



Tuning Up Wounded Minds

Hope Young Uses Music Therapy to Help Heal Brain Injuries

by Katie Burns

It was March 29th, and 39 of Hope Young's clients from The Center for Music Therapy were walking toward *The Statesman* Capitol 10,000 finish line. Many runners were passing them up, but for CFMT folks, that was okay. It was their ability to participate that led them to raise their arms and shout triumphantly as they crossed the finish line.

All Young's clients have brain injuries – Parkinson's disease, strokes, aneurisms or damage from accidents. Some were told by their doctors they may never walk or talk again.

The doctors hadn't reckoned with Hope Young. Young, CFMT founder and president, has become well-known through news articles, TV interviews and her own presentations to various organizations. But perhaps her highest praise has come from her clients.

When Carlos Mixson hit a car with his bike in 2005, some thought he would be bedridden for life. But mother Toni Rockwell reports that he ran the entire Capitol 10K this year. She credits the music therapy Mixson, age 33, received from CFMT.

Another client is Mary Lou Larson, who thinks she has been fighting Parkinson's for roughly seven years. Larson said she has been working with Young for about three years, since she saw Young give a presentation at the Capitol Area Parkinson's Association. Mary Lou's husband Carl recalled that one of Young's clients came, and seemed barely able to walk. When the music started, "he put his cane down and marched around," Carl said.

Mary Lou comes for the lunchtime singing and the training for what Young calls "Team I Am, I Can," both free each week at the First Presbyterian Church Fellowship Hall. Carl Larson reported that his wife's two doctors are impressed with her improvement. Previously, he said, she "couldn't keep up with people," but now, usually, she can. Young first heard about music therapy when she was an 18-year-old freshman at Ball State University in her home state of Indiana. She was double-majoring in special education and music, in hopes of combining the two professionally. Although Young's mother hadn't combined them technically, she had been a special education teacher and a musician.

A friend of Young's returned from a conference where he heard a professor, Dr. Suzanne Hanser, speak on her work in music therapy at the University of the Pacific's Conservatory of Music in Stockton, CA. "He came by my dorm room, and said 'Hey, this sounds like you!'" Young recalled. She agreed, and transferred to the conservatory in 1986, after saving up money. Young graduated in 1989, and came to Austin in 1990 for a six-month internship at Travis State School, part of the Texas Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation, working with developmentally disabled residents. By the internship's end, she had numerous job offers, so she

set-up shop as an individual music therapist, as well as working with patients in hospitals and rehabilitation facilities. Eventually, she established The Center for Music Therapy. Today she's one of roughly 200 music therapists in the state.

The following are some testimonials from actual patients which attest to Young's success:

My Experiences with Brain Injury

In November 2004, I was managing newsletter editor for the International Economic Development Council in Washington, D.C. My life was about to change. Alone in my apartment one night, I suffered a ruptured brain aneurism. I have no memory of my time in the hospitals, including five weeks in a D.C. intensive care unit and four more facilities over nine months.

My recovery began in earnest in Richmond, VA, where a doctor noticed that pressure on my brain was dangerously high. In February 2005, after a shunt was implanted between my skull and my skin, my family says slow but amazing progress began. My mother said I hadn't spoken since she first saw me on my second day in the D.C. hospital, when I greeted her saying, "Hi, Mom." Once I had the shunt, I began responding occasionally to comments by others.

While at the North Hospital of the Medical College of Virginia in Richmond, VA, a dedicated speech therapist brought in music therapist Melissa Owens, who put me in twice-weekly groups and one-on-one therapy.

Owens said that she got me to "speak" by having me sing my requests, such as "I'm thirsty," "I need a blanket" or other phrases to the tune of This Land is Your Land. My next stop on the road to recovery was a highly beneficial stay at Texas NeuroRehab Institute in Austin, followed by a move to my parents' home in Kerrville, where I continued physical, occupational and speech therapy as an outpatient at the Ambulatory Care Center of Sid Peterson Memorial Hospital.

My Experiences with Young

My next opportunity for music therapy came after I moved to my own apartment in Austin in June 2007, when my cognitive therapist suggested I take music therapy with Young. Young evaluated me and concluded that I did not require one-on-one sessions, but that some of the center's programs might help. I began attending the weekly singing and the group session for people with brain injuries. There also is a group for Parkinson's patients, who have different needs.

Young says my movements were very slow when I began with her, despite the fact I once walked so fast that friends used to tease me. Now, however, I walk normally, if not especially fast.

With Young's encouragement, I participated with Team I Am, I Can in last year's IBM Uptown Classic, and twice in the Capitol 10K. In last year's Capitol 10K, I walked about one mile, helping hold construction tape meant to keep runners from bumping into one of my fellow teammates, a Parkinson's patient. In last year's Uptown 10K, I walked perhaps one kilometer. This year, I walked an entire 5 kilometers for the "fun run/walk" segment of the Capitol 10K.

Does music therapy help heal brain damage? In my personal experience, the answer is a strong “yes.”

MORE INFO

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