

MusicAbility Case Study



"If only we had a permanent music therapy studio in Penzance, it would make all the difference," said Ruth Boulton, one of the co-founders of Community Interest Company (CIC) MusicAbility.

Ruth admitted this was something she had been saying for years and so when the opportunity to acquire one of the town's larger and pre-eminent buildings came along, they jumped at the chance.

"The effect on our clients is major, people are coming to a place that is dedicated solely to meet their needs. It feels safe, secure, and purposeful and it will enable us to do so much more.

Clients can come and use this wonderful facility and appealing instruments to express and communicate through music and sound. It's almost like a retreat providing our users with a greater resource to develop confidence and a more robust sense of self, health, and social connection," said Ruth.

A dedicated music therapy room was the first stage in the development of the organisation's new building on Parade Street in Penzance, after being given a generous donation which allowed MusicAbility to acquire the property.

MusicAbility was created in 2017 by music educator Tim Boulton and his wife, music psychotherapist Ruth to respond to changes in therapy and education in Cornwall – the company delivers work that was previously part of Cornwall Council's services.

MusicAbility was established to own the building and promote music, education, and music psychotherapy. It operates with a team of ten trustees, bringing a wealth of experience and expertise to the charity.





Restoring the glory

Over the next five years, the CIC plans to redevelop the historical Parade Street building, working closely with The Architectural Heritage Fund (AHF) to sensitively restore it to its former glory and bring it back into the 21st Century for modern day use.

Tim Boulton said, "Retaining the building's historic features and beautiful original detailing is vitally important. Any alterations need to be carefully considered – we want to preserve the heritage in the building but bring it up to standard and make it a modern, thriving, and lively public centre."

The building, located on one of Penzance's oldest streets, dates back over 200 years and has been used as the town's private subscription library and public newspaper reading room in the past. Now MusicAbility aims to turn the property into a multi-use music therapy centre, performance, and rehearsal space.

Tim added, "We want it to be somewhere for the local community to use, to participate in, generate wellbeing and use as a resource, with a real sense of community engagement. Whether that's for choirs, parent and child groups, youth and adult music-making opportunities, there should be lots of participation."

"In the last few months violinist Emma Stansfield has performed regular solo concerts into care homes streamed live from the building and young musicians have received coaching and given in-house performances too."

"There is so much potential for people to come here to hear concerts or play music, as well as attend performances from local, national, and even internationally renowned musicians."

The next stage of development is creating a second 'spacious yet cosy and contained' music therapy facility in the basement, complete with a lift to allow clients with mobility issues and wheelchair users level access. The CIC has a long history of running therapy groups for adults with complex support needs, but many of those groups were curtailed due to Covid. Around 15 clients a week currently attend the centre and therapy groups will start again as soon as the basement is ready.

Following that, plans include a three-storey extension out into the existing car park recreating the original footprint of the listed building. This will house a new public-facing entrance, looking out towards the Acorn theatre and near The Exchange gallery to create a small arts quarter in the centre of Penzance.

Other works include soundproofing, double glazing, a new stage and seating in the main hall, toilets, flexi kitchen and reception space, office, storage, and work space for visiting music teachers.

A beacon for sustainability



Ruth said, "We want to create a new extension, which is contemporary and eco-friendly. Full of light and openness. It's very important that we build as ethically and sustainably as we can, creating a low-carbon footprint and becoming a beacon for sustainability. We would also like to reinstate the importance of the building's position in the town and give it back the identity it had 200 years ago."

Helen Willett, Head of Business Services at Coodes Solicitors, was instrumental in helping MusicAbility to acquire the Parade Street building in Penzance.

She said, "It's going to be a fantastic resource for Penzance and the wider area, and I was delighted to be involved in advising on the acquisition of the building for MusicAbility. It will, undoubtedly, change what the CIC is able to deliver and how it delivers its services in the future."

MusicAbility had worked for over a year with Helen Willett on securing the property. Tim said, "We are incredibly grateful to Helen for going above and beyond. I have found her to be very approachable, easy to work with, personable and super-efficient. She is very reliable."

"Helen has a very personal way of doing things and we have complete confidence in her legal expertise. It's like talking to a friend and yet she has all the answers. She is extremely good at what she does."



An exciting future

The priority now for MusicAbility is raising and increasing awareness of the facility and fundraising to support the building works, which are estimated to cost in the region of £500,000. MusicAbility hopes to access funding from other charitable bodies and donations from local businesses and organisations.

Ruth added, "There have been several generous donations, for which we are hugely grateful, from the gift of a piano and other musical instruments, as well as acoustic glazing and heaters. We have been incredibly fortunate and well supported so far. We have a way to go and there is much more to be done."

MusicAbility aims to run a public consultation soon and is keen to engage with the local community and seek their opinions and requirements on how the centre might be developed.

Tim said, "We want the centre to be life-enhancing and it doesn't matter what your musical tastes or genre, it must appeal and become a resource that people want to access."

For more information and to contact MusicAbility visit www.musicabilitycic.uk