

By [Janis Warren - The Tri-City News](#)
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From her electric piano in the corner of the room, Cristine Bostrom starts the class with a series of stretches before launching into vocal warm-ups.

From there, she leads the four adults and their caregivers in a round of song over the next hour, beginning with *You Are My Sunshine* and *The Muppet Song*. A Kelly Clarkson tune soon follows.

Some read from their song sheets; others sway to the beat, or gesture.

It's all good fun for the Glee choir but, most importantly, it's helping the four developmentally disabled adults with their mental, physical and emotional functioning.

Registered clinical counsellor John Mews, the executive director of Mewsic Moves, a private practice in Maillardville, said music therapy is especially beneficial for people with special needs as it aids with their language cognition — a point reinforced by Coquitlam's Shelley Balachanoff, who has seen her 28-year-old autistic son, Chase, blossom since starting lessons.

"He is very inspired by music," she said. "He has been absorbing different types of music, too. He hears the radio in the car and he can follow along with the words because he remembers the lyrics from the song sheets in the class. Now, he looks at the newspaper and recognizes those words.

"It's just been phenomenal," she said.

Mews' Glee choir is also unique as it's one of the few programs available to adults with developmental disabilities (most activities are streamlined to people under 18).

As well, the adult Glee choir is endorsed by Community Living BC and was featured in its April newsletter, *The Citizen*.

Mews said the first adult Glee choir, which started in the spring, wrapped up in May with five participants recording a CD with eight tracks. "They picked the songs they wanted to sing and all of them had good messages. It was very personal and beautiful," he said.

And this fall, Mews plans to expand his music therapy programs by offering Glee Club for children, Korean choir, drumming for teens, early toddler intervention with music, and music for parents of children with special needs.

Speaking of the latter program, Mews said, "Not only will it give the parents a short break during week, but it will teach them how to play.... Music is uniting. It's bonding. My goal is to make families feel empowered."

Mews' musical background started at the age of three at church. Over the years, his mother — a singer — encouraged him to study music; he wanted to practice medicine.

During his third year of his bachelor's degree, majoring in piano, at Memorial University in Newfoundland, a professor asked Mews if he would carry on with his master's in music.

"I said, 'No way. I'm going to apply for med school,'" the Vancouver resident remembered telling her. "I didn't want to perform."

She suggested music therapy, a stream she had wanted to pursue. Mews looked around and found Capilano University had a bachelor of music therapy degree. He completed that program and, in 2004, he opened a private practice in Port Moody.

Now, Mews has 40 clients ranging in age from three to 35, with funding in part from the provincial government and the Autism Funding Unit of BC.

"Music therapy is a lifeline. It can do so much," he said. "There's a lot of research about music and the brain in terms of motivation, stimulation and communication, and wI think we're just on the cusp of learning how much it has to offer."