

All the Right *Notes*



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UPMC
LIFE CHANGING MEDICINE



All the Right Notes

UPMC Music Therapists
Connect Patients to
Treatment With a Beat

*Ann Jackovich, music therapist,
UPMC McKeesport*

*Story by Katherine Lewis
and Andy Mulkerin*

*Photos by John Dillard
and Jake Carlson*

Ann Jackovich was working recently with one of her patients at UPMC McKeesport. The young woman was diagnosed with schizophrenia; her condition had her pacing, fidgeting, acting out. There was one tool in Ann's therapeutic toolkit that was particularly effective in the moment: Beyoncé.

"When I put on Beyoncé, she stops pacing, she stops trying to touch other people, and becomes engaged with the music and me, singing to me — you know, 'Everything you own in the box to the left.'"

Ann is a music therapist — part of UPMC's Creative and Expressive Arts Therapy program (CEAT) — and as such, she finds innovative ways to meet patients where they are. With this particular patient, Beyoncé is a pathway to a healing experience.

"For those moments, she is in reality with me," Ann says. "When the song is over, I'm able to engage in conversation for about 10 minutes and she's calm, she's grounded. The music grounds her into reality. It's a great tool."

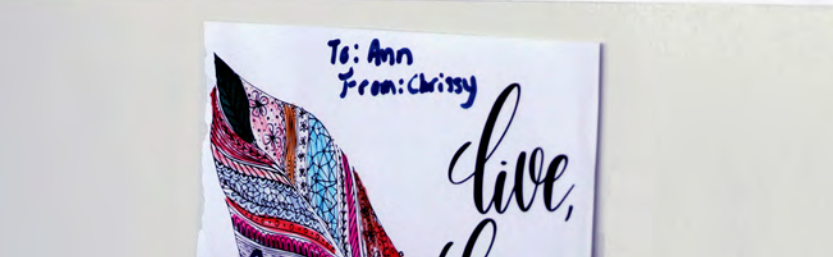
Ann, who's been with UPMC for three years, works with patients on the hospital's behavioral health units and its addiction medicine unit, where patients receive medication-assisted treatment for substance use disorders.

Music therapy is applicable in nearly every clinical setting in one way or another, and at UPMC, it's used primarily in adult behavioral health patient populations and general pediatric populations. Music therapy applications run the gamut from helping an adult overcoming a substance use disorder to write and sing about their addiction and their goals to exposing an infant in the NICU to music to help regulate their heart rate. >



“I think being able to see the world through the eyes of a child may be one of the greatest gifts I’ve ever been given.”

— **Nicole Steele**, creative and expressive arts therapist, UPMC Children’s Hospital



UPMC music therapists touch the lives of our patients in many ways. **Ann Jackovich’s** wall (left) contains drawings and cards from patients who she’s worked with on the behavioral health and addiction medicine units at UPMC McKeesport. **Nicole Steele** (right) works with young patients with medical diagnoses at UPMC Children’s.

Finding Their Calling

Combining natural musical talent with a career helping others is a theme that’s common among UPMC’s music therapists. Some, like **Nicole Steele**, a creative and expressive arts therapist at UPMC Children’s Hospital of Pittsburgh, considered pursuing a degree in performance before switching gears and finding their true passion. She attended Slippery Rock University.

“I knew that wasn’t exactly what I wanted, and someone was like, ‘Why haven’t you looked into music therapy?’” she recalls. “I was going to do a psych minor, so I talked to one of the professors of music therapy and totally fell in love.”

Nicole is one of three music therapists at UPMC Children’s, where the Creative and Expressive Arts Therapy unit works closely with the Child Life team. Unlike at UPMC McKeesport and UPMC Western Psychiatric Hospital, where music therapists work primarily

with behavioral health and addiction patients, music therapists at UPMC Children’s engage with a variety of patients throughout the hospital.

At UPMC Children’s, the three music therapists are trained to work with all patients and see a variety of ages and diagnoses. “Our patients are here for medical reasons, and we’re an ancillary service supporting that,” says **Kory Antonacci**, CEAT program coordinator and one of UPMC Children’s certified music therapists. Music therapy goals can relate to mental health, she says, “but they can also be very medically driven.”

Kory, Nicole, and **Brittany Stone**, the team’s other music therapist, are preparing to publish research they conducted about rhythmic entrainment in the NICU at UPMC. Since infants can’t respond verbally to music, they rely on physiological feedback to show how their work is affecting the patient.



“We implement our music and the beats per minute, the tempo, to try and maintain their vital signs within normal levels,” Kory explains. “Neonates tend to run a very high heart rate, so we want to be able to relax them without having to add another medication, and we also want to keep their oxygen saturation up.”

A music therapist might spend 10 to 20 minutes or more exposing a NICU baby to music to help regulate their vital signs and stimulate neurological advancement.

Music therapy at the hospital can involve patients directly or can incorporate their loved ones. It can mean playing music on a tablet to keep a child engaged during a procedure, or it can mean helping an adolescent patient work out their feelings in words, then turn them into a track using a beat-making app.

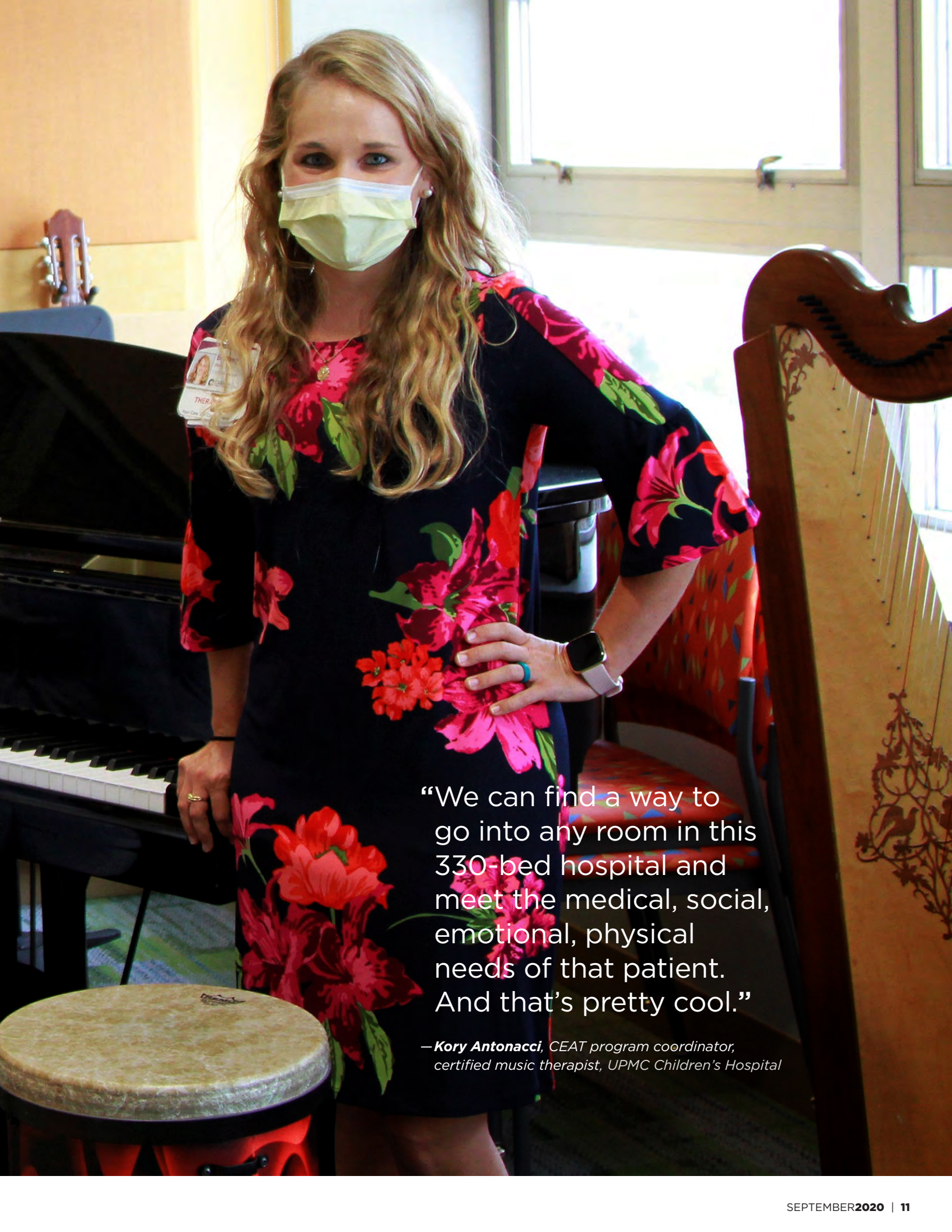
It can also involve helping a patient and their family deal with the difficult moments.

“We will often be called for withdraw of care,” Kory explains. “Having a therapist in the room in those moments is key. And we hear all kinds of beeps, the morphine drips, nurses providing care, doing their job — as we begin to remove support, those sounds start to decrease, and music really provides a container in that moment, where people can express their emotions. You can only imagine what that moment feels like.”

“The bottom line is: We can find a way to go into any room in this 330-bed hospital and meet the medical, social, emotional, physical needs of that patient,” Kory says. “And that’s pretty cool.” >

The UPMC Children's music therapy team (from left: **Nicole Steele**, **Kory Antonacci**, **Brittany Stone**)





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— *Phillip Mauskapf, music therapist, UPMC Western Psychiatric Hospital*

Robert Miller, MS, MT-BC (left) and Phillip Mauskapf (right) play guitar outside UPMC Western Psychiatric Hospital.

Beats for Behavioral Health

Robert Miller, MS, MT-BC, CEAT program coordinator, oversees the CEAT department at UPMC Western Psychiatric Hospital and coordinates UPMC’s music therapy internship program. He and **Phillip Mauskapf**, music therapist, comprise the full-time music therapy staff at UPMC Western Psychiatric Hospital.

“We mainly do unit-based activity and groups. We travel from unit to unit for group sessions. We’re not able to visit everyone, but the CEAT department helps ensure one or two modalities in each,” Robert explains.

Robert and Phillip tailor their sessions to the clinical focus of each unit. Sessions are aligned with the different theoretical orientations on each unit to help give a seemingly uniform series of treatments to the patients.

“The nice thing about music therapy is that we can adapt to the specific needs of the unit, such as being a population-based need,” Robert says. “Having a group of adolescents with intellectual disabilities is very different from adults with eating disorders, so we adapt to use the music in ways that fit their needs.”

Adjusting in a Difficult Time

COVID-19 has forced some extra creativity among UPMC’s music therapists. Just last year, UPMC Children’s dedicated the Nora Grace Kaufman Center for Creative Arts Therapy and Dream Big Studio, with two innovative spaces for collaborative creative work. However, the restrictions put in place to keep patients and staff safe have forced a return to the roots of the music therapists’ work.

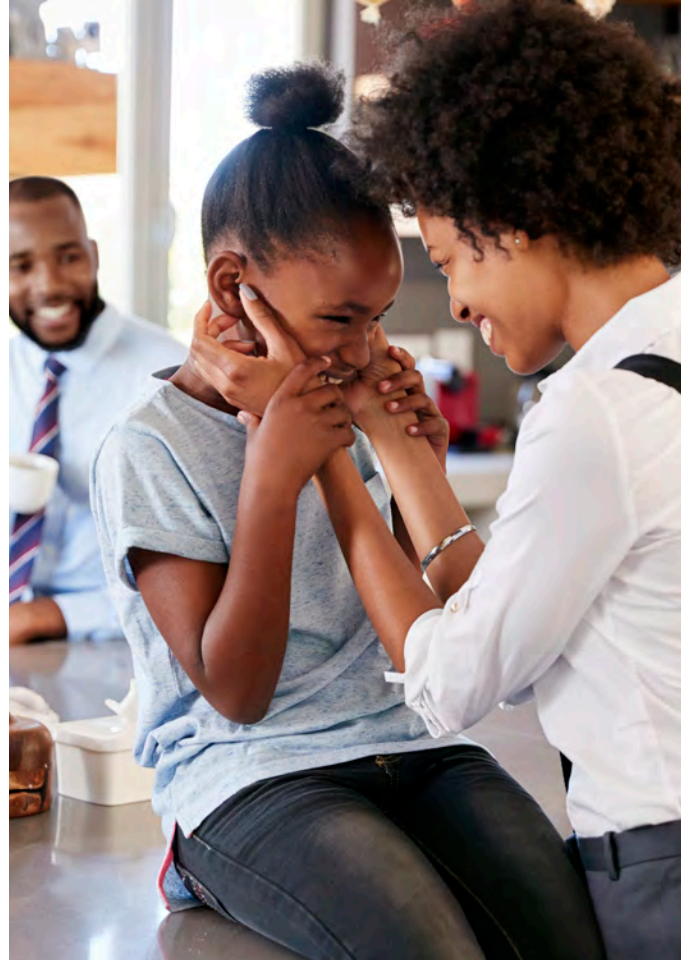
“It brought me back to the basics,” Kory explains. “Me with a guitar in a child’s room.”

While the Nora Grace Kaufman Center is currently in use for one patient at a time, “there was something so humbling about going back to the bedside and doing all of our sessions there” at the start of the pandemic, Kory says.

Ann, at UPMC McKeesport, has also changed her approach. She has helped move live performances that previously took place on-site for her addiction medicine patients to a streaming platform. With the help of the [Sonny Pugar Memorial Inc. Music Smiles program](#) and the McKeesport Hospital Foundation, she has arranged live broadcast performances for the patients, emceed by Kay Bey of the Sonny Pugar Memorial.



Balancing Work and Raising Children?



At UPMC Western Psychiatric, groups have been reduced to nine patients. Limiting peer collaboration — patients may no longer share writing utensils, for example — has helped keep all involved safe.

One of Phillip's ongoing specialty projects, a mobile recording studio, is currently on hold due to COVID-19. Prior to this hiatus, Phillip has been using this method with the general adolescent and bipolar disorder units for the past seven years. Working with Phillip, patients express what is troubling them through writing and producing songs about any topic.

“Along the way, the patient's major needs pop up while working on songs. Whenever this happens, we would talk about how to develop skills to overcome those problems. It could be learning your words have value, knowing you don't have to be perfect, or anything in between — it would all come out during the songwriting process.”

Upon discharge, patients are presented with a CD of their songs to use as a resource at home. Phillip has turned the sessions into a creative writing group to practice safety precautions during COVID-19. >

The new [COVID-19 Parenting Resources Infonet page](#) connects you to child care, back-to-school, and wellness resources.

Connect with other working parents in the [Parents of UPMC Yammer group](#).

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A Unique Learning Opportunity

Each year, the full-time music therapists are joined by a handful of interns. In order to sit for the Music Therapy Board Examination, students must complete a six-month clinical internship. UPMC is one of the clinical sites accredited by the American Music Therapy Association for internships, so it makes for an easy top choice for interns to apply to.

Interns spend the first three months at UPMC Western Psychiatric, and the last three months of the program at UPMC Children's. This hybrid clinical experience provides interns with a slew of varied skills and experiences, which attracts applicants across the country. Since the start of the internship program in the fall of 2008, interns remain key players in the success of the music therapy program at UPMC, and graduates of the program are now practicing music therapy throughout the country.

Damien Cabrera completed his six-month internship in July 2020. He came to UPMC after graduating from Duquesne University in May of 2019, with a bachelor's degree in music therapy. After doing a semester of clinical practicum at UPMC Western Psychiatric Hospital during college, Damien was drawn to apply because of the opportunity for diverse caseloads.

"In terms of populations served, I really came out of the internship with such a wide range of skills and the ability to be adaptable. Having to modify my skills and practices by through unit to unit, from hospital to hospital, from group sessions to individuals, gave me such an eclectic experience," says Damien.


Intern responsibilities include, but are not limited to, observations, session planning, leading sessions, and documentation. Outside of music therapy, interns observe other CEAT Program experts to gain a bird's eye view of the department.

Working in a clinical and medical environment threw different challenges at the interns. **Reese James** started her internship at the beginning of March. Pursuing a bachelor's in music therapy from Belmont University, her internship is the last portion of her undergraduate degree. Currently at UPMC Children's Hospital, her understanding of music therapy's caseloads has changed for the better.

"Being able to work in a medical setting, after a psychiatric environment, has taught me how diagnoses differ in different realms. Some of our therapies at UPMC Western Psychiatric are dialectical behavioral based, but the therapies at UPMC Children's Hospital can be more person-centered. Learning from different lens has been a fantastic learning experience."

As Reese's internship draws to a close, she says it has already exceeded her expectations for growth.

"Seeing how people reach the same goals, using different methods, is amazing," Reese says. "Some people may be working on coping skills. One person may improve by analyzing lyrics, but the other might need to hit a drum really hard. We are reaching the same goal, but in very different ways." >



Ann uses a supply of percussion instruments to help in her therapeutic work with her patients located throughout UPMC McKeesport.



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CEAT program coordinator,
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— **Reese James**, *CEAT intern,*
UPMC Children’s Hospital

Everyone Has a Song

Across the board, the music therapists agree that this foundational relationship with music helps make music therapy sessions successful.

“People just respond to music,” Phillip says. “It’s a universal area where everyone can be moved. It impacts people much deeper than we realize. When we take the time to understand, it makes a very accessible form of helping ourselves and others.”

“Music is something that most people relate to heavily,” explains Reese. “It’s a comfortable space to be in, regardless of how the patient might feel on that day. There is an innate therapy being around music and the creation of music. Music as therapy, by itself, gives so much room for learning.”

And it’s not only the kids who are affected by the work music therapists do.

“I think being able to see the world through the eyes of a child may be one of the greatest gifts I’ve ever been given,” Nicole says. “That resilience, that sense of hope, that approach to life, is right in front of you and you can be present with it and interact with it and get to just be with them on that journey. I’m not healing anything, I’m not dosing out medication, I can’t make that diagnosis better for them, but I can be part of their time here.” **FF**