



GRANT REPORT

grant org:	Musical Care Network International
grant type:	Medium Grant (£3,000)
project/event:	'Musical Care as a Balm for Grief' – Event #1 in a series of events around Musical Care for Music Therapists of Colour by the 'We Are Monster' Network
project date:	29 March 2025
location:	Leicester, UK
attn:	Neta Spiro, Katie Rose Sanfilippo Musical Care Network International

Overview

The We Are Monster Global Network for Music Therapists of Colour received confirmation of our medium-sized grant (for £3,000) from the Musical Care Network International on 9th January 2025. We held our in-person event, 'Musical Care as a Balm for Grief' in Leicester, UK on 29th March 2025.

Further to receiving confirmation of the grant award, we began planning our event, which we intended to centre around the expressions and processing of grief for People of Colour (PoC). In particular, we wanted to create a space for our network members, and members of the public to come together to explore this using collective musical care, ie. through engaging in improvisational musical play as a group of people. As music therapists of colour, we have seen how in-the-moment group and community musical engagement can access deep-seated emotions which otherwise stay dormant and go ignored. Historically, the lack of safe spaces for People and Communities of Colour (P/CoC) to prioritise grief and trauma processing has often manifested in chronic poor physical and mental health.

COVID-19 exposed the [devastating and racist disparities](#) in healthcare in the UK [National Health Service \(NHS\)](#). Communities of Colour (CoC) experienced higher death tolls and overt racist treatment within health services. The level of grief which emerged from this was not just specific to the pandemic, but revealed an inter/transgenerational element, the depths of which CoC are still grappling with half a decade later. Our event hoped to address some of this in order to open the door to ongoing conversations and community cohesion through the experience of creating culturally sensitive musical spaces which could facilitate and hold the expression of Black Grief, and the equivalent for other PoC.

We are pleased to attach the consolidated video of the event [here](#).

Event Plan

To create a supportive space for Black African, or Black, Asian, and Brown (BAOBAB) individuals to engage with grief, an event was specifically designed to acknowledge the distinct ways in which PoC process loss. This distinction arises from the profound impact of transgenerational trauma held within the bodies of BAOBAB communities, setting their experience of grief apart from that typically understood within white contexts. To facilitate the initial exploration of these complex emotions, the event centred around a screening of the powerful film, *"Our Grief - Black Women Speak"*.

Securing the participation of author and filmmaker Dr Yansie Rolston was crucial; we obtained her direct permission to feature the film as a cornerstone of our gathering. Through established grassroots community connections, we successfully partnered with The Phoenix Cinema & Art Centre in Leicester, UK. This collaboration allowed us to not only rent a dedicated cinema room for the screening but also to secure an adjacent space, providing participants with an immediate and seamless transition into musical processing activities directly following the film. This thoughtful design aimed to support a holistic and culturally attuned approach to understanding and healing.

EVENT PLANNING / AIMS	EVENT OUTCOMES
<p>Promotion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• We reached out to the We Are Monster Network, the Black, African and Asian Therapy Network (BAATN), the British Association for Music Therapy (BAMT), as well as local Leicester art networks connected to the Phoenix. The event was specifically catered to P/CoC and this was made explicit on the ticketing page. Members from other therapy disciplines, as well as members of the public were invited in order to gain a sense for how employing musical care in the processing of grief may influence public policy in the future.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The event was promoted in these organisations' bulletins and emailers. Grassroots networking in Leicester provided us with the first wave of signups for the event.• Through 'We Are Monster' we did a second round of internal promotion. The uptake was lower than we had hoped as train travel proved expensive for many members. Although we are still committed to holding as many in-person events as possible, we are definitely seeing the effects of the current cost of living crisis in play.
<p>Ticketing & Attendance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Eventbrite was used for ticketing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• We received 27 tickets orders in total. 7 tickets were ordered by We Are Monster Network members, and 19 tickets were ordered by members of the public.• 10 people (excluding 3 organisers) attended in total. 9 were ticket-holders and 1 was a walk-in.• Please see the order report for detailed information.

<p><i>Aims (as in proposal):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a better understanding of grief, as it pertains to P/CoC • Provide a space to gently approach personal, collective, and intergenerational grief through a film screening • Facilitate a safe and supportive space for processing grief through musical engagement and care, with further discussion 	<p><i>Outcomes:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With the film, we found a way to invite participants into a reflection on grief for P/CoC, and we managed to offer a space for processing through musical engagement. However, this space was not private or soundproof enough, which was a letdown for some of the participants. • Although not derivable from the data, the exchange of knowledge was very much a characteristic of the discussion and fellowship amongst participants. The group discussed language and meaning, shared experiences of health and health services, and the significance music plays in everyday life for PoC. • Sustained conversation with participants around what grief “looks like” for P/CoC and the lack of spaces for P/CoC to express grief in culturally-specific/sensitive ways highlighted the urgent need for many more spaces to engage in community work around grief and musical care.
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Please see the reflections below for an expansion of the points above.

Pre / Post Surveys

Surveys were sent out both prior to and following the event to gain more insight into both attendees’ understandings of using music and musical care for emotional processing, as well as specifically in grief processing. Surveys were separated between We Are Monster network members and attendees who were not music therapists, as most music therapists are aware of and more familiar with using music in the service of emotional processing.

[Pre-Survey We Are Monster Members](#)

[Post-Survey We Are Monster Members](#)

[Pre-Survey Non-Music Therapists / Members of the Public](#)

[Post-Survey Non-Music Therapists / Members of the Public](#)

We aimed to harness the results of the surveys to enhance our own comprehension of the use and benefits or drawbacks of musical care in P/CoC’s daily lives.

Survey Response

8 people completed the pre-surveys and 5 people completed the post-survey. Of these, 3 people completed both the pre- and post-surveys.

Expected Outcomes (as in proposal):

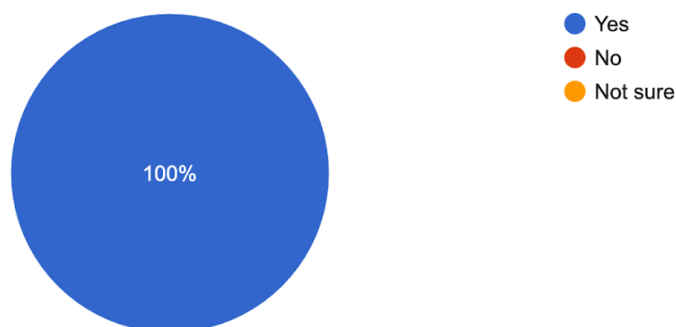
- Data gathered will inform next steps in our research on musical care practices, including educational materials on the manifestations of grief for P/CoC, and instruct the format of future events
- Our report may impact healthcare recommendations of musical care for P/CoC
- Employing musical care in processing ongoing and intergenerational grief will strengthen ties amongst MToC, as well as with the wider community of therapists of colour
- Engagement of non-music therapists in the event will ensure that the power of musical care, well-known within the music therapy sector, is recognised not only within music therapy training, practice, and research but also impacts wider policy

Survey Results:

- With a low uptake of survey responses, we were unable to positively determine the impact of the event through the data. However, both the limited data gathered as well as the discussion during the event pointed to the need for many more spaces and events to engage in musical care for CoC so as to be able to strengthen community ties as well as build necessary resources for practice.
- While the response was low, all post-survey respondents answered “Yes” to the importance of “intentionally creating more space for us to attend to our grief as PoC”.

Do you think it is important to intentionally create more space for us to attend to our grief as People of Colour?

4 responses



- 2 respondents said that the event had changed their perception and use of musical care, although only 1 elaborated on how:

“It has changed - the act of participating in improvised music gave me such a relief from the anger/ agitation I left with after watching the film. I thought “musical care” was more passive process.”

- For Music Therapists of Colour (MToC) who often provide musical care for others, and who may engage in personal musical care more often than in groups, engaging in musical care as a community uncovered new layers of connection, as well as questions around how to be musically authentic.

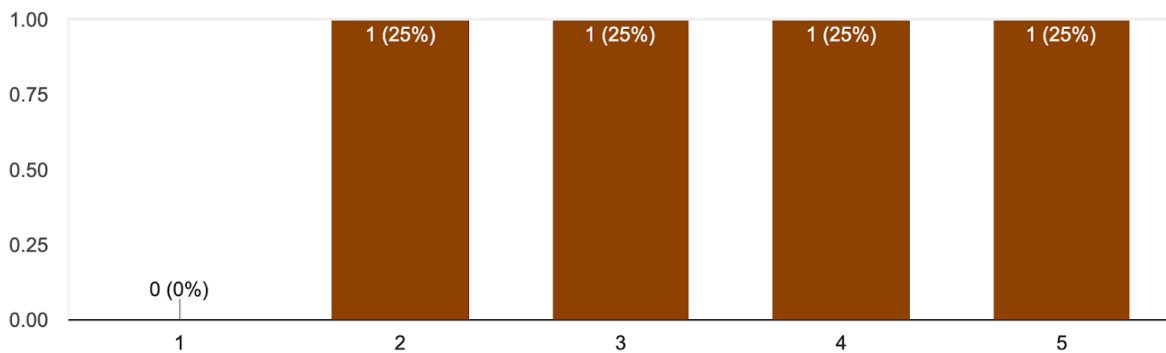
“I appreciated [to be] with other people a lot while making music as I use music making on my own to cope with everyday life, although not necessarily unconsciously. Feeling some kind of connection is a powerful thing.”

“There is much to unpack here. Personal musical care feels intimate, shaped by memory and survival. Community musical care offers the possibility of shared resonance—but also the risk of cultural flattening. I am left reflecting on how we might honour individual authenticity while co-creating something that holds space for all voices, not just the dominant or more confident ones in the room.”

- Responses about the effectiveness of using musical care as a balm for grief for PoC were more mixed.

How effective do you feel this event was in using musical care as a balm for our grief as people of colour? (ie. did we do what we said on the tin?)

4 responses



- Some respondents felt that the space and/or the music were not contained enough to hold the deep and painful experiences of grief which might have been brought up by the film:

“There felt a risk of politics or even Covid conspiracy entering the space. That wouldn't be supportive or sensitive to the bereaved.”

“Looking at the improvisation space specifically, I found that it lacked the necessary boundaries and sense of containment to support the deep, often painful emotional work required when engaging with racial and transgenerational trauma. Grief rooted in such complex histories needs time, structure, and care to surface meaningfully. Without this, there is a risk of brushing past what is too important to ignore.”

- A very serious observation about the leadership of the event is something for us to take into urgent consideration for future events:

“...despite the focus on grief within communities of colour, particularly Black communities, there were no Black-identifying leaders facilitating the event. This absence echoes wider societal patterns and can inadvertently reinforce feelings of invisibility or erasure. For an event that seeks to speak to the grief of Black people, especially considering our historical experiences [...] it is crucial that the leadership team visibly reflects those it aims to represent. This creates both conscious and subconscious affirmation of safety and belonging.”

We have since been in touch with this participant who has expressed an intention to formally take on some leadership in upcoming events.

Our Reflections

Our aim was to provide a space to sit with, process, and express grief as experienced by P/CoC in a collective musical care setting. We are intrinsically aware as PoC that we ourselves need these spaces in a world where unresolved and unexpressed trans/intergenerational and ongoing grief is impacting our physical, mental, and spiritual health. Through networking and building community within the We Are Monster network, we were also aware that while our experiences and expression of grief are very culturally-specific, this is ultimately a collective need. Equally, as music therapists who are more often in positions of delivering musical care, we rarely get the chance to engage in community-based musical care. As an extension of this, we wanted to open the space up to non-music therapists who may never have considered acts of musical care in their own grief processes.

For us (Davina, Jonathan, and Michaela), using mixed media, such as the film by Dr. Yansie Rolston, was an extremely powerful invitation into the language of grief for PoC. Although we did not manage to gather as much data as we would have liked, we know from the group discussion and further conversation that this was a similar experience for the other participants.

While The Phoenix facilities are very accessible and accommodating, one thing we did not account for was that the space which they would offer us for musical care processing was not private or soundproof. This meant that we could hear sounds from the café below and that members of the public could hear our music too, and for some of us, this hindered our ability to speak or play as freely, or perhaps even as loudly, as we might have liked. We should have been more specific about our requirements for the space as this would likely have altered the musical and conversational dynamic significantly.

Our other learning came from the astute observation of one participant that a one-size-fits-all musical care experience for processing grief for CoC was potentially too narrow a scope, given that between all of our different cultural backgrounds, grief presents in ways too expansive to capture:

“During the improvisation at this event, I initially found it difficult to connect. But then I caught a vibe—something rooted in gospel—that allowed me to contribute authentically. A few people responded to that, which led me to wonder: were other cultural identities in the room also struggling to be heard? Was the collective sound we created truly reflective of everyone’s roots, or were we unintentionally blending into a new musical identity, perhaps a new way of being?”

Together with the observation about the lack of Black-representation in the leadership of the event, these learnings will form a critical base from which to construct further events.

Nevertheless, during the discussion and subsequent community meal, the direct one-to-one connections people made were palpable. As mentioned above, although we were not able to derive this from the data, the exchange of knowledge and experience was also very much a characteristic of the discussion and fellowship amongst participants. In fact, we were introduced to the term BAOBAB above as an alternative to the much-objected BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) acronym by a participant at this event. It is hard to describe the kind of relief that comes from finding language that resonates in spaces which require no translation. Furthermore, the rich conversation that weaved in through the musical play, the blending of voices, and both the vulnerability and resistance some participants showed were clear signals that we simply need to create more of these spaces so that we can explore and learn how to support P/CoC in the wide variety of ways we need, through a more careful consideration of musical care: what it looks like for each person and community, and how we can come together in safe and brave spaces to grow and thrive together.

Overall Conclusions and Further Recommendations

As music therapists, we are deeply committed to the transformative power of musical care, advocating for its holistic application in fostering mental, emotional, and physical well-being and rehabilitation. This inherent passion compels us to extend the reach and understanding of musical care beyond traditional clinical settings and into more accessible public spaces. In the current climate of protracted NHS waiting lists, dwindling public services, and a pervasive cost-of-living crisis, access to essential mental health support, including private therapy, remains out of reach for a significant portion of the population.

This challenge is particularly acute for BAOBAB communities who are further marginalised by the system and often grapple with unresolved grief compounded by the unique burden of transgenerational trauma. For these communities, the simple yet profound acts and practices of engaging with musical care on a daily basis hold immense potential. Such accessible musical engagement could offer a vital, potentially life-saving outlet for processing complex emotions, fostering resilience, and supporting healing when formal therapeutic services are inaccessible or culturally misaligned. It underscores our belief that musical care, when brought into daily life, can serve as a critical tool for self-management and community support in navigating complex emotional landscapes.

As such, we are committed to organising more events for CoC to engage in this very targeted form of musical care. Becoming more conscious of what is needed by diverse communities in such events, and ensuring we have the right leadership involved in planning and running them is crucial. We aim to then gather more relevant data in order to shape and influence public policy so that musical care can be openly embraced as a powerful tool for mental, physical, and spiritual health and wellbeing.

Yours sincerely,

Davina, Jaytee, and Michaela
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