

December 20, 2003

## United Way: An instrumental intervention

By Joe Mosley  
The Register-Guard

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the last in a series of stories about programs funded by United Way of Lane County to be published during the agency's annual fund-raising campaign.

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It's no one's intention to make rock stars out of at-risk youths.

But hey, put a guitar into a kid's hands and some pretty cool things can happen.

"We try to give them a positive experience, something they can really feel good about," says Bob Clayton, who along with fellow musicians David Helfhand and Jeff Schenck has been offering free guitar lessons for the past four years to clients at Station 7, a program of Looking Glass Youth and Family Services.

"Most of the kids we've worked with have never had a chance to touch an instrument before, much less get individualized lessons," Clayton says.

The crisis-to-chords program devised by the volunteer instructors not only gives Station 7 kids a hands-on opportunity, it now offers the incentive of a free electric guitar and amplifier to those who stick with the instruction through at least 10 lessons.

Since the earn-an-instrument element was added to what's now known as the ACCHORD Music Mentorship Program two years ago, 13 students have been rewarded for seeing the program through.

Station 7 alumnus Ashley Bass is a good example of kid whose self-confidence and overall outlook has gotten a boost from her foray into music. She completed the requirements and earned a guitar, and still seeks out opportunities to reconnect with her teachers.

"I try things now, and don't really hold back," Ashley says during a reunion with the musicians. "And I'm not so used to being with adults all the time, so it really has helped me in that."

Clayton plays a sequence of notes on his guitar, and Ashley's fingers quickly find the right frets on her instrument, demonstrating her newfound confidence.

"The first couple lessons, I didn't know anything about it," she tells her teachers. "I learned something from each of you guys. Then I, like, put it all together and - woo - beautiful!"



Ashley Bass smiles after successfully playing a riff she just learned from Jeff Schenck (left) and Bob Clayton, who give lessons to at-risk kids.

Photo: **Thomas Boyd** / The Register-Guard

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Clayton, Helfhand and Schenck have taught a combined 400 lessons at the crisis center - where clients generally come and go in less than six weeks, though outreach services to the children and their families may continue for half a year.

The United Way-funded program helps juveniles move on from crisis situations by formulating and following through with plans to stabilize their lives and set them off on an even keel.

Program director Galen Phipps says he welcomed the prospect of a musical avenue at the teen shelter when Clayton contacted him and proposed the program, offering even to bring along a small grant that Helfhand had secured from the Lane Arts Council.

"Then after the funding disappeared, Bob kept coming here," Phipps says.

The mentorship program now costs about \$2,000 per year to operate - mostly the cost of instruments - and in fact has been on hiatus for the past month, as the instructors seek donations to restock the guitar cabinets. Most of the program's past donations have come from the instructors themselves.

"You learn as much as you teach," says Schenck, a bass guitarist.

"It's been a real rewarding experience."

"Through music you're able to establish a rapport with these kids," Clayton says. "As soon as you play something cool on the guitar, you have a connection with them."

Each of the three instructors currently teaches at least one private student not associated with the Station 7 program, and each have played in various bands - from Celtic to heavy metal.

Clayton says more volunteer instructors are as critical to the program's future as monetary contributions. But he says it's a unique teaching situation - the period of contact with students being limited - that has required the musicians to streamline things to get kids playing real music, sometimes by the end of an initial lesson.

"We've been able to boil down teaching guitar so we can get a kid playing a song fairly quickly," he says.

## LANE COUNTY UNITED WAY CAMPAIGN

**Fund-raising goal:** \$4.3 million

**Pledges to date:** \$3.6 million

**Top small company pledges:** Lane Electric Coop raised \$30,004 with 50 employees; A.I.G Valic raised \$11,960 with 6 employees; the Public Safety Center raised \$16,584 with 80 employees.

- *United Way*

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