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Rhythm Remedy

In the hands of Norman's Music Moves Mountains Foundation, melody is medicine. By Brooke Adcox

CLOE BAKER PICKS up a shaker and starts to dance. Her mother, Abby, watches with excitement.

"I knew my daughter loved music, but I didn't know she could follow sequential steps, because she has a difficult time knowing where she is in space sometimes," says Abby, a Moore resident. "Then I saw her pick up the shaker and follow the basic swings they were doing."

Five-year-old Cloe is autistic. She loves music and learned to sing before she learned to speak. Abby knew her

daughter's love of music could help Cloe open up to new experiences. So she brought her to an All Abilities Rock concert hosted by the Norman-based **Music Moves Mountains Foundation**.

"She has done things no one expected her to do, and one of the first things that helped us hope was when we started using music with her," Abby says.

Music resources for special needs children are limited in Oklahoma. It's this problem Music Moves Mountains has tried to solve since 2012. At its All Abilities Rock concerts, the venue, volume, instruments, and set list are handpicked to provide a comfortable place for children on the autism spectrum or with sensory issues to enjoy live music.

The work is personal for Music Moves Mountains founder and director Julie Frost: Her nine-year-old son Hudson Tartack is autistic. Frost has observed how playing drums, writing songs, and listening to music have improved his life.

"He'll play drums for twenty minutes, and all of a sudden, his mind and body are working together," says Frost.

Research has shown that music can help those with autism, mental illness, brain injuries, chronic pain, and developmental disorders. However, there are fewer than thirty-five nationally certified music therapists in Oklahoma. In April 2015, Music Moves Mountains hosted a workshop for music educators that featured a hands-on learning session

about using adaptive music techniques for special-needs children in schools.

The foundation's Play It Forward program secures musical instruments for those in need. Volunteers also organize live music events every year, including two annual benefit concerts. The foundation's efforts reflect Frost's passion.

"Our community lacked something that would benefit special-needs kids, and Julie saw that," says Abby Baker. "How much more could you ask from somebody than for them to believe in your child as much as her own?"

Get There: For more information on programs and upcoming performances, visit musicmovesmountains.org.



LORI DUCKWORTH

Music therapists lead events for kids and adults throughout central Oklahoma with the Music Moves Mountains Foundation.