

M I S S I O N   H O S P I T A L S

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## Music Hath Charms...

### *Musical expression therapeutic for children with illnesses*

Music is not only the universal language, but a powerful means of communication, a vehicle for people to express their emotions, and even a calming influence for those in pain or distress. At Mission Children's Hospital, music therapist William Jackson says it can benefit people of all ages and backgrounds, though there are misconceptions about using music as a therapeutic tool.

"It's not just about relaxation," he says. "It can be as unpredictable as the changing emotions of the individual."

And Jackson should know. In fact, he has worked with hundreds of individuals through the years, witness to changes large and small.

Every summer he teaches Celtic harp at Warren Wilson College while spending the remainder of his professional life at Mission Children's Hospital, serving as a music therapist. His primary clients are children up to age 18 who have autism or some form of developmental delay. Prior to the therapeutic position at Mission, he was a music therapist in his native Scotland. But for 25 years, he has also been a major force in bringing Scottish music to a worldwide audience through concerts, tours, composing, and performances. In 2000, he was invited to perform his award-winning Scottish anthem "Land of Light," before HRH Prince Charles in Edinburgh.

Jackson came to Mission through a chance encounter with Dr. Olson Huff.

"I met Dr. Huff in 1997 at Warren Wilson College after I was introduced to him by the college president," he says. "He became interested in my music therapy work and decided to find the funding to start a music therapy post at the hospital."

In turn, Dr. Huff says he was fascinated with this intriguing fellow and considered it a coup to have him even consider the position.

Jackson took the job in October, 1998, using a variety of instruments, with music improvised or pre-composed. The patients are not required to have prior musical skills or experience. Both patient and therapist take an active part in the session through playing and listening. There is no charge for Music



William Jackson, Music Therapist at Mission Children's Hospital, works musical magic with our pediatric patients as well as sharing his talent with the world. He has just returned from a concert tour, "A Scottish Christmas," that covered 14 U.S. states along with performances and recording in Scotland and Ireland. Jackson's CDs, featuring self-composed and traditional music, are available for sale in both hospital Gift Shops.

Therapy, thanks to donations made through the Mission Healthcare Foundation.

While working his musical magic with one pediatric patient, Jackson says he encountered a child who stated on a referral form that he didn't like music.

"The issue," says Jackson "was that the child was over-

stimulated by too many sounds in everyday life. He would continually turn off those things he had control over, such as radios, CD players, etc. It wasn't that he didn't like music. He was just filtering out as much noise as possible."

Jackson worked with the child through one-on-one sessions, allowing him full control of the sounds – how and when the music began; how loud or quiet it should be. Before long, the child was comfortable with both the instruments Jackson used and the sounds they created together.

In another case, a blind, distraught child attended by two nurses, his mother, and grandmother, was thrashing and crying. No one could calm him.

"I came in and played the flute for several minutes," says Jackson, "long, slow notes until the child turned his head towards me, closed his eyes, and went to sleep."

Not only did Jackson's music therapy alleviate the child's distress, it freed up the two nurses who were trying to calm him. The boy's mother said he hadn't slept in two days.

For patients in a psychiatric setting, both young and old, the use of music in a group setting helps them identify their individual roles, says Jackson, and their responses to other people.

Other benefits of music therapy include freer self-expression, better communication, a clearer understanding of negative emotions like anger, frustration, or fear.

"It can be also be used to encourage physical rehab and to deal with psychiatric problems through guided imagery and improvisation," Jackson adds. "Even social skills can be taught through musical activities."

Music therapy programs are found in schools, prisons, other hospitals, and retirement homes throughout the U.S. An established health service similar to occupational and physical therapy, music as a therapeutic tool is endorsed by the American Music Therapy Association (AMTA) which seeks to advance public awareness of benefits to patients through music and increase access to music therapy services. Currently, there are more than 70 approved music therapy programs nationwide. Only professionals with proper training and credentials are qualified to provide music therapy services.

Too often considered a last resort or a diversion, Jackson says music therapy is, in fact, one of the most effective and natural ways of helping to achieve change in a person's emotional, psychological, or physical well-being.

"And no negative side effects," says Jackson. "All it takes is someone with vision, like Dr. Olson Huff, to get a program like this started."

"It was a way of broadening our treatment and resource approach,"

Dr. Huff explains. "By providing music, arts, any of the creative processes, you can expand the ability of the child and his or her family to better cope."

He calls Jackson an "exceptional person with tremendous talent." He remembers one case in particular in which Jackson's skills and therapeutic abilities were dramatically effective. Huff was there to watch the entire process unfold.

"The patient was an autistic child who actually hid under the table when Billy (William) came in. Billy sat down, made a sound on the piano, then another, loud, then low. Gradually, the child moved forward and came out from his hiding place. And by the end of the session, he was actually sitting beside Billy, his head on Billy's shoulder."

The power of this type of therapy, says Dr. Huff, is "remarkable, almost beyond description," often allowing patient and therapist to speak in a language known only to each other. He says the memory of that amazing encounter still touches him today.

What Jackson hopes readers will come to understand about music therapy is that it is appropriate for all people.

"Whether you like music or not is irrelevant," he says. "The music becomes the means to an end in helping to achieve change."

For more information on Mission's Music Therapy program, contact William Jackson at 213-1692. He is based in Room 417, Peds Rehab, in the Doctors Office Building.

– Marie Bartlett

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