

The wind beneath Jennifer's wings

Dave Stephen, Arts Practitioner



Jennifer and I bonded over our shared love of songwriting"

During COVID our sessions moved online. Jennifer had been learning Makaton and enjoyed signing along to songs. She wanted to write a song about lockdown and how she was feeling about it so we started working on that. I'd made a backing track for the song and a guide vocal of how I thought the melody would go, but looked to Jennifer for direction of how she wanted it to sound. I suggested we record it, but at that time I knew she wasn't comfortable singing in front of me. She had never even spoken to me - we communicated a lot through writing.

So, one week, I thought let's just experiment. "I'll play this to you, Jennifer and if you feel like it you might want to try and sing it." I put my camera off so I wasn't in her visual field and that was it. I heard Jennifer's voice for the first time ever - singing a song she had written herself about how she was feeling. It was an incredible experience. From that point on, her confidence in singing in front of me grew and grew. Week on week she would challenge herself to sing and sign at the same time to all her favourite songs.

The first time Jennifer performed "live" was Sense Scotland's pre-recorded Christmas Concert in 2021. Everyone has anxiety about performing, but it's especially hard for Jennifer. Being able to see herself perform really boosted her confidence. I can hear it in her voice - compared to a few years ago, the passion and emotion comes so naturally and her diction and clarity has improved - greatly. She's performed 5 or 6 times now and has gone from strength to strength. She looks so happy and alive when on stage.

But it's not just about performances. When life gets challenging for Jennifer and there's a lot going on, particularly around her physical health, music is an escape. Sometimes it's just good to sit together and play some songs. She's quite mischievous at times and loves to challenge my abilities, requesting music I find difficult to play or struggle to sing well. She finds it very amusing.

Jennifer is a very creative, funny and intelligent young woman who wears her heart on her sleeve when it comes to musical expression. Looking ahead, it would be great for her to perform on other stages and maybe record and release some of the songs that she's written. But she might have different ideas - I'm just here to support her and figure out the best way I can help. And that's what I intend to do."

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Finding her voice

Jennifer's story

There are days in your life you'll never forget - your wedding day, the birth of your child, the death of a loved one. For me it's the day my daughter Jennifer found her voice.

The Sound of Silence

Jennifer stopped speaking when she was 12. Having endured a lifetime of medical interventions related to her cerebral palsy and suffering trauma due to surgeries, it all finally got too much. She withdrew into herself and shut down. Through the whole of secondary school no-one heard her speak. Not once, not even a whisper. The only people she could speak to were me and her sister Chloe, but never if someone else was around.

For years, this silence surrounded her everywhere she went. She didn't like to be in crowds or busy places, she would hide in corners and be invisible. Because she didn't speak, people made assumptions - that she couldn't speak, that she didn't understand, that she was stupid. None of this was true.

My heart broke for her. She is one of the most sensitive, perceptive and caring souls you will ever meet. Can you imagine her pain?

Without Sense Scotland, Jennifer would still be trapped in silence. With the patience and perception of tutors from the Arts department, music has literally transformed her life, and I can't thank them enough.



I'm sharing Jennifer's story with you to illustrate the profound impact of their work and ask if you can donate to Sense Scotland today."

Let It Go

Jennifer attended music sessions with Dave for years. Although she never spoke, they communicated through music, gestures and Makaton signing. During the 2020 lockdown, their sessions moved online. Dave was playing music and she was signing along as usual when, completely out of the blue, she started singing the words. My heart stopped - I couldn't breathe. I sneaked a look – it was really happening! Jennifer had finally found her voice.

From that day, everything changed. While she still didn't speak to anyone, she sang. Together, she and Dave wrote songs, allowing her to express her feelings in words, with Dave providing the melodies. Her first performance was in December 2021 - a special recording of the Sense Scotland Christmas Concert, broadcast online. No one else had ever heard her speak, never mind sing. The reaction from friends and family was overwhelming.

With gentle guidance and encouragement from Dave, Jennifer's confidence soared. She performed publicly, joined the Singing Hands choir, travelling to London and Brighton. She sang at a family wedding, performed at an open mic event in Glasgow and is a regular contributor to Sense Scotland festivals. Every time I watch her perform, my heart bursts with pride.

When Jennifer sings, she doesn't see or hear anything else - she's completely lost in the music. It takes her to a different world - one where she is confident, happy and feels safe. But it's not just the emotional and spiritual, it also helps her physically. She has limited movement on her right side due to cerebral palsy. Her biggest fear is that her right hand becomes a fist, so learning to play keyboard, and signing, is helping her maintain mobility

There is no amount of therapy or counselling in the world which could have achieved this for Jennifer. Music is everything to her. All thanks to Sense Scotland. And your support.

A music session costs only £20. Your donation could offer someone else the same joy and healing that Jennifer found. Please don't hesitate to donate today.

This is Me

Music helps build Jennifer's confidence and pushes her to try new things. At age 23, she now has a fiancé, and is able to speak with him. Without music, I dread to think what life would be like for Jennifer. It's given me hope for her future. I am my daughter's voice when she can't find hers. But when I go, who will speak for her? I can only pray that she continues to develop trust and confidence in others to overcome the crippling anxiety which prevents her from speaking.

If you too have experienced the power of music – its ability to connect, heal and inspire - please donate today. Music changes lives. Sense Scotland changes lives. You too can change lives.

As the song goes - don't stop believing.

Thank you

Crystal Miller

PS. In addition to music, your donation will support the wider Arts Team. Jennifer has regular sessions with artist Gayle. She has recently been working on a sculpture - again helping maintain dexterity in her hands through non-intrusive physical therapy. Using Arts as a tool for wellbeing is what makes Sense Scotland unique – no other social care charity does this. Donating today will ensure that they are able to continue this life-changing work to benefit so many other people.

Please give if you can.



Jennifer's tattoo

*When words fail me
Music speaks*