

Testimony**Study of ASD Services in the state of ND****01-17-2012**

Chairman Representative Wieland and Interim Human Service Committee, Good afternoon. My name is Vicki Peterson and I have a soon to be 10 yr. old with autism and intellectual disability. I have testified before and you have my son's story.

Today I would briefly like to comment on educational services for children and youth with autism spectrum disorders. Our children with special needs and disabilities can really start accessing educational services at age 3 if they qualify for special education and be placed in an Early Childhood Special Education Program, and services may be delivered in several Least restrictive Environments, such as a ECSE classroom, public preschool, or homebound depending on what the IEP team decides is appropriate for that child. Children must now qualify in one of the 14 categories of Special Education. Autism being one of those categories and others. Many children on the autism spectrum do not meet those criteria as they do not have an intellectual disability but still are under the autism umbrella. Autism defined educationally means a developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and non-verbal communication and social interaction, generally evident before age three that adversely affects a child's educational performance. Other characteristics often associated with autism are engagement in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements, resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines, and unusual responses to sensory experiences. The term does not apply if a child's educational performance is adversely affected primarily because the child has an emotional disturbance. Now some children with autism will qualify for special education

under a different heading such as Non-Categorical or Other Health Impaired. Many children with PDD-NOS(Pervasive Developmental Disorder-Non Otherwise Specified) and Aspergers do not qualify for special education and may not be receiving the services they need to have a beneficial education. I believe to collect real data , and make policy changes policy-makers need some real numbers in the state that reflect how many children , youth and adults we have in the state with an autism spectrum disorder.

We need to think “outside the box” and provide opportunities for social skills not only just for children and youth with a disability but for all children so they will learn to communicate with each other and get a greater understanding for their peers with developmental delays. Use of assistive technology needs to be implemented more in the school systems and be more available for students on the autism spectrum and other developmental disabilities. Implementation of more aides and paras in the school system to help with that child that needs more supervision either to stay on task, navigate the school, or may need help in academics for understanding , writing, or learning in a unique and different way, to help with the sensory needs of children. Paras in the school system are there to help our children learn independence when it is right for them, they are a great source for general education teachers to be able to teach the classroom as a whole and with the rise of students in special education and general education it is a need. For my son Aaron, the aides he has in school play a key role and the teachers welcome that. We need to look at other programs in the school system such as music therapy which can help with speech, sensory needs goals on an IEP and of course social skills. I want to thank the Bismarck Tribune for doing a front page story on the pros of music therapy and how it has enriched and helped the needs of children with special needs. At a time when school enrollments are up and we seem to be losing our music rooms to something else, it worries me a lot of what services will look like

for my son in the future in ND. We all can value some music in our lives. Quality education is and will be essential for all students whom have a diagnosis of autism.

We are talking about accessing and receiving services for autism spectrum disorders. I would like to reiterate that Autism Spectrum Disorders cover the lifespan of a person. It does not end at certain "magic ages of 3, or 5 or 16 or 22, it is across the entire lifespan. Education will play a very large role, as our children will typically be in school for at least 12 years and many more will or will want to further their education.

Families whom have children, youth or adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders need to access a variety of systems, some at the same time, with many points of entry. Let's not forget the family support piece that will be needed to guide these families. I believe in North Dakotans, I believe we can make it work for our children, youth and adults and the adult futures for those with an Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Thank you for your time.

Vicki L Peterson

Parent

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Music therapy graduate brings her services to Bismarck

By MARA VAN ELLS | Bismarck Tribune | Posted: Sunday, January 8, 2012 1:00 am

Four-year-old Ben Enzminger can do things he never could before - he can sit by himself and raise his arms on his own.

Although it might not seem like much, these are big accomplishments for Ben, who has cerebral palsy. Since working with music therapist Laura Fehr, Ben has come a long way.

Fehr uses music to work on non-musical goals with those who have disabilities, disorders or who are developmentally behind.

"Music therapy works because music is processed everywhere in the brain," Fehr said, explaining that music can stimulate new pathways within the brain that language alone will not.

Fehr has been doing music therapy weekly with Ben since April. She said he has strengthened his arms and improved his posture, grasp and eye-hand coordination.

"This just gets him into a different environment and hands-on with the musical instruments, which he doesn't get anywhere else," said his mother, Nicole Enzminger.

Enzminger said music therapy reinforces skills Ben is working on in other therapy sessions, such as speaking and walking. Some of his specific goals in Fehr's music therapy sessions are saying consonants, linking words and following two- or three-step directions.

"I think it's just been good for Ben to have a different way to practice those goals," Enzminger said. "We're trying everything we can that is creative and fun. A lot of different stimulus is kind of what we understand is the key to helping."

Playing instruments is multi-sensorial, while music is enjoyable and motivating, Fehr said.

"Music is familiar. Everyone knows some sort of music," she said.

Fehr, a Dickinson native, is music therapy board certified and can work with people of all ages and disabilities, including aging, medical, communication or psychiatric disorders, physical disabilities or chemical dependency. She graduated from University of North Dakota in 2010 with a bachelor's degree in music therapy and a minor in psychology. She completed a six-month internship in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and covered a maternity leave for a school music therapist for three months in Davenport, Iowa.

Fehr has had her own business since May, but also contracts her services to different organizations. Often, her biggest challenge is explaining to people how music therapy is beneficial.

"A lot of places, I think, are uneducated as to what music therapy is and how I can help," she said.

University of Mary special education, cognitive and language development instructor Becky Salveson said she believes that music therapy will continue to become more commonplace.

"People don't know (what music therapy is) at first, but almost everyone can relate to being moved by music," she said. "I'm not a music therapist, but any special ed teacher working with kids with autism or with emotional disorders uses music."

Music therapy can be used for people of all ages, Salveson said.

"I believe strongly that music therapy is a real therapy and will come into its own. The baby boomers are a very powerful lot, and as soon as they are accessing enjoyment, renewed cognition ... they'll insist that (music therapy) is an adjunct therapy. I don't think it's very long coming," she said.

Fehr does individual sessions with five children and one adult in the Bismarck-Mandan area with conditions such as spina bifida, autism and Peters anomaly.

Ben's favorite activity during music therapy sessions is playing with a rainbow play parachute. Each session, Ben grasps the parachute with both hands and lifts it up and down. Fehr sings to the beat of his arms.

"So it's also motivating," Fehr said. "If he doesn't raise his arms, I'm not going to sing the rest of the song."

Last summer, Ben's mother needed to help him raise his arms. Now, Ben can pump his arms on his own and only needs assistance standing. The therapy also forces Ben to use his left hand, which is much weaker than his right.

Part of the game is popping stuffed animals off the parachute, and Ben has to retrieve the toys. To work on his goal of following multi-step directions, Fehr will sometimes ask Ben to pick up the stuffed animals in a particular order.

"His grasp is a lot better because he has to pick up the animals and put them back on the parachute," Fehr said.

Before Fehr came to Bismarck, Ben did about five sessions with a music therapist who traveled to Bismarck from Grand Forks once a month or so.

"We did experience it before so we knew that we liked it ... It's helpful to have (music therapy) one on one and being able to have it hands on with the instruments," Enzminger said.

Before taking on a client, Fehr meets with the individual's parents or caretaker to gather background information. She does a session with prospective clients to assess motor, cognitive, communication and social/emotional skills. She tests them to see if they react to music and determines how she thinks music could help them improve their skills.

Fehr works with her clients to set specific goals. For example, Ben's goals include sitting by himself for 75 percent of sessions. Every three months, she assesses the clients again to see if they have met their goal. If they have, they make a new goal for the next session.

Fehr's individual music therapy sessions are weekly and can be 30 or 45 minutes long. For more information contact Fehr at 701-290-0014 or email at laura.fehr.mtbc@gmail.com.

Enzminger said the sessions are upbeat and fun but still have Ben working hard at his goals.

"He really does enjoy music," she said.

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Other Bismarck children benefit from music therapy

By MARA VAN ELLS | Bismarck Tribune | Posted: Sunday, January 8, 2012 12:15 am

Aaron Peterson is 9 years old and has autism with a cognitive disability. Eight-year-old Jaiden Jacobchick has had a large fluid-filled cyst in his brain since birth, which has led to seizures and vision problems. Jaiden also has agenesis of the corpus callosum, a birth defect in which the structure connecting the two hemispheres of the brain is partially or completely absent.

Although the boys have different challenges, they have both benefited from music therapy with Laura Fehr.

Vicki Peterson said that music is her son Aaron's "mode for learning."

Since starting therapy with Fehr, Aaron's speech and enunciation of words have improved, Peterson said. With Fehr, Aaron works on saying yes and no. Fehr will ask him what instrument he wants to play and he must answer in order to play the instrument.

"Music is a highly motivating technique for my son," Peterson explained.

Improved communication has been Aaron's biggest accomplishment, she said. Now, Aaron can have "conversation-like dialogue" with others. "My son who was nonverbal is verbal now," she said.

"(Now) he can sing a full song and we can understand the words he's saying. Before that, even if he had the tone for music, the words were something that I call monkey talk," she said.

Jaiden's grandmother, Erna Jacobchick, said that Jaiden loves music and the therapy is "more like playtime to him." Since therapy, he is better at taking turns and has improved his social and communication skills.

"Now he can't get enough of other people's attention. It's beautiful. Definitely, we've seen an improvement," Erna Jacobchick said.

Since Jaiden does not speak, Fehr finds other ways to help him communicate.

"She'll give him choices, like right hand and left hand and if he wants 'Grandpa's Farm' or 'Frosty the Snowman' ... he chooses the song he wants," she said.

"Having Laura being local and coming twice a week ... we saw a major improvement. With Jaiden, it's important to have consistency and repetition," his mother, Amanda Jacobchick, said.

"I can't even say enough how much (music therapy) helped Aaron and brought our family closer together to enjoy the music," Peterson said.