

Draft

For immediate release. With two images.

### **Therapist-turned-author's bittersweet celebration**

A Christchurch music therapist and researcher has told how the Ukrainian conflict has tinged the success of her first book's publication with sadness.

Dr Lisa Margetts, a Clinical Music Therapist at Autism Unlimited's Portfield School in Parley is the author of Intercultural Music Therapy Consultation Research: Shared Humanity in Collaborative Theory and Practice.

Published by Routledge, the book sets out a practice-based framework for teachers, psychologists and music therapists to support hard-to-reach children with complex needs through musical interaction, creativity and play.

The book draws on detailed research, interviews and case studies Lisa amassed while working closely with teachers and children in a special school in Minsk in The Republic of Belarus.

Lisa's book has been called: "powerful", "moving" and "a highly valuable resource for music therapy and education students and professionals" by reviewers.

However, Belarus, which is bordered by Russia to the east and northeast and Ukraine to the south, is now embroiled in the bitter conflict between those two countries and Lisa has lost contact with the teachers and children who started as her research participants - and became her friends.

She explained: "In my previous job before Autism Unlimited, I had worked on a project to help build a school for children with complex needs in Belarus. The staff responded immediately to the idea of using musical sounds as communication and so invited myself and a colleague back to support them in their own work, to optimise their relationships with the children.

"I made five visits to Belarus overall and they were an extraordinary group of people, so responsive to the training offered and so full of ideas and enthusiasm."

She continued: "Although the policy in Belarus is towards closure of state-run orphanages, movement is slow and there are still institutions in which children with complex needs can find themselves. The teachers we worked with wanted to be able to offer these children the very best they possibly could and worked long hours to do that.

"Of course, there were many challenges, not least in terms of working across very different cultures and the language barrier. Through an interpreter we were able to form strong relationships and they became our friends through our shared commitment to the children at the school.

Lisa's book features data gathered from 16 interviews with participants, as well as a detailed case study on a Belarusian teacher and child with complex needs.

She has also developed a music therapy consultation programme based around her research in Belarus, which is proving highly successful with teaching staff at Portfield School who work with autistic children.

She said: "It's very exciting to see my research in print. I tried hard to lay out it out in the Belarusian participant's own words as much as possible and I think that's perhaps what makes it so powerful. It also makes me very proud to know that our teaching framework was fed directly into the Belarusian national curriculum for special education.

"But since the conflict between Russia and Ukraine began, we have been unable to visit or even contact Belarus and it breaks my heart that I cannot share it with them.

"It is my dearest wish to one day be able to take the book back to show them how their experiences are being used to guide many other people working with children with complex needs."

Ends

Picture captions – to come

Information for Editors:

Autism Unlimited, based in Parley, is a leading regional charity which provides specialist education, care and support to autistic children and adults.

The charity's Portfield School, in Parley, supports primary and secondary school students aged 4-15.

Autism Unlimited employs nearly 500 people across the South of England.

[www.autism-unlimited.org](http://www.autism-unlimited.org)

Media information: Debbie Granville, Deep South Media. Tel: 07884 657782 Email:

[Debbie.granville@deepsouthmedia.co.uk](mailto:Debbie.granville@deepsouthmedia.co.uk)