



Jennifer Dale gets the hang of the triangle in a music therapy session at Sunnyhill Hospital with students from Capilano College.

Helps young and old

Vancouver using music therapy as aid in treatment of disabled

B.C. is fast becoming the music therapy centre of Canada mainly because of a unique program at Capilano College in North Vancouver and the interest and dedication of people like Roy Hudson who teaches at Sir Guy Carleton school in Vancouver. The importance and success of music therapy is detailed in this article which was edited from a story by Capilano College information officer Bill Little and includes comments by Roy Hudson about his experiences as a music therapist.

Mr. J. had not talked for 30 years when he came to his first music therapy session. He sat at the back and joined in the first song! Slowly, he began to talk again, adding more and more words to his vocabulary.

John D. was an autistic seven year old. His world consisted of objects, not people. When he heard a certain classical piece of music, however, he would allow himself to dance with the therapist. Each week he made more and more contact with other people, so long as the session began with "his" music.

These are just two of the reasons why the music therapy program at Capilano College is becoming widely recognized by hospitals and other institutions in British Columbia. Music therapy is a well-established field in Europe, but it is relatively new in

Canada. The program at Capilano College, which started in 1975, has broken a lot of ground.

Capilano College students in music therapy are trained in clinical practice, the disabilities of children and adults that respond to music, assessment and evaluation procedures, and professional conduct and responsibility.

Each week the students attend a clinic, hospital, school or boarding home for at least six hours, where they are expected to direct therapy sessions with different age groups.

Music therapy co-ordinator Kerry Burke has watched many students go through the program. At first they find themselves very upset and emotional, he said.

"It's not easy, but with group support from other students and from therapists or staff, students overcome personal barriers and find greater personal fulfillment."

Music therapists now work mostly with the elderly and with special needs children. There are two music therapy departments — at Sunnyhill (Children's) Hospital and at Valleyview (Senior's) Hospital. With both groups music therapy has been shown to reach clients with emotional and communication difficulties faster than other kinds of therapy.

Capilano College students are now employed in Valleyview, Sunnyhill, UBC Extended Care and Riverview hospitals, group homes, and other facilities such as the North Shore Association for Physically Handicapped and Daycare programs and by Vancouver Family Services.

Roy Hudson, a Vancouver elementary and secondary school teacher for nine years, believes that music therapy is an important method of establishing communications with disabled or handicapped children. His work with the Pacific Association for Autistic Citizens, a Vancouver group which has been operating for a number of years, brings him

in touch with many people he says have benefitted from music therapy. He is presently training eight youth workers in a program at the Dunbar Community Centre in Vancouver. They will work on a one-to-one basis with autistic children this summer at Camp Squamish.

"The basic principle is the same as that recognized by Plato; that music effects the nervous-emotional condition of the listener," says Hudson. "A number of reports on specific courses which have been conducted explain its merit in clinics for autistic, brain damaged, hearing impaired, or otherwise crippled or handicapped children.

"The fact is that music, though itself superficially undisciplined, in fact can introduce an element of order and organization into a child's chaotic emotional life. The therapist first plays the kind of music that seems to him to echo or reproduce the child's mental state, while the child is given a drum to beat. The character of his response, shown in his drum-beating, often provides a valuable key to the diagnosis of the child's illness and may reveal potentialities which may help with curing or alleviating his condition."

"There seems to be no doubt that to these children music is indeed a kind of language," according to Hudson. "Emotional maturity is closely connected with the ability to express oneself in speech, and singing is one of the most integrated yet intimate and revealing of our expressive acts — a direct expression of the ego. In music therapy it is possible to "take hold of the ego directly" and bring it into activity within the impaired or disturbed emotional life. The combination of an all important sense of mastery or achievement and the sheer delight of the activity itself will in many cases overcome the deep self-distrust that afflicts all these children in different forms".

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