

Waterloo, works with children with disabilities, including Down syndrome and autism. She says that many of them are taking music lessons or receiving music therapy. "I think that there is a connection between language learning and music for a variety of reasons. Music and language happen in complementary parts of the brain," explains McLennan. "When there is a multi-sensory approach to learning, there is more language learning that occurs. Singing, hearing the music, beating on a drum, dancing...it's a total sensory experience, and when kids are interested in something, they learn more. We often use music in our speech therapy sessions, using the words we are trying to teach the kids...and they remember it more!"

Amanda Bedard of Meaford, Ont., says that music has helped her seven-year-old son, Logan, who has PDD-NOS (Pervasive Developmental Disorder – Not Otherwise Specified). "Music has been a phenomenal tool in shaping Logan's vocabulary. When he started senior kindergarten, he was taught Jolly Phonics through music. He sang *all day*. This year, because of these foundations, he's learned to read."

Bedard says that without the repetition, Logan would not have been motivat-

ed enough to tackle reading. "Music has given Logan the opportunity to practise his skills in a meaningful way."

Evie Allgeier, 15, of Kitchener, Ont., has Down syndrome and autism. She has been working with McLennan for many years, and with hard work and the help of her parents, she has made great strides in her speech and language.

Allgeier's mother, Wendy Newbery, says, "In our daughter's early years, music was the key to everything. It facilitated communication, motivation, co-operation. We often said music was Evie's first language."

Newbery says that she and her husband, Doug Allgeier, sang to their daughter at home continually when she was young. She also listened to tapes, and when Allgeier reached the age of 18 months, her parents enrolled her in Kindermusik, a research-based educational program, which she completed at age eight. "Still today, a song can help Evie make transitions and often will help encourage her to try new things," says Newbery. "Its effect on her is magical."

Now a teenager, Allgeier enjoys music therapy with accredited music therapist Taryn McKinnon. The therapy is also helping Allgeier live with a medical con-

dition. In 2002, she had a stroke that affected the right side of her body. Music therapy helps her use and strengthen her weakened side.

Canadian children's entertainment icon Fred Penner agrees that music can offer powerful experiences for children with disabilities. "As a teenager, I was overwhelmed to see the effect that music had on my sister Susie, who had Down syndrome. Often she would be drawn to tears after listening to her favourite songs," says Penner. "She passed away when I was 21, but this experience set the foundation for my philosophy, 'By making a positive connection with the vulnerable spirit of the child, your attitude toward life can be affected.'"

Penner adds that this has been confirmed for him countless times over the years – not only with children who have disabilities, but all children. "Never underestimate your ability to make a difference in the life of a child."

Melissa Martz is a childcare provider and freelance writer who lives in Kitchener, Ont. She wrote the article "Good Signs," about the benefits of sign language for children of all abilities, in the Winter 2007 issue of Abilities.

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