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Life Services Alternatives



NHAT V. MEYER — STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

MUSIC SETS THE RIGHT TONE

By Ethan Baron » ebaron@bayareaneusgroup.com

Inside the living room of a San Jose home with the quiet group who eagerly await his weekly visits, Christian LaPaglia strums on his acoustic guitar as he strolls among two women and a trio of men in wheelchairs, playfully acknowledging each and every one of them.

“Hello to TJ,” he sings to one man, “it’s good to see you. He then gets down on one knee to serenade another resident. “Hello to Natalie, good to see you,” he sings, and Natalie laughs.

Most of the severely developmentally disabled people living in Life Services Alternatives’ homes scattered among Santa Clara County neighborhoods cannot speak or walk.

“It’s kind of amazing to see how people respond to a loving and caring environment,” says LSA executive director Dana Hooper. “Most of these individuals are nonverbal but they communicate a lot — with their smiles, with their expressions, with blinks of eyes. We

often see growth that maybe was stifled by the environment they were in before they came here. Our philosophy is this should be a home for life.”

The Campbell-based nonprofit operates 15 houses in the county, funded mostly by the state and federal governments, housing 70 disabled people with varying levels of assistance needs. Five of these dwellings house people who require frequent nursing and receive other supportive services, like those offered at the San Jose house where LaPaglia provides a special kind of care: music therapy.

“It’s the most rewarding thing I’ve ever done in my life, besides marrying my wife and adopting our daughter,” says LaPaglia, 55, of San Mateo, who is certified as a music therapist by the profession’s national board, and holds a music degree from San Francisco State University.

“We’re looking for some voluntary responses to the music,” he says, “some gentle movement, tracking with the eyes, vocalizations, and hopefully also relaxation.”

Certified music therapist Christian LaPaglia, right, sings to Natalie Chavez as he leads one of his weekly music therapy sessions at a Life Services Alternatives home in San Jose.



Donations will support the music therapy program at Life Services Alternatives’ five homes for residents with special health care needs.

Goal: \$10,000