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INSTRUMENTS OF PEACE: MUSIC VOLUNTEERS SHARE THEIR PASSION TO BRING COMFORT TO HOSPICE PATIENTS

(PASADENA, MD, August 5, 2016) — Bruce Sponsler’s mom always said, “God gives us gifts. No matter how big or small, you should try to share it.”

So when the Glen Burnie man retired last year after four decades of teaching physical education, he called Hospice of the Chesapeake to see how he could share his gift with patients.

One day, he volunteered at the Rebecca Fortney Inpatient Care Center in Pasadena and visited an actively-dying woman and her daughter. Sponsler was warmly welcomed, but he felt he probably didn’t make a good first impression. “(The daughter) didn’t say what she was probably thinking, seeing some guy carrying a banjo,” he laughed.

Undaunted, he played and sang softly for the little family. He could feel the comfort it brought at a difficult time.

At a very different visit, Sponsler was greeted by a large crowd at a patient’s home. There, his upbeat songs were accompanied by the boisterous voices of people using smartphones to find the lyrics.

“It’s not the instrument. It is how you play the instrument. How you present your healing art,” he said. “Whether it’s two people in a room playing quietly or 10 people in a home singing along with the lyrics on their phones.”

Music is one of the many Healing Arts used by the nonprofit as part of a holistic approach to caring for people experiencing advanced illness. Other therapeutic offerings include massage, pet therapy, Aromatherapy, beautician services, scrapbooking – pretty much anything that makes a person find peace and comfort. These are called complementary therapies, as they are offered in concert with the medical, social and spiritual care of the care team.

Hospice of the Chesapeake has more than 110 volunteers trained to serve as healing arts volunteers. These are often creative people looking for a meaningful way to share not only their talent, but their passion. For Lisa Salkov of Baltimore it started with a ukulele. The vocalist originally gave it to her boyfriend as a gift, but started to teach herself how to play it and quickly fell in love. It makes her so happy, she said her boyfriend said it was the best gift she ever gave him.

“I love it with such a passion,” Salkov said. “It’s very personal to me.”

Because of her intense connection with the instrument, she was a bit hesitant at first to share it with strangers. But playing for the patients on Saturdays at the Fortney center has changed that. “Working here has opened me up. Sharing something so intensely important to me and seeing the reaction, looking at their face to see the lines of pain are gone,” she said. “It’s almost selfish. What you get is just so nurturing to the soul.”

Terri Fevang of Towson said as much when she spoke of her music practice. “This is not performing. It is absolutely a service – it is a ministry,” Fevang said. “We are not here for us; we are here for everyone else.”

Fevang is not a healing arts volunteer. She is a certified music practitioner, or therapeutic musician, a professional who uses the language of music to create a healing space for the patients. By healing, she doesn’t mean curing, but rather making a person whole. “We use music to balance the body, mind and spirit,” she said.

A variety of patients can benefit from the holistic healing of music – from trauma victims to cancer patients. Along with Hospice of the Chesapeake, Fevang’s practice also includes Anne Arundel Medical Center, Mercy Hospital and private clients. Her internship was at the University of Maryland Shock Trauma and she also has helped cancer patients. “There is no downside to music when used thoughtfully and intentionally by somebody who knows how to do it.”

To become certified, Fevang had to complete five separate modules of coursework, do independent study and participate in clinical internships. This has given her the experience and knowledge to use her instrument – the keyboard – to respond to a patient’s needs in a most immediate way. “Moment by moment I am creating a human connection through live music,” she said. “Your skill level, your connection to your instrument, your knowledge, your desire to give your music away; you’re bringing yourself, your humanity, life and joy and sadness. You’re bringing it all back into that room.”

You don’t have to be certified or even a professional musician to volunteer at Hospice of the Chesapeake. However, you do need to complete patient care volunteer training – either two full days in person or 30 hours online. Like most of the training opportunities the nonprofit offers, it is free for volunteers.

Salkov said that though it was a bit of a commitment, the plus side is she has since become interested in other Healing Arts and has since taken the training to qualify her as a Comfort Touch and Aromatherapy volunteer. “There is so much that you can learn. And so much that you can give.”

(INFOBOX)

Learn the healing arts: Become a volunteer

To inquire about becoming a healing arts volunteer with Hospice of the Chesapeake, contact Kris Carpenter-Zyla at 410-987-2003, Ext. 1328, or kcarpenterzyla@hospicechesapeake.org.

For details on volunteering, visit <https://www.hospicechesapeake.org/volunteer>.

To see a video of Lisa Salkov playing for a patient at the Rebecca Fortney Inpatient Care Center, visit <https://vimeo.com/user36238218>.



(June 2016) Bruce Sponsler plays the banjo for hospice patient Carol Tutton of Severn while Sponsler's wife Tracey holds her hand. Photo courtesy of Patty Griffin of Severn



(June 10, 2016) Bruce Sponsler plays the banjo in the backyard of his Ferndale home. He has been playing banjo for over 40 years. Photo by Elyzabeth Marcussen, Hospice of the Chesapeake



(May 28, 2016) Lisa Salkov of Baltimore volunteers at Hospice of the Chesapeake where she sings and plays the ukulele for patients in the Rebecca Fortney Inpatient Care Center in Pasadena. Photo by Elyzabeth Marcussen, Hospice of the Chesapeake



(June 6, 2016) "Moment by moment I am creating a human connection through live music." -- Certified Music Practitioner Terri Fevang of Towson. Photo by Elyzabeth Marcussen, Hospice of the Chesapeake

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Caring for life throughout the journey with illness and loss is the mission of **Hospice of the Chesapeake**. For more information, please visit www.hospicechesapeake.org.



(May 28, 2016) Lisa Salkov of Baltimore volunteers at Hospice of the Chesapeake where she sings and plays the ukulele for patients in the Rebecca Fortney Inpatient Care Center in Pasadena. Photo by Elyzabeth Marcussen, Hospice of the Chesapeake