

Vitamin L News

Spring 2016

A Powerful Way to Start the School Day

Last fall Vitamin L performed at Fayetteville Elementary in Fayetteville, NY. Out of 27 years of Vitamin L concerts, that day was quite memorable. Why? Because the school had some practices that were so inspiring and supportive of the kids that I wanted to share them in this newsletter.

We were doing a morning concert so we were at the school early setting up and heard the morning announcements. I was taken aback when I heard an encouraging little story in the announcements. We were there on a Wednesday and it turns out that every Wednesday they have "Wednesday Words of Wisdom." The Words that day were to promote problem solving.

Here is what we heard over the loudspeaker: *Have you ever been sad because of a problem in your life? Maybe you aren't making the grades you want, or maybe you aren't playing ball as well as you'd like. Maybe you just can't seem to do better with your music lessons. Now imagine a mighty river flowing through the earth. It may be blocked for a time - like when a big rock gets in its path - but it always finds a way over or around or through. A river never gives up. It just keeps moving forward. Someone wise once said, "A river always wins because it is persistent and overcomes every barrier. A river can be an example of how to keep going in the face of a big*

problem. Next time you are sad about a problem in your life, remember the river. It finds its way, and with some help from someone you trust, you can, too.

I thought, how supportive and beneficial to have an inspiring story to ponder at the beginning of the day. I think that would have been very helpful to me in elementary school!

But there was more! The school-wide morning walk was next. All of a sudden the halls were filled with students and teachers walking around to the cheerful music of the song "Happy," by Pharrell. I was quite taken with this! What a big burst of positive energy to start the day with! This walk created a feeling of community and woke up the kids and got everyone's blood pumping. And it seemed fun! Wow!

I later learned that all 3 elementary schools in the Fayetteville-Manlius district have been doing this energizing morning walk every day for about 10 years. The walk is 8 to 10 minutes long and each class has a loop to walk. While the students and teachers walk, the school nurse and other staff stand by and greet them. I learned that they used Vitamin L music for their morning walk for about a month before the concert. The school-wide walk was started out of a need to fulfill the state-mandated Physical Education hours per week,

but the benefit goes far beyond just physical. The walk creates a wonderful feeling in the hallways and a positive energy in the school community. What a way to start a school day!

I also learned that the school has had the "Wednesday Words of Wisdom" tradition for 8 or 9 years. The school has a terrific character education committee that provides all the teachers with an excellent resource binder with stories, lesson plans, and other very helpful resources in it, including books to read for specific problems such as tattling or a pet dying. The school has character education time each month that has specific goals that have to be met. Activities take place between different grade levels to help build community. Through these activities and efforts students are taught that if they are a problem solver, and if they are caring and respectful, they will do well and have a happy life.

I was deeply moved by how the students and staff at Fayetteville Elementary started their day. May these powerful and inspiring practices spread to many more schools and reach students all across our country!

- Janice Nigro, Director, Vitamin L



Connecting with our audiences...

We treasure connecting with the children in our audience. When possible, our chorus greets each audience member as he or she leaves the concert. Some kids write thank-you letters, and here are samples from a few recent ones:

"Thank you for singing for us with your awesome voices and hearts." - Abdulla

"I look forward to seeing you every year. I love the messages your songs send. They really help me and my peers. Come again soon." Your biggest fan, Molly

"I appreciate you for encouraging us to be happy."

"The girl with the curly hair is my favorite singer." – Tayonna

"I like how your songs have a message. When all of your voices are together it sounds amazing. The soloist voices were out of this world." – Omia

"I love all of your songs you sing. They make me happy."
From your friend Isabella

"Thank you for singing songs that help us."

"Thank you for coming to our school and inspiring us. I love this band so much I don't know what I would do without the inspiring songs. You make us shine!" – from Mahoniss



THE GRATITUDE REPORT

On May 4 Vitamin L was one of 105 organizations to take part in the **Giving is Gorges** 24-hour online fundraiser in our community. This event raised \$1,765.00 for Vitamin L from 39 donors and we appreciate every donation! In addition, in the last six months The Vitamin L Project has been very grateful to receive contributions from numerous individuals and groups, including The Park Foundation, The John Ben Snow Memorial Trust, The Triad Foundation, Alice Saltonstall via The Middlecott Foundation, and the Vector Magnetics Fund of the Community Foundation of Tompkins County.

The Savage Club of Ithaca, Audrey Edelmann Realty USA, and several individuals contributed to a matching grant opportunity from The John Ben Snow Memorial Trust that raised funds to provide partial scholarships for Vitamin L concerts at financially challenged schools.

Thanks to our board members, photographers Sandy and Bill Podulka and Cathy Saloff-Coste, editor Sandy Podulka and

A HEARTFELT THANK YOU TO ALL OF OUR SUPPORTERS AND VOLUNTEERS!

From a Vitamin L Current Member...



The importance of having an understanding and caring community can never be underestimated. And in my case, it's one of the most important things I need. I've been working with Vitamin L since I was eleven - nearly seven years now - and I have stayed not just because I believe so strongly in our work, but because I have received nothing but love, support, and care from the community.

Here's a bit of background on me: I have lived in Ithaca since the age of two. When I was five, I watched my first Vitamin L video - my parents played a VHS tape of the Tenth Anniversary Concert and asked me if I wanted to see the 15th Anniversary Concert live a few weeks later. My answer was a resounding "Yes!" I cheered and clapped from my seat, so utterly enraptured by the feel-good music and dancing of the people on stage. My parents saw how much I loved the experience and told me I would be able to audition in just a few years. I was immediately interested and spent the next years of my life looking forward to that audition. I was a performer at heart, and loved making up songs for my parents and siblings on the family video camera. I had all four (later 5) Vitamin L CDs growing up and listened to them constantly. My little sister and I would dance and sing at the top of our lungs to "The Beauty Shop." We

would sway back and forth to "Walk a Mile." We would jump around the living room to "Say Thanks." The music was truly magical to me because it taught about love and acceptance. I knew from a young age that I was different, but never knew how to put words to it. I just knew that I'd find a caring community in Vitamin L. For someone like me, who connected with Vitamin L songs from an early age, it only made sense to be a part of the group that created them.

Fast-forward a decade or so, to when, two years ago, I came out as transgender and announced that I would begin my long process of transitioning. I was just completing my second year serving on the youth section of the Vitamin L Advisory Board, and my fifth year as a chorus member. I even had spent the last few summers helping to train new chorus members in the choreography and singing that were second nature to me. I chose to transition very publicly and was not ashamed of my open trans status. I sent out a mass email to every parent and student in Vitamin L and received an outpouring of support and love, some from people I never even had met before. I spent 15 years terrified to be honest about myself, but I was extremely lucky to have a caring community on my side.

I made one of my toughest decisions at this point, which was that I would formally step down from my place in the chorus and the Youth Board to spend at least a year working on myself and being the best "me" that I could. It became immediately clear, however, that the Board intended for me to do no such thing. When I made my announcement, nearly every person I worked with on the Board reached out to me in some way to tell me how much they wanted to support me through this trying time in my life. It was one of the most amazing shows of support I'd received. I made the decision to stay and I was made co-chair of the Youth Advisory Board.

I know now that I made the right decision. The importance of being surrounded by people I love and who love me back was something I had truly underestimated when I made the decision to step down from the Board, and I don't know where I would be without my ties to this community. Without trying, I had formed a huge emotional connection to the people and my work on the board, and leaving that behind would have been a mistake of me. I now am the Chair of the Youth Board, and supervise its members. With a year off, I would not have been able to move into this role, which feels truly natural to me.

Vitamin L songs always empowered me and made me feel strong. "The Beauty Shop" is about love and kindness and letting inner beauty show. "That is a Mighty Power," a long-time favorite of mine, is a powerful expression of the power we all hold to make a difference in our own lives and in the lives of others. Another favorite, "Here's to the Hero," contains similar messages of self-empowerment and strength. These songs meant so much to me growing up because I loved the hope they contained. They're inspiring—they made me want to make a difference in the world even before I knew what that might be. The messages from these songs have even helped me to develop my identity as an LGBT activist.

After spending nearly half of my lifetime involved with Vitamin L in some way, it feels weird to have my graduation coming up. Where I will go with my life I do not know, but I am excited to see what will happen. Next year, although I won't have a formal place on the Board of Vitamin L, I never will forget my time working in such a supportive space with such wonderful people.

- *Sophie Field, Senior,*
Lehman Alternative Community School
Ithaca, NY

**Please support our unique outreach, service, and leadership work by making a tax-deductible donation online at www.vitaminL.org or to:
The Vitamin L Project 105 King St. Ithaca, NY 14850
Thank You!**

It's audition season for youth currently in 5th - 10th grades.

For more info call 273-4175 or contact us at vitaminLproject@hotmail.com.

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Inspiring children since 1989!

Vitamin L
sings at the
Ithaca Festival
Saturday, June 4
11:00 - 11:30
Bernie Milton
Pavilion
Ithaca Commons

The Vitamin L Project is a Project of The Center for Transformative Action



Several Vitamin L members sang and walked a mile with the Vitamin L team on May 7, 2016 at the "Walk a Mile in My Shoes" Fundraiser for Suicide Prevention held at Eldridge Park in Elmira. This event drew over 2,000 walkers who joined together to raise awareness and over \$50,000.00 of funding for this important issue.

For concert schedule and more info: www.vitaminL.org