



 PercussionPlay
Outdoor Musical Instruments

Outdoor Musical Instruments for
Children's Hospitals

Using Music to Support Children through Healthcare Experiences

Hospitalization can be a frightening experience, particularly for children and young people (CYP). Suddenly having to leave everything familiar; home, school, friends, and the people important to them and stopping their favorite activities, can cause acute anxiety and stress to the child and their family. Negative feelings are intensified when facing chronic or severe and life-threatening diseases.

As well as fear, hospitalized children can also experience feelings of loss of control, loneliness, and frustration. This can result in problems with sleep, nightmares, irritability, and aggressiveness.

During hospitalization, play is highly therapeutic for children, contributing to their physical and emotional well-being and recovery. Playing reduces stress, increases happiness, and is a great way to stay mentally and physically active. Many hospitals have adequate indoor play spaces and opportunities available to children; however, there is an increasing number of pediatric specialists who advocate for usable outdoor play spaces for all hospitalized children and their families. Something which is currently sadly lacking in many hospital settings.



Music in Therapeutic and Healing Gardens

In recent years we have seen a significant upswing of interest in our outdoor musical instruments located in children's healthcare settings, particularly in therapeutic, sensory, and healing gardens.

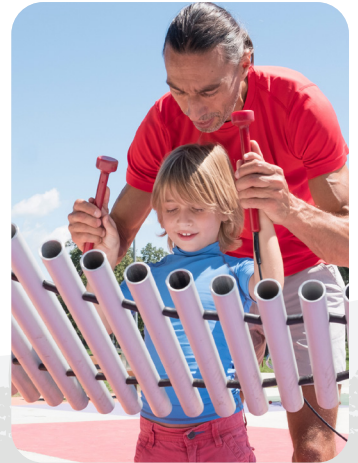
Where previously, the closest the patients were to the outdoors was by looking out their window; these healing green spaces for play, social support, and quiet reflection help give patients and families a sense of control and normalcy under stress. They help bring the outdoors to children who must spend disproportionate time inside and build community among patients, family, and staff.

Playing musical instruments in a garden accompanied by the buzz of bees and the chatter of birds can help a child process a series of emotions, safely express negative feelings, and act as a form of communication and self-expression. These spaces allow families to play and spend valuable time together away from the noisy wards, helping children achieve a stronger feeling of normality and continuation of their past life while alleviating parents' anxiety.

"The instruments have been great for music therapy. Being durable, weatherproof, and easy to wipe down, means I've been able to use them both inside and outside. The pentatonic xylophone has a lovely tone and allows the children to engage in shared music-making without playing any 'wrong notes'"

♪Olly Lowery♪

Music Therapist at Starship Children's Hospital



DinoSOAR Garden at Palm Beach Childrens Hospital, FL

The President of the Palm Beach Children's Hospital Foundation had an idea to create a pediatric garden for children and families to get out into the garden and play. She decided what was needed was a dinosaur garden – this was apt considering Florida's tropical weather - and began with a sidewalk circling the area and seven giant dinosaurs. A small waterfall and plants were quickly included for sensory impact, and patients soon began to enjoy the benefits of the healing garden.

The garden aimed to help reduce the trauma associated with a hospital stay and provide a positive hospital experience. With a brachiosaurus that is two stories high and a child-size baby t-rex, the healing garden at Palm Beach Children's Hospital is not your regular hospital garden and is pretty spectacular.

It has evolved since its creation in 2012, and today the healing garden is filled with music after outdoor musical instruments were installed to help provide more interactivity for visitors.



While there was a lot to see in the garden, the Child Life team at the hospital realized that interactive, playful items would enhance the area further.

For a Bright Future Inc was one of the donors that wanted to add instruments from Percussion Play. Lisa worked with Percussion Play to help envision what they could put in the garden – [Rainbow Sambas](#), [Harmony Bell](#) flower, and the [Bell Lyre](#) that could be engraved with the donor's logo.

The instruments have been a big hit with children and adults from the rehab unit at the hospital next door. With picnic tables, tranquil music, and lights at night, this is a space everyone at the hospital enjoys. It allows patients and families to forget about their treatment and escape into a magical garden.

“A child’s job is to play, so we quickly knew we had to add in something fun to play with.”

♪ Lisa Barron ♪

Paediatric Office Supervisor at Palm Beach Children’s Hospital



The Jess Mackie Music Garden, Scotland

Patients, visitors, and staff at Edinburgh Children's Hospital can now benefit from a new multi-sensory garden created in the loving memory of an East Lothian teenager with a passion for music. The sensory space was fully funded by the Jess Mackie Memorial Fund (JMMF), which supports therapeutic music projects within the hospital in memory of Jess, who passed away in 2018 at 14.

The garden pays tribute to her love of music. It encourages children and young people to have fun making melodies together in a relaxing, non-clinical setting away from the wards. The Music Garden is a vibrant, interactive outdoor space that ensures children don't miss out on the joy of creative play and music-making while in the hospital. It provides an oasis for reflective, educational, and creative endeavors, such as reading, writing and art.



It features six Percussion Play outdoor musical instruments nestled within ornamental grasses. Along wide wheelchair-friendly walkways are the [Congas Trio](#) in bespoke colors, [Tembos](#), wall-mounted [Rainbow Chimes](#), a [Harmony Bell](#) Flower in C-Major, [Grand Marimba](#), and [Babel Drum](#).

This nurturing and healing environment also boasts a teepee, bird's nest swing, plenty of seating areas, shade, and shelter. Music, plants, trees, and flowers boost positivity, reduce stress and anxiety, lower blood pressure, ease muscle tension, and promote relaxation. Children in hospital, away from their friends and wider family, need all that!

The healing garden will offer a place for play, social support, and quiet reflection, quietly restoring a sense of control and normalcy for patients and families under stress. A chance to bring the outdoors to children forced to spend a lot of time inside and help build community among patients, family, and staff.

“Many children and young people in hospital feel vulnerable because they lack control over what’s happening to them. Music can have an enormous and positive impact, helping ignite a spark and give back a sense of control”

♪ **Michael & Jackie Mackie** ♪

Parents of Jess Mackie



Interactive Music Garden at Childrens Healing Center, MI

The Children's Healing Center is a year-round non-profit recreational center for children who have weakened immune systems. Located in Michigan, they provide a safe, clean place for children with compromised immune systems to gather, engage with expert staff, learn, and play. The original music garden at the Children's Healing Center was installed back in the summer of 2016 and has proved so popular with the children, parents, and staff, that they decided to include more instruments. By expanding the interactive and musical outdoor space they can give the children an opportunity to go outside with other children and families to have fun.



The garden had to be imaginative, playful, accessible, and interactive. Most importantly, it had to be specially constructed to lower the risk of infection from germs. Featuring hypoallergenic plants, fun animal statues, and special shade areas, the Center was focused on including outdoor musical instruments in the design. As wooden instruments may absorb moisture or other germs from the environment, the easy-to-clean and maintain stainless steel and aluminum musical instruments from Percussion Play were the perfect solution.

With the support from the junior league of Grand Rapids, the Dogwood Foundation, and Mieka Downing, they were able to add colorful [Congas](#) and a [Duo](#) to their musical garden. Installation was carried out by a local engineering company and friends of the center Fishbeck, Thompson, Carr & Huber, Inc.

This outdoor space is a triumph of teamwork for the staff, volunteers, and local companies involved, all keen to help assemble and install the garden's features and be part of the fantastic transformation.

“We are extremely happy with the instruments and our children love them. And so do our neighbors who have commented how glorious it is to hear the children outside playing them!”

♪ **Staff at The Children's Healing Center** ♪



Using Music as Creative Therapy

There is a strong link between children's creativity and well-being. Creative development contributes to children's moods as they lose themselves in their thoughts and ideas. Engaging in creative behaviors improves brain function, mental health, and physical health. Art and music are influential in their expressive capabilities.

Making music combines physical activity with a creative outcome and is highly soothing, helping to relieve anxiety and stress. Once mastered, patients can lose themselves in the gentle movements required when making music, boosting their self-esteem and confidence.

Adding instruments that require different actions and produce different sounds serves as a healing sensory environment while enhancing children's play. Drumming can be powerfully helpful and healing in times of stress, anxiety, and trauma. With a focus on the now, repetitive drumming can invoke a relaxed state of mind in much the same way that meditation or breathing exercises provide focus and stress relief.

Sound has a direct connection to healing, with sound healing having ancient roots in cultures all over the world. The resonance and vibration of sounds, such as those made from our chimes or xylophones, can release stress and emotional blockages in the body, calm the mind and bring a sense of peace and well-being.

Playing music outside encourages social interaction and opportunities to give and receive positive affirmation. They offer an outlet for children and young people to express their emotions and make sense of them in a format different from the traditional discussion of feelings.



Creating Usable Outdoor Play Spaces

Outdoor spaces such as gardens are often treated as peripheral landscapes, not necessarily intended for the healing process of patients. But being outside and experiencing the natural world, even in small ways, provides a balance of multi-sensory stimulation instead of the overload or deprivation found within the ward. This, along with the resulting play and socialization, can have significant restorative effects.

Cheerful open spaces offer nurses, play practitioners, and therapists an alternative area to calm or stimulate children away from the artificial lighting, strange noises, and smells of being inside the hospital. Outside, children can experience natural elements, including rain, sunlight, shadow, fresh air, and fun features such as play equipment and musical instruments.

By providing opportunities for self-expression, problem-solving, creative thinking, role-playing, and imagination, outdoor play allows children to feel complete control over their situations. Being outside can help release the hormones responsible for a positive mood. Plus, fresh air and exercise can tire them, helping to address poor sleep patterns.

A music garden creates a safe space and an excellent distraction from the demands of hospital life. Let's advocate for usable outdoor play spaces with music for all hospitalized children and their families





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