
November 4, 2007

A Range of Disorders Tamed by the Beat

By **SUSAN HODARA**

Correction Appended

White Plains

DURING a recent session with a class of 3-year-olds at Stepping Stones, a special education preschool here, Angeline Brown, a music therapist, strummed her guitar and led the group in song. The children — who have received diagnoses of impulse control disorders and developmental delays — were attentive and responsive as they followed along with Ms. Brown. They patted their knees to the beat; they took turns hitting the small drum she held out for them; “One, two, three,” they sang.

Ms. Brown is a faculty member at the Music Therapy Institute, part of the Music Conservatory of Westchester in White Plains. Founded in 1986, the institute provides individual and group treatment to more than 2,000 children and adults. Sessions take place at the conservatory and at 44 off-site locations throughout the county, including schools, [hospitals](#) and [nursing homes](#).

The institute’s work has not gone unnoticed by the [Westchester Arts Council](#), which, for the second year, presented it with a grant of \$100,000.

At the same time, in August, the council awarded \$25,000 to Heartsong, a music therapy organization based in Scarsdale that holds 36 weekly group sessions at two sites, in Bronxville and White Plains, on Saturdays.

Heartsong was created in 1992 by the family of a child with [cerebral palsy](#), and now serves more than 200 people between ages 3 and 20. Its programs are provided at no charge and the funding will enable it to continue this policy.

According to John F. Mahoney, 54, Heartsong’s director of clinical services, the needs of the children have changed over the years. “We used to have more physically challenged students,” he said, “but now about 48 percent of our kids are on the [autism](#) spectrum.”

The grant money for Heartsong and the Music Therapy Institute was allocated through the Arts Council’s Music Therapy Grant Program, an initiative of the Westchester County Board of Legislators. The program was established in response to the rise in autism and similar conditions in the county, and the need for access to music therapy.

Music has proved to be a successful treatment for all ages and many conditions, ranging from developmental disorders to learning difficulties like A.D.D. and [A.D.H.D.](#) to physical [disabilities](#) like cerebral palsy to syndromes like Down, Fragile X and Rett. Music therapy is also used to treat adolescents with behavioral issues; people

struggling with substance abuse, psychiatric illness or head injury; and [Alzheimer's](#) patients.

“Music has a way of dealing with all those populations,” said Lisa Sandagata, 46, director of the Music Therapy Institute’s outreach services.

The institute will direct its grant toward enhancing existing programs and creating new ones. “Nine organizations will receive services directly related to this funding,” Ms. Sandagata said. These include St. Mary’s Rehabilitation Center for Children in Ossining, as well as the Bedford, Tarrytown, Irvington and Greenburgh school districts.

“Without this grant,” Ms. Sandagata said, “many of these places would be unable to provide a music therapy program.”

At Stepping Stones, Ms. Brown’s work — which resembled a conventional toddler music session — was in fact aimed at developing the children’s speech, concentration, impulse control and socialization skills. It included tactile stimulation and body awareness, as well as the teaching of colors, numbers and patterns.

“Angeline can adapt activities to address any need that arises,” Ms. Sandagata said. “The guitar engages the children, and once you have their attention, you can begin to work.”

Correction: November 11, 2007

A picture caption last Sunday with an article about music therapy programs misstated the affiliation of the music therapist Angeline Brown, who was shown holding a drum for children to play. As the article noted, she is on the faculty of the Music Therapy Institute — not Stepping Stones, one of the many off-site locations where she and other members of the institute conduct music therapy sessions.

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