

Music Therapy Aides Emotional Recovery

By Kristen Reece

Domestic abuse is one of the most chronically under reported crimes in the United States, according to the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics. It occurs when an intimate partner exhibits violent behavior such as battery, intimidation, psychological abuse, financial control, isolation, threats, and other means to coerce and control the other person. Intimate partner violence is responsible for 30% of all women murdered in the United States. However, for those who manage to escape, the emotional and psychological effects of the abuse can last a lifetime.

Chords for Change, a non-profit organization based in Sonoma County, works to help curb these effects through implementing ongoing music therapy programs in local emergency and transitional housing shelters. Music therapy, as administered by a board certified music therapist, has been widely studied as an effective method for generating positive emotional change, increasing self-esteem, and teaching important communication and coping strategies. It has also been proven to successfully decrease feelings of anxiety, isolation, fear, and regret.

"This is truly an innovative organization that is doing important work to provide alternative forms of therapy to an under represented population of our society," says Chords for Change volunteer Jamie

Blumenthal, music therapist, and owner of Family Music Connection in Santa Rosa, "Music is widely known as the 'Universal Language' and can help people heal in deeply subconscious ways that may be difficult to express in words."

Brian Miller, Program Director for Chords for Change says, "We do not simply present an opportunity to spend a few hours a week experiencing music, but rather we also present an opportunity to feel a sense of belonging. We give victims a chance to express themselves in both a verbal and non-verbal means, discover a talent, inspire and uplift, and validate a sense of self worth and personal identity that is often lost by the cruelty and indifference of abuse."

Chords for Change is a community-based music program, established in Sonoma County in 2009. The goal of Chords for Change is to improve the quality of life for the women and children who reside in domestic violence shelters in Sonoma, Napa and Marin counties. Chords for Change aims to use the healing power of music, along with the proven techniques of music therapy as a vehicle to alleviate the negative effects of domestic violence.

If you would like more information on this topic, or to schedule an interview with Jamie Blumenthal or Brian Miller, please contact Kristen Reece at 510/585-7310 or email Kristen at kristen@chordsforchange.org.

FREE Tax Service For low or moderate income residents

Volunteer IRS-certified income tax preparers will meet (at no cost) with low and moderate income families to help them file their taxes as well as to determine if they are eligible for the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), and the Child Tax Credit. Free e-filing is available on the spot, so families could get their refunds in seven to ten days.

Families who earn less than \$50,000 and have two or more children can earn a refund of more than \$5,000—even if they do not owe any taxes. Families with one child may earn \$3,000 or more. The Child Tax Credit may be worth up to an additional \$1,000. Individuals without children with an income of less than \$19,000 a

year may also be eligible for refunds.

The EITC is one of the most effective anti-poverty programs in place. However, nearly a quarter of the families that qualify for the EITC never apply for it. California families left \$1.2 billion unclaimed in 2004—and Sonoma County's share of that unclaimed money is likely to be about \$1.45 million. Research has shown that most moderate income families spend their funds within their own communities, so this will also benefit Sonoma County businesses.

Appointments will be held in various locations in Santa Rosa, Petaluma, and Guerneville. To arrange a free appointment, the families just need to call 2-1-1.

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