity to impact research and practice across various levels. The following section will provide recommendations that arose from the research, including recommendations for the homelessness and family violence system, music therapy practice, and for future research within the child welfare context.

**Homelessness and family violence system.**

The results from this research demonstrate a need to design a service system that prioritizes the social and emotional needs of children through acknowledging the resources that they bring with them and subsequently supporting the facilitation of access to the resources that they identify. As a result, there is a need for increased collaboration between children, families, professionals and the service system to ensure that children’s experiences are understood and responded to appropriately.
Facilitating access to resources.

While the children in this research were able to identify important resources in their lives, it became clear that some children would benefit from practical assistance to support them to navigate their way to these resources and to ensure that they served the purpose they were striving for. Accordingly, I believe that professionals working in this field have an important role to play in facilitating access to these resources and having discussions with children about the times when these strategies may be helpful or unhelpful.

In the case of Malakai, he identified in his first interaction with me that he had always wanted to play the drums but he did not have the practical resources available to him to be able to do this. Through accessing brokerage funding in my professional role, I was able to purchase a drum machine for Malakai and subsequently supported him in music therapy to develop ways of using the drums to express himself, to develop his identity as a drummer and to experience a sense of mastery. As Malakai expressed in the article (Fairchild & Mraz, 2018), everything in his life changed when he received this drum machine. In fact, it is likely that it was a combination of the family moving, starting a new school and establishing a sense of safety, in addition to commencing music therapy and receiving the drum machine that contributed to Malakai’s sense that his life was improving and that things would be better in the future. Yet, from Malakai’s perspective, the drums symbolized a change in his life and a new beginning. At the time of meeting Malakai his family was engaged with family violence and homelessness support workers who were assisting him and his family to be safe and to link into appropriate medical, educational and therapeutic supports. However, it was through his discussion with me about his resources where he expressed his interest in music and drumming and as a result he was able to develop a new way to express himself at time when he had been struggling to cope.

I believe there is a role for professionals to play in enhancing resilience in children and providing them opportunities to practice and develop their resources in a safe and
supportive environment. In order to be able to validate and deepen resources in children’s lives, an important first step is to identify those resources that have been both helpful and unhelpful (Ogden & Fisher, 2015). Following the identification of resources, children need to be supported to develop healthy strategies for drawing upon these in a conscious and purposeful way in order to reap greater benefits. Therefore, through having these discussions with children, therapeutic workers would increase children’s capacity to identify, build upon and expand their resources so that they can have the opportunity to process their experiences of transience and violence as they grow up.

**Strengthening family relationships.**

A key finding from the individual songwriting sessions identified the important role that family members and supportive people played in children’s lives. Some children described ways that their family members helped them to feel safe, provided practical assistance and supported them. However, it became clear that children were receiving various levels of emotional support from family members, and this was not always described as helpful or positive. While I did not engage family members in the research process, I believe there is further work needed to ensure that professionals working in this field understand the importance of external supports in children’s lives.

Family violence researchers Humphreys, Thiara and Skamballis (2011) have described family violence as ‘an attack on the mother-child relationship’. Research in this area has explored the abusive tactics that perpetrators of family violence use to undermine the mother-child relationship, including criticising mothers in front of their children, using the children to relay negative messages, belittling her capacity as a mother and threatening to report her to child protection, and punishing her if she is unable to control the children (Humphreys, Thiara & Skamballis, 2011; Mullender et al., 2010). These tactics often stem from the perpetrators jealousy of the attention given to the children and desire to control the
family dynamic and relationships. The fracturing of family relationships is often further exacerbated due to the secrecy that surrounds family violence, as often it is not acknowledged or talked about between family members. Mullender and colleagues (2010) recommended that new strategies are needed to understand the relationship between women and their children after their experiences of family violence.

Resilience research emphasizes the importance of children having a close relationship with an attuned and responsive adult (Luthar, 2006; Cutuli & Herbers, 2014; Malchiodi, Steele & Kuban, 2008), thus there is an important role that professionals can play in building upon parent’s capacity to understand and respond to their child’s needs. In an action research project exploring the relationship between mothers and their children after family violence, Humphrey’s and colleagues (2011) identified that all fifty-two children participating in the study identified their mother as one of the people they were closest to in their supportive network. However, this relationship may have been disrupted due to family violence. Focusing on strengthening the relationship between mothers and their children is therefore important when working in this field. Perhaps identifying and talking about children’s resources with mothers could be a useful starting point for engaging them in conversations about their children, and creative approaches to practice might create a space for working together to rebuild their relationship.

The community organization that I was working for at the time of completing this research offered family violence support to members of the family through separate but integrated programs, such as supporting children through therapeutic group work, assessment, safety planning and case management; supporting women through case management and safety planning; and holding male perpetrators accountable for their uses of violence through men’s behaviour change programs. Yet, Humphreys, Thiara & Skamballis (2011) have critiqued traditional organizational structures that often perpetuate the fracturing
of relationships by offering separate services for children, women and men. Therefore, I believe it is timely to consider the ways the service system can be adapted in order to provide more opportunities for children’s experiences to be heard and responded to within the context of their families’ experience.

**Music therapy practice.**

The arts-based approach to research I developed explored the potential for music to provide a creative way for children to express themselves and to connect with others. From a trauma perspective, Steel and Raider (2001) have described how using only cognitive processes such as talking with children are often less effective due to children regularly being in a heightened state of arousal. On the contrary, creative methods such as music provide a basis for children experience a sense of safety, regulation and control over their emotional reactions and thus provide an alternative approach for engaging children in therapeutic processes. Considering the growing acknowledgement of body-based and creative approaches in working with children who have experienced trauma (ie. Ogden & Fisher, 2015; Van der Kolk, 2015), I believe that music therapists working in this field have a lot to contribute to this body of knowledge through resource-oriented songwriting, and engaging more fully with family and support systems.

**Resource-oriented songwriting.**

The collaborative and resource-oriented songwriting method that was used throughout this research provided a way to identify the resources that exist in children lives, including the people that supported them and the internal resources that helped them to be determined and hopeful for the future. Similar to my findings, Hines (2015) has recognized the importance of identifying children’s networks of formal and informal supports such as friends, family, pets and teachers, and subsequently supporting children to navigate their way to additional supports and resources.
Children who have been exposed to family violence often develop their inner resources so that they can cope with the adversities in their lives (Mastropieri, Schussel, Forbes & Miller, 2015). Many children develop these internal resources through the active use of creative mediums such as music and art to cope with challenging situations. Other sources of resource development include external supports such as school, family, recreational activities and friends (Hines, 2015). Trauma-informed approaches emphasize the importance of therapeutic work focusing on the identification and development of coping resources so that children are more equipped to overcome adversity, as well as minimising trauma symptoms that are impacting children’s ability to function in everyday life (Tremblay, Hébert, & Piché, 1999). Therefore, I believe that it is important to provide a space for children to explore and identify their resources when supporting them in their recovery from trauma.

It is my recommendation that the resource oriented song-writing method would be a useful practice tool for music therapists to use in the early stages of therapeutic work with people who have experienced trauma and could assist with providing a basis for longer-term therapy. The resource-oriented songwriting method provided a way out of silence and an opportunity for children to talk about what is important to them. Ruud (2005) identified how songwriting can provide a creative and aesthetic context for people participating in music therapy to develop a new narrative through exploring their own life experience, losses and aspirations. The initial question that I asked in the songwriting interviews of ‘what helps you to do well in your life’ provides a basis for exploring resources that exist in people’s lives and this could be further explored through identifying important people, activities, coping strategies, internal thought processes, strengths, and goals and hopes for the future. Akin with Randi Rolvsjord’s (2010) approach to resource oriented music therapy in mental health, this approach to songwriting has the capacity to identify and to privilege the existing
resources that participants bring to music therapy, shifting the focus from the challenges and deficits that exist in their lives. Therefore, this approach to songwriting is likely to provide a sense of safety and containment in the early stages of therapeutic work when people are not ready to talk in detail about their experiences of trauma.

**Engagement of family and supportive systems.**

Through my experience of working as a music therapist in this context and embedding the knowledge gained through this research into my work, it is becoming clear that in order to create change in children’s lives we need to include their family and supportive systems wherever possible. The children in this research identified a range of people in their lives who provided various levels of support and helped them to ‘do well’ in their lives such as their family, friends and teachers. However, the forms of support that these people offered were variable. The children mostly spoke about their parents offering practical support such as buying them clothes, taking them to school and looking after them, though they sometimes struggled to identify the ways that their parents provided emotional support. Groves and colleagues (2002) have described the importance of ensuring that non-violent caregivers are able to be emotionally available to children after their experiences of violence and trauma, therefore reflecting upon and fostering support provided by family members is a fundamental part of the work.

As I described earlier in this chapter, research into therapeutic work with children experiencing trauma has indicated the central role that primary caregivers play in supporting children in times of adversity. Siegel (1999) identified that a positive and strong relationship between a child and their parent or caregiver is considered to be a key contributor in the development of resilience in children and in determining how well children do after their experience of trauma. Similarly, Aceves and Cookson (2007) have described how positive relationships with a care giver can help a child to develop a positive identity and to foster
healthy coping strategies. Hardaway and colleagues (2016) described how parental involvement incorporates attitudes and practices that promote positive parent-child relationships as well as providing emotional and practical support.

Within music therapy, Clarkson (2008) has identified the importance of engaging the adult survivor of violence, most commonly the mother, in the child’s recovery process. As mothers are often going through their own process of recovery in understanding their experiences and responses to abuse and violence, they often need support and guidance in responding to their child’s emotional responses in constructive and validating ways. Therefore, the engagement of the non-violent parent in the therapeutic process can help to facilitate positive communication and start to work towards rebuilding relationships that have been disrupted due to family violence. As we heard earlier in this thesis, Jasmine described how her family protected her and kept her safe. While she may have felt that her family were making conscious attempts to protect her, she was still exposed to ongoing family violence and as a result her relationship with her mother was impacted. A family centred approach to working with Jasmine and her mother in music therapy could have provided an opportunity for them to explore the ways that their relationship had been impacted, to provide an insight into Jasmine’s experience, and to subsequently identify creative ways of rebuilding their connection.

In their music therapy research in child protection with families identified as ‘at risk’ or with children who had been emotionally neglected, Jacobsen, McKinney and Holeck (2014) investigated how dyadic music therapy can work on communication and interaction between the parent and child (5-12 years). After a 10-week dyadic music therapy intervention, the parents reported being less stressed by their child’s behaviours and moods, and demonstrated more understanding and increased responsiveness to their child’s needs, in comparison to families who did not receive music therapy. Therefore, within this context, music therapy has
been shown to improve parenting capacity and parent/child interaction. Further work is needed to explore the applicability and appropriateness of this approach within the homelessness and family violence context.

Child welfare research.

It was important that I assumed responsibility as the adult and researcher to ensure that children felt protected and that they were able to participate in the research to the best of their ability. As a result, I played a crucial role in choosing which method the children would find meaningful and to design the research so that children had the opportunity to demonstrate the creative resources that they bring to research and to draw upon these wherever possible. I believe that there is a lot to learn from research with children, and that it is important that we respect and value what they chose to share with us in this research. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge the significance of children’s contributions and to take their perspectives seriously, in order to reduce the risk of perpetuating the cycle of children being unheard within the homelessness and family violence system.

The songs for both the individual and group interviews were written in a single session that last between 50-120 minutes. Future studies might consider writing the song over more than one session, to allow more space for reflection and discussion, and to provide more time to focus on the aesthetic quality of the song and for participants to be able to contribute with more confidence to the recording. The children were provided with a copy of the song recording after the interview, however, it would have added depth to the process to allow time and space to share the song with children’s family members if they wanted to share the song. This would have provided an opportunity for families to develop their understanding about their children’s resources and then provide opportunities for fostering these as children grow up. As I was no longer working with the children in a therapeutic capacity, I was not able to have these conversations with families following on from the
research but I believe this would have enhanced the process and positively contributed to children’s lives.

This research was designed to focus on children’s resources, in response to the unbalanced representation of children that was uncovered in the critical interpretative synthesis at the start of this thesis. In doing so, I specifically designed questions for the children in the group and individual songwriting sessions that focused on what helped them to ‘do well’ throughout difficult periods of their lives. Through these discussions, some children chose to describe their experiences of family violence and transience through reflecting on the significance of their resources in hard times of their lives. However, it is possible that some children felt that they couldn’t talk about their trauma in the creative space that they were offered due to the nature of the questions I was asking, and perhaps if given the opportunity some children would have liked to share their perspectives of their experience of trauma and adversity in more detail. Therefore, future research in this context might focus on understanding the full scope of children’s experiences by providing opportunities to explore both their challenges and their resources in the face of adversity.

The children identified a range of resources in their lives that they believed to be helpful to them. These understandings would be helpful to professionals such as social workers and psychologists who are offering therapeutic work to children in these contexts, in order to provide a basis for understanding the active efforts that children are taking in an attempt to cope with what is happening in their lives. Future studies might explore the ways that we can increase the capacity of workers in the field to use creative methods such as music and drawing in order to explore children’s resources and coping strategies. Through supporting professionals to have these conversations with children, we would be expanding upon children’s conscious awareness about how they are using these strategies and further
develop their understanding about the ways these strategies are unhelpful or helpful in their lives.

Research into the uses of music by adolescents in the field of mental health has demonstrated how music can be used to support development of identity; to foster interpersonal relationships; to develop self-determination and agency; and to establish ways of coping and regulating emotions (Gold, Saarikallio & McFerran, 2011). However, this discourse has also identified that young people may be using music in both healthy and unhealthy ways, which provides a useful framework for identifying possible risks such as depression and anxiety, in addition to exploring unhelpful coping strategies (McFerran, Garrido & Saarikallio, 2013). Through the music workshops in my research, the children explored some of the ways that music was helpful or unhelpful in their lives and used simple language to describe how music sometimes made them feel worse if ‘the song is bad’ or if they were ‘bored’. Future research might explore in more depth the function of music in the child welfare context, to explore whether children ever experience feeling triggered while listening to a particular song after they have used music as a way of escaping from the violence that is happening in their home. It would also be interesting to gain insights from children about the ways that they believe music therapy could support them when accessing services within the child welfare context.

As I discussed in the previous chapter, the process of emotionally engaging in the data and artistic products arising from this research had an impact on my professional, emotional and social life (Fairchild, under review). However, through the arts-based method of songwriting I was able to process and share my reflections and to find meaning in my experiences of vicarious trauma and resilience. The ongoing need to advocate for children’s voices to be taken seriously in this research is often a demanding commitment and responsibility, thus acknowledging the central and often emotional role of the researcher in
hearing and sharing children’s stories is crucial so that researcher’s can continue their important work in this area. Although there are likely to be challenges associated with conducting research with children in this context, it is my recommendation that we need to emphasize the importance of establishing appropriate and supportive forums for researchers, particularly those who are in the early stages of their research career. Consequently, further exploration is needed regarding the ways that developing researchers can be supported to sustain their research interests in child welfare and to draw upon their own creative resources to develop strategies that assist them to cope and to express the ways that the research has impacted them.

**Final Reflections**

The children in this research have described how they were able to make conscious decisions about the ways that they drew upon their internal and external resources, in an attempt to feel safe, connected and hopeful that their lives will be better in the future. Accordingly, it is important to recognize, understand and respect the resources that children bring with them to therapy to provide a solid foundation for child-led therapeutic work and to acknowledge the active efforts that children are making in spite of their difficult circumstances. Equally important is the responsibility of adults, professionals and the service system to provide opportunities for children to express these resources and to ensure children’s rights to access meaningful supports are fulfilled.

The participatory approach to research provided a creative space to explore children’s resources by co-constructing knowledge through songwriting and collaborative writing. The collaborative songwriting method provided a way out of silence and provided an opportunity for embedding children’s voices into the current discourse. Additionally, this research has demonstrated how children are able to be active and valued collaborators in research and
emphasizes the importance of recognising the creative resources that children bring to research.

An important strength of this study is that it represents an alternate narrative to the dominant descriptions in the literature that typically privilege representations of the challenges faced by children in this context. I hope that this new knowledge and perspective on children’s resources and experiences will impact the ways that children are viewed, understood and responded to within homelessness and family violence research and practice in years to come.
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Appendix Preface

In consultation with my supervisors, I have purposefully decided not to include the interview transcripts in the appendices. The collaborative analytic process has been described throughout the thesis, and included: data generation through brainstorming ideas for the song, collaborative analysis through the selection of ideas and the development of song lyrics, and presentation of the findings through developing the melody and recording the song. Therefore, in order to privilege children’s collaborative interpretations and understandings I felt it was best to share their individual stories and songs throughout the thesis as a way of representing their subjective experiences and highlighting which part of their stories they wanted to share. Additionally, as some of these children were living in unsafe living situations due to their experiences of family violence, it was important to protect children’s privacy by safeguarding the raw data from the interviews.
14 August 2015

Prof K.S. McFerran
SCHOOL OF MUSIC
The University of Melbourne

Dear Prof McFerran

I am pleased to advise that the Humanities and Applied Sciences Human Ethics Sub-Committee approved the following Project:

Project title: Understanding the role of music in the everyday lives of pre-adolescent children
Researchers: Prof K S McFerran, Dr G A Thompson, R Fairchild
Ethics ID: 1544921

The Project has been approved for the period: 13-Aug-2015 to 31-Dec-2015

It is your responsibility to ensure that all people associated with the Project are made aware of what has actually been approved.

Research projects are normally approved to 31 December of the year of approval. Projects may be renewed yearly for up to a total of five years upon receipt of a satisfactory annual report. If a project is to continue beyond five years a new application will normally need to be submitted.

Please note that the following conditions apply to your approval. Failure to abide by these conditions may result in suspension or discontinuation of approval and/or disciplinary action.

(a) Limit of Approval: Approval is limited strictly to the research as submitted in your Project application.

(b) Variation to Project: Any subsequent variations or modifications you might wish to make to the Project must be notified formally to the Human Ethics Sub-Committee for further consideration and approval. If the Sub-Committee considers that the proposed changes are significant, you may be required to submit a new application for approval of the revised Project.

(c) Incidents or adverse effects: Researchers must report immediately to the Sub-Committee anything which might affect the ethical acceptance of the protocol including adverse effects on participants or unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the Project. Failure to do so may result in suspension or cancellation of approval.

(d) Monitoring: All projects are subject to monitoring at any time by the Human Research Ethics Committee.

(e) Annual Report: Please be aware that the Human Research Ethics Committee requires that researchers submit an annual report on each of their projects at the end of the year, or at the conclusion of a project if it continues for less than this time. Failure to submit an annual report will mean that ethics approval will lapse.

(f) Auditing: All projects may be subject to audit by members of the Sub-Committee.

If you have any queries on these matters, or require additional information, please contact me using the details below.

Please quote the ethics registration number and the title of the Project in any future correspondence.

Yours sincerely

[Signature]

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Appendix 2: Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Approval

Rebecca Fairchild
16 Ballarat Road
HAMLYN HEIGHTS VIC 3215

Dear Ms Fairchild

Thank you for your research application to the Centre for Human Services Research and Evaluation (the Centre) entitled: “Understanding the role of music in the lives of pre-adolescent children experiencing homelessness and family violence”.

I am pleased to advise you the Department of Health and Human Services is able to support your project.

This approval is subject to you providing the Centre with the following:

- A copy of the accredited ethics approval related to this research within four to six weeks upon receiving this letter. The research cannot commence prior to receipt of this approval.
- A copy of the draft report for feedback prior to completion, submission or publication.
- A copy of the final report at the completion of the research.

Our approval is limited to this project. Please submit a separate external research application if you wish to use information collected from this research for other purposes.

Your department contact for the duration of the research will be Ms Deb Kearney (deb.kearney@dhhs.vic.gov.au or 5226 4513) Team Leader, Local Connections Unit, Barwon Area.

If you have any further queries, do not hesitate to contact the Centre at chsre@dhhs.vic.gov.au. You may also call Nicola Thomson from the Centre directly on 9036 1062.

We wish you all the best with your research.

Yours sincerely

[Signature]

Dr Brigid van Wanrooy
Manager, Centre for Human Services Research and Evaluation

16/9/2015
Appendix 3: Plain Language Statement

Understanding the role of music in the everyday lives of pre-adolescent children

Researcher details:
Name: Professor Katrina Skewes McFerran, Melbourne Conservatorium of Music – Responsible Researcher
Email: k.mcferran@unimelb.edu.au and University phone number: +61 3 8344 6541

Name: Dr Grace Thompson, Melbourne Conservatorium of Music – Co-Researcher
Email: graceat@unimelb.edu.au and University phone number: +61 3 9035 8978

Name: Rebecca Fairchild, Melbourne Conservatorium of Music – Graduate Researcher
Email: r.fairchild1@student.unimelb.edu.au and Bethany number: 5278 8122

Project details:
You are invited to participate in this project, which is being conducted by Professor Katrina Skewes McFerran, Dr Grace Thompson and Rebecca Fairchild of the Faculty of the VCA & MCM at The University of Melbourne. This project is a part of Rebecca’s PhD research and has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee and the Department of Human Services (DHS) Centre for Human Services Research and Evaluation.

The aim of this project is to enhance our understanding of the ways that pre-adolescent children use music in their everyday lives. Therefore, we are inviting children who have previously participated in the Music Art Play (MAP) group at Bethany to come along to a half-day music workshop and focus group in the September school holidays. We are interested to talk to you about your experiences, so that you can help us to know what music means to you. Your participation may help us to better support other children and families in the future.

What will I be asked to do?
Your participation in the project will involve:

1) Participating in a half-day music workshop and focus group at Bethany, including:
   • Sharing a song with the group that is important to you
   • Writing a song together with the group about what music means to you
   • Brainstorming ideas for other musical activities you would like to do in the future
The workshop will be audio recorded so that we can remember what everyone talks about. This means we will be recording your voice throughout the workshop. We will also record the song we write together, and you will receive a CD with the song after the workshop. The music workshop will run for about 4 hours and we can provide transport to and from the workshop if needed.

2) Optional follow up individual session which will involve writing your own song:

After the workshop, we will ask you whether you would also like to have an individual songwriting session with Rebecca. It is your choice whether or not you choose to participate in this part of the project. In the individual session you will make up your own song and talk further with Rebecca about what music means to you. It is expected this session might last up to 2 hours. We will record the song together and you will receive a CD with your song on it. You can choose whether you would like this session to occur at school, home or at Bethany. It is okay if you decide not to have an individual songwriting session.

Participation in this project is voluntary, which means it is your decision about whether or not you would like to be involved. Your decision about whether or not to participate in this project will not impact your involvement in current or future support services in any way.

If you change your mind about participating, you are also free to withdraw anything you say until the data has been collated and it is no longer possible to separate your contributions from the overall data.

Are there any risks?

We don’t think there are any problems that will come from joining in with this project, but if you feel uncomfortable or unsure, you don’t have to answer the questions. If the questions make you feel upset, please let Rebecca know, and she can arrange for you to get any help you might want.

What if I don’t want people to know information about me?

All information that we collect about you will be kept private. We will ask you to choose a special name so that others will not recognize you. Because there will be small numbers of children in this project, there is a slight chance that some people may figure out that you were involved, but we will try our best to make sure this doesn’t happen.
Who else will know what I say and do?
All information from this project will be kept safely in a locked filing cabinet, and we will save all of the computer files in a safe place so that only the researchers can access them. All of the files will have a password and will be destroyed 7 years after the project finishes.

It is important to know that the information may be accessed in extreme circumstances, due to legal requirements, such as if we were really worried about your own or others safety.

What if I think there is something not right about this project?
If you have any questions or concerns, or would like further information about the research project, please contact the researchers. Contact details are listed at the start of this Plain Language Statement.

This project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of Melbourne, but if you have any questions or concerns you are welcome to contact the: Executive Officer, Human Research Ethics, The University of Melbourne, ph: 8344 2073. The Department of Human Services (DHS) Centre for Human Services Research and Evaluation has also approved this project.

What happens next?
Thank you for reading this and thinking about being in the research project. A worker from Bethany will call you within the next week to ask you whether you are interested in being involved. If you choose to participate, Rebecca will then call you to arrange a time to visit you at home to discuss the project with you.

Whether or not you choose to participate, this Plain Language Statement is yours to keep. If you do decide to participate, you will need to sign the Informed Consent Form, which tells us that you have read and understood this information, and agree to participate in the project.

Your participation in this project could really help children in the future. We look forward to talking with you if you choose to be involved.
Appendix 4: Informed Consent Form

Understanding the role of music in the everyday lives of pre-adolescent children

Researchers:

**Responsible Researcher:** Professor Katrina Skewes McFerran  
k.mcferran@unimelb.edu.au

**Co-Researcher:** Dr Grace Thompson  
graceat@unimelb.edu.au

**Graduate Researcher:** Rebecca Fairchild  
r.fairchild1@student.unimelb.edu.au

Melbourne Conservatorium of Music, The University of Melbourne  
PhD Research Project

I, ____________________________ (parent/guardian’s name), agree for my child ____________________________ (child’s name) to participate in this research project which will explore the ways that pre-adolescent children use music in their everyday lives.

I understand that my child’s participation in the project is voluntary, and my child is free to withdraw at any time.

I have read the information provided to me in the Plain Language Statement and realize that for the purposes of research:

**My child’s participation in this project will involve:**

1) Participating in a half-day music workshop and focus group at Bethany  
   • Sharing a song with the group that is important to them  
   • Writing a song together with the group about music  
   • Brainstorming ideas for other musical activities they would like to do in the future

2) Participating in an individual songwriting session with the graduate researcher (OPTIONAL)  
   • Meeting individually with the graduate researcher to write another song and talk further about what music means to them

I agree that the researchers may use my child’s contributions as described in the Plain Language Statement.
I acknowledge that I have been informed that:

- Every effort will be made so that the identity of my child will remain anonymous, and that they will be referred to by a pseudonym (pretend name) when referred to in the project and in any publications or presentations about this project.

- There are limitations to protecting my child’s identity because of the small number of participants. However, the confidentiality of any personal information I provide will be safeguarded subject to any legal requirements.

I understand that:

- The entire music workshop and focus group will be audio recorded

- The individual interview will be audio recorded (if my child chooses to be involved)

- De-identified information about my family may be used to help understand my child’s descriptions

- This signed consent form will be retained by Bec

Please tick the following:

I consent for the following to be used in publications and presentations arising from the project:

- Audio of my child, including singing and talking □ yes

- Song lyrics created by my child □ yes

- Artwork created by my child □ yes

I confirm I have discussed this with my child and they have provided consent to participate. By signing this consent form, I provide consent for my child to participate in the research project.

________________________________________________________________________(Child's signature)__________________________(Date)

________________________________________________________________________(Parent/Guardian Signature)________________________{(Date)
Minerva Access is the Institutional Repository of The University of Melbourne

Author/s: Fairchild, Rebecca Emily

Title: Collaborative songwriting with children experiencing homelessness and family violence to understand their resources

Date: 2018

Persistent Link: http://hdl.handle.net/11343/212530

File Description: Collaborative songwriting with children experiencing homelessness and family violence to understand their resources

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