Figure 2. 10 Top Tips when facilitating music therapy groups using songwriting

1) Sharing known songs and their personal significance can be an important part of establishing group members' identity and trust and is a useful starting point for song-writing ideas;

2) Musical check-ins (such as passing an instrument) remain an important structure, and help to begin sharing of current states and to prepare for musical improvisation/song creation;

3) Allow plenty of time (particularly in early sessions) for participants to explore instruments and familiarise themselves with the various sounds through improvisation;

4) Address differences in musical knowledge and skill between group members from the very beginning and return to this as needed;

5) Songs need time for development and it is important to allow time to return to previous ideas in later sessions; agree with the group what can be written down/recorded for future use (including spoken phrases that have potential as lyrics) and store these securely;

6) Develop strategies of how to work with frustrations when feeling stuck, e.g. free improvisation in response to brainstormed words on flipchart paper;

7) Pre-recorded loops can be helpful as 'ostinati' backings for songs (with lyrics and/or live instruments overdubbed), or as a starting point for free improvisations (instrumental or vocal); however, they also risk becoming 'stuck' or difficult to bring to an end; use with care!

8) Keep an open dialogue with group members regarding their contributions to songs and agree with group members how these may be used if members are absent or leave the group;

9) When co-working during recording the music therapists may take on different roles as e.g. producer (coordinating members contributions) or recording engineer (managing technology);

10) Agreeing the content of any recording (e.g. CD) and any limits on its public use are important factors for creating an end product that respects group members' artistic rights and confidentiality.