

Music for the soul

Therapy helps
Calgarian
overcome odds

Jacqueline Louie
For Neighbours

Whoever coined the saying “music saves lives” must have had someone like Brittany Lloyd in mind.

Frustrated, upset and miserable after suffering a brain injury in an accident when she was just two years old, the now-26-year-old Calgarian credits music with helping her learn things that other people take for granted.

“Working on my speech and talking about songs helps me get my words out,” says Lloyd, who has been using music therapy for more than 15 years now. “It also helps me when I’m feeling angry and frustrated with my life.”

Lloyd, who loves to sing, will be one of the performers at JB Music Therapy’s annual Night of Song, held for clients and their families who come together to celebrate music during National Music Therapy Month in March.

“There is no other activity we know of that uses more of the brain simultaneously than music,” says accredited music therapist Jennifer Buchanan, president of JB Music Therapy and a past president of the Canadian Association for Music Therapy.

“If we can tap into the right music for a client, it will help them be motivated to do something, or it will help them feel less anxious.”



Wil Andruschak/For Neighbours

Music therapist Andrea Curry, left, sings with Brittany Lloyd, who uses music to combat a brain injury she suffered as a child.

Music can also change people’s moods, adds Buchanan. It releases hormones, including dopamine — “the feel-good hormone” — and oxytocin, which helps us feel connected to other people.

Serotonin released during music can also help people sleep and feel relaxed, says Buchanan.

“We use music to achieve non-musical goals,” adds Andrea Curry, an accredited music therapist with JB Music. “The way that music interacts with the brain, we can use it for healing, and we can use it for rehabilitation. If we find the right music, it can hit the right chord with anybody.”

For Curry, who studied jazz voice and classical voice in university, the most important thing about music is how it makes people feel.

“Music gives people a chance to smile, connect and remember. Music moves us, and it moves me when people are moved by music,” she says.

Curry, who was a professional singer-songwriter and recording artist in Nova Scotia before she moved to Calgary, now performs as an entertainer in a musical duo featuring Curry on vocals, guitar and piano, together with a violinist.

“The two together, it’s beautiful,” says Calgarian Norm Walsh, who has seen Curry and her musical partner perform several times at Garrison Green Seniors Community.

“I think music is one of the most wonderful therapies that you can have,” says Walsh, 87, a retired salesman.

New pro urbanite

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Roasting marshmallows, a campfire at night, sleeping in a tent and listening to the sounds of nature are all part of the camping experience. For many Calgarians, particularly new Canadians, have never spent time in a tent with the Rockies as the backdrop.

Several local organizations are trying to change that with an initiative designed to get Calgarians out of the urban jungle and into the wild.

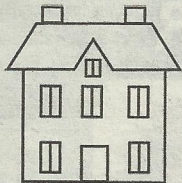
“It’s a chance for adults and kids to discover the wonders of nature together,” says Michael Gley, outdoor program manager for Scouts Canada’s Chinook Council in southern Alberta.

The Urban Camping Program will take place in the Calgary area June 22. Organizers say the program will be rolled out across Canada in the coming years.

“It will be similar to what the American Wildlife Foundation has undertaken for the last several years with considerable success,” says Greg Smith, CEO of the Ann & Sandy Conservation Area, one of the organizations spearheading the Calgary initiative.

Organizers see the Urban Camping Program as an opportunity for people to experience outdoors in a different way.

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