

Expanding Horizons Through Music

by Alyce Duckworth, LCSW
Supervisor, Prince St. Academy, Arapahoe/Douglas Mental Health Network
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Successful community-based service agencies don't become successful alone. It is only through the combined efforts of diverse community members and organizations that a single program can fully meet the needs of those it serves. Our experience over the past year at Prince Street Academy (PSA) has proven this. Piano Pathways, a relatively new business in our area, has brought music, free of charge, into our curriculum. Prince Street Academy is an alternative day school for children who cannot attend their regular public school until behaviors related to their mental illness can be improved.

Piano Pathways is the result of the vision of Ken Trujillo, a man who exudes warmth and compassion the moment he walks into a room. Ken's vision has been, simply, to provide opportunities for music education to kids who would not have access to those opportunities otherwise. Ken's Web site, pianopathways.org, cites research that shows a link between music education and improved test scores, increased brain capacity, and faster healing from trauma. In fact, "music therapy" has been recognized as an effective form of mental health treatment, capitalizing on the stimulation of specific brain centers that assist in the processing of information.

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Although I understand the importance of research, I tend to be one of those individuals who needs to “see it to believe it,” and I do see the amazingly positive impact the music curriculum has on students here at Prince Street Academy. Piano Pathways loaned our school two fabulous pianos, complete with headphones and other necessary sound equipment, for a year. Although private and group lessons can be purchased at the Piano Pathways facility, Ken and his piano teachers voluntarily came to PSA to teach our students. The on-site pianos enabled students to practice conveniently during free time.

In these ongoing piano classes, our students learned to read music, improve concentration, and express themselves in new ways. For the first time in their lives, many students were able to excel at something within the academic school day. With pianos on site, I witnessed proud exclamations from our new pianists as they called PSA staff and their parents in to “Hear what I can play!” A few students, often hesitant to write at all, wrote lyrics about their life experiences.

As PSA students improved upon their abilities to read music and play the piano, it seemed that a whole new world of possibility was within reach. Our youth were beginning to understand firsthand the diverse options that were available to them.

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Arapahoe/Douglas Mental Health Network

155 Inverness Drive West, Suite 200
Englewood, CO 80112
admhn.org
303 889 4800 Fax

Jamie DeBartolomeis
Phone 303 793 9625
Cell 720 234 3430
jdebart@admhn.org

Media Contacts

Meryl Glickman
Phone 303 793 9602
Cell 303 909 8765
mglick@admhn.org

During last school year, two students were left late at PSA by their bus. Of the many things they could have chosen to do, the two boys decided to practice their piano skills. For a half hour, one of them played the background music while the other constructed lyrics.

Together, they filled our school with song and laughter.

Ken Trujillo is truly a visionary. He believes in opening new doors and new pathways to underprivileged kids and their families. In a recent conversation with Ken, he explained that he wants our society to understand that piano lessons teach a lot more than just music. In fact, exposure to the arts changes lives. Ken has a passion for teaching young people about the world of music, and he believes that **all** kids should have opportunities to expand their horizons. To learn more about his wonderful program, visit pianopathways.org

Alyce Duckworth is a licensed clinical social worker who supervises Arapahoe/Douglas Mental Health Network's Prince Street Academy day treatment program. She can be reached at aduckwo@admhn.org. For more information about mental health issues please call Arapahoe/Douglas Mental Health Network at 303 730 8858 or visit admhn.org.

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About Arapahoe/Douglas Mental Health Network (ADMHN)

ADMHN is a private, nonprofit 501 © (3) corporation providing professional, comprehensive behavioral health care and substance abuse treatment primarily, but not exclusively, serving the communities of Arapahoe and Douglas Counties. We offer programs for adults, seniors, families, couples and children. These services include counseling, psychiatry, crisis services, case management, substance abuse treatment, victim services, an adult acute treatment unit, adult supported and residential housing, services to the criminal justice system, vocational and social rehabilitation, a day treatment therapeutic school and school-based services. Arapahoe/Douglas Mental Health Network has an on-site pharmacy. We offer community education, wellness programs and a Speakers Bureau.

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admhn.org
303 889 4800 Fax

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jdebarato@admhn.org

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