

Band Wagon rolls into George Pearson Centre

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Laura Unger, a music therapist at George Pearson Centre, secured access for residents to Band Wagon during the month of June. The program delighted, challenged and promoted self-expression for 15 residents who enthusiastically embraced the opportunity to create and record their unique musical expressions.

Thanks to the efforts of Music Therapist Laura Unger, many residents got the opportunity to flex their musical muscles by taking a spin on the Band Wagon.

A mobile recording studio encased in a shiny red-and-chrome wheeled box, Band Wagon is an iMac computer equipped with musical software that's sophisticated enough to produce studio quality recordings in any setting.

As a therapeutic tool, it gives people an opportunity to create, express themselves and their thoughts through music. "Having Band Wagon at George Pearson created a lot of interest among residents," said Unger. "It allowed me to connect to residents I hadn't previously had much contact with."

In one of the most surprising sessions, a resident vocalized a haunting Middle Eastern chant; an accomplishment especially surprising because this resident is deaf/mute and has rarely, if ever, vocalized while living at GPC.



Using Band Wagon, Don Basso was recorded his own rap song. This promoted awareness of speech volume, articulation and clarity. Don was so pleased with his song that he became motivated to begin playing the guitar again.

“Through music we found a way to tap into this resident’s ability to communicate,” said Unger. “It was the kind of moment that reinforces for us why we work in health care – to make a connection like this was really special and powerful.”

Band Wagon is funded by the annual Music Therapy Ride and the Music Therapy Association of British Columbia. While Band Wagon 1 is located permanently at BC Children’s Hospital, Band Wagon 2 provides music therapy programs across the Lower Mainland, traveling to various facilities for six-week residencies.

More than 15 residents participated in Band Wagon at George Pearson during its June residency. Most participants did multiple sessions, creating recordings that were shared with their loved ones and families.

While some sessions were therapeutic, others are just plain fun.

Joyce Johnson took up the drums at 83 years old. Now 88, and an accomplished drummer, Johnson looks forward to her sessions which usually include a jam session with Unger who accompanies on piano. This week’s tune, Great Balls of Fire, is as much a cardio as a musical workout, and Band Wagon records it all. “I like to play,” said Johnson, taking a break to catch her breath. “And I like to play loud.”

And sometimes that’s just the point.



Joyce Johnson, 88, took up drumming five years ago. Self-taught with innate rhythmic sense and timing, Joyce has recorded her jam session with Band Wagon and can now share her music with family and friends.

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