

Media Release

Chiefs of Staff, News Directors

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Music on Mother's Day could be great way to tackle post-natal depression

The gift of time, to allow a new mum to do something she did by herself before childbirth, could be the most valuable gift of all this Mother's Day, according to University of Tasmania research student Melissa Terry.

For the 36-year-old mother of four it was music, in particular learning to play the bagpipes, that brought sanity to her world, led her back to university and eventually became the catalyst for a new music therapy session for mothers and babies in Launceston.

Melissa suffered post-natal depression with every one of her children, and the condition was undiagnosed until after her third child was around six months of age.

Despite the diagnosis health professionals struggled to help her, she chose not to take medication as she was breastfeeding, and she cried for nine months after finding out she was pregnant with her fourth child.

Like many mothers suffering postnatal depression she thought feeling tired and unable to cope was "normal".

She couldn't bond with her baby, became obsessive over sleep for herself and her child, and she had thoughts of walking away and not coming back.

Melissa's husband Daniel, a PhD candidate with the University of Tasmania's Centre for Rural Health, found a flyer on campus offering bagpipe lessons, and he freed up his wife, who had a music degree and could already play the flute and piano, to attend to give her a break from the children.

She said it gave her a welcome focus and a chance to be herself with a new group of people.

"Making music gave me a sense of accomplishment and exhilaration that changed my mind-set," she said.

"It made me wonder if music could be helpful to other mums who were

going through the same thing.”

She started by investigating the use of music for therapy around the world, and while it was becoming widely used to address many different problems, it had not been specifically applied to postnatal depression.

After her journal article “Singing The Blues: A Literature Review of the Effects of Music on Postnatal Depression” was published she was last year able to embark on a Masters Degree through the University of Tasmania’s Centre for Rural Health to continue research on this topic.

She has also successfully secured a grant through the Tasmanian Early Years Foundation to bring a music therapist to Launceston Government-run parenting centre Walker House, on May 22, who will show interested mums how to sing to their babies for mutual comfort.

“My aim is to find the best way to help women get their life back, to come out of depression, and influence the way that health professionals tackle what is a common but still largely misunderstood problem.”

Melissa is calling for more interviewees to help with her research – she intends on interviewing up to 30 women from the north, north-east and north-west of Tasmania and welcomes expressions of interest from any mother who has suffered postnatal depression in the past five years.

“Not all mums will feel happy this Mother’s Day. I want to use music to help mothers get their life back – it’s not too late.”

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