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Family Centred Care

THE POWER OF MUSIC

Music helps children feel, express themselves and communicate. For some children in hospital, it replaces what can't be put into words.

Sawyer Murray has never seen his bedroom even though everything at home is all set up and waiting for him. Sawyer was born with a condition called Central Core Disease and for 15 months he has lived in the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit at the Alberta Children's Hospital. The disease affects all of his muscles including his diaphragm and he is not able to breathe on his own. He relies on a special ventilator to breathe for him. Because his disease is so rare, doctors couldn't predict how Sawyer would develop.

"Sawyer continues to surprise everyone around him," says his mom, Cassandra. "He has absolutely no cognitive delays at all and he can hear and see perfectly. He can smile, blow kisses and he absolutely loves music."

Thanks to community support Sawyer has benefitted from the Alberta Children's Hospital Music Therapy Program for over a year now. "Music therapy gives Sawyer the opportunity to participate in activities that promote normal child development, such as playing instruments, listening to familiar songs and rhymes, and interacting playfully with others," says

Music Therapist Marc Houde. "He especially loves drumming and sounding the chimes! Music is a wonderful and highly emotional experience and it shows from his reactions to it. His mom always loves seeing his smile, which makes me proud that the family can have some positive memories while being at the hospital long term."

"It's incredible to see Sawyer light up," says Cassandra. "When he hears Marc's voice and feels the vibration of the music, he beams and his whole being just overflows with happiness."

"Music stimulates all of the senses and can be highly motivating," says Marc. "It also has a calming and relaxing effect. When used as a form of therapy, music can help kids by encouraging socialization, self-expression, communication and motor development. Because the brain processes music in both hemispheres, music can stimulate cognitive functioning and may be used for

remediation of some speech and language skills." Thanks to generous community support, there are two music therapists at the hospital who lead over 1,200 sessions per year with young patients.

Cassandra says that even though her son can't communicate by speaking, he definitely lets everyone know how much he enjoys his music therapy sessions.

"Once we finally go home, I know we won't be able to replace Marc, but I will definitely be looking for musical therapy to continue Sawyer's growth," says Cassandra. "It has truly offered us a side of therapy I never would have even thought of and now, can never do without."



Baby Sawyer enjoys playing with many musical instruments

Every year, generous community donations help the Alberta Children's Hospital enhance medical care with programs that help families heal emotionally and spiritually as well. Thank you!