

ScotchPlainsPatch

Scotch Plains Non-Profit Offers Music As Therapy

Music For All Seasons, Inc. uses funding from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts to bring live music to confined individuals.

By Rachel Gillett (Open Post)

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The New Jersey State Council on the Arts awarded more than \$450,000 in grants to Union County arts organizations and projects last week.

Music For All Seasons, Inc., which brings live, interactive music performances to people who are confined, was the only organization in Scotch Plains to receive funding, accepting \$27,775 for general operating costs.

The grant will be applied to help support programs serving children in shelters for victims of domestic violence, children in half-way homes for foster care, returning veterans, seniors, and patients in hospitals and hospices.

“We are thrilled and honored to be recognized by the New Jersey State Council on the Arts for the eighteenth year in a row,” said the organization’s Executive Director Brian Dallow. “In this economic climate, the Council and the State of New Jersey are to be congratulated on maintaining such a high level of support for the important and life-changing work that the arts organizations of the State provide in the areas of education, quality of life, and therapeutic healing.”

The non-profit organization was founded on the grounds that music has therapeutic properties, and through bringing live, interactive, and professional music to the residents of facilities that have no regular access to the arts, the organization can bring healing to these residents.

“Music For All Seasons is very proud of its contributions over the past twenty-one years, and the fact that we represent both Scotch Plains and State of New Jersey as we go about our work of healing through music in New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, and California,” Dallow said.

According to the organization’s website, the number of people confined in institutions is at an all-time high, and the upward trend is expected to continue. Long-term confinement can be a dehumanizing experience, the organization states, denying dignity and diminishing people's chances to recover or to thrive.

Music For All Seasons facilitates the performance of live musical events in a wide range of institutions, including children's hospitals, retirement facilities, juvenile detention centers, nursing homes, medical centers, halfway houses and prisons.

The organization also seeks to solidify the commitment of young, professional artists to serving special audiences by creating regular volunteer opportunities to serve local communities.

Music For All Seasons auditions young artists from the undergraduate and graduate programs of major conservatories and young professionals with established careers. They then train these artists to perform in institutional environments and to communicate with special audiences. Their current roster includes more than 70 musicians and musical groups who perform regularly.

Their most recent program, Voices of Valor®, addresses issues of the trauma and stress of reintegrating into civilian life for veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as other conflicts.

Dallow said this pilot program, which has just completed a successful year funded by a major grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, uses therapeutic song-writing to assist veterans in dealing with the significant traumas of readjusting to a civilian world, especially a world in which many of them return to issues of unemployment, homelessness, and a very difficult economic climate.

According to US Department of Veterans Affairs figures for fiscal year 2011, about once every half hour in America, a veteran within the VA healthcare system tries to commit suicide.

However, Music For All Seasons seeks to change this and has had success working with veterans on university campuses, in veterans' hospitals, and in a program at Holliswood Hospital in Jamaica, Queens, where they work with active-duty military diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

“Funding for all programs in the arts is a major challenge in this economic climate, but it is important to remember that these programs are not frills; they are all programs with proven clinical research-based results that demonstrate the remarkable changes the arts make to the quality of life of our society,” Dallow said.

The organization has received funding from the New Jersey State Council on

the Arts since the mid 1990s.

According to Dallow, the application process is detailed and elaborate, requiring significant proof of financial stability, quality of programming, proof of objectives, goals and demonstrable results, and the ability to match the grant on a minimum of a three to one match.

In addition, financial audits are required, along with the ability to meet the stringent requirements to receive government funding.

Funding decisions are made through a merit-based and rigorous grants process that assures access and equity. Independent peer panels evaluate grant applications to eliminate the possibility for conflict of interest.

The State Council on the Arts receives its funding in direct appropriations from the State through a dedicated hotel and motel occupancy fee and grants from the National Endowment for the Arts.

New Jersey State Council on the Arts outgoing chair Ofelia Garcia said, "The council is confident that we have made the most responsible investment of valuable resources, recognizing the highest standards of excellence among the diverse arts communities in the state, that they may provide their critical and irreplaceable services to our citizens."