

The Lullaby Project: Building Community and Bonds at 4920 Brightside Academy and Beyond



Musicopia is honored to lead the Philadelphia chapter of Carnegie Hall’s Weill Music Institute’s Lullaby Project program for families of young children ages 18 months to 3 years. Through this free, six-session music program, parents/primary caregivers create personal lullabies for their children with the guidance of professional musicians. These songs are deeply personal reflections of the caregivers’ relationships with their children. Taking part in this program offers caregivers a rare moment to pause, think about what they want most for their little ones, and put their feelings into words.

We’ve seen that the Lullaby Project has strengthened parent/caregiver-child bonds and created a sense of community among families we’ve worked with. Linda Russell, Site Director of the 4920 N. Broad Street location of Brightside Academy, an early childhood learning center, speaks highly of how the program has transformed her community. “It takes a village to raise a child, and lately that community has been broken,” she shared. “With Lullaby, it was joyful seeing all the parents come together to support each other. They made their kids a priority and sometimes even told their employers they had to go and make music with their children. This is a way to bring that community and village back together.”

Over the years, Linda saw a cultural shift in how families interact with their children and each other. “COVID changed things, but it’s not just COVID,” Russell remarked. She recalled that earlier generations saw raising children as much more collective effort and that parents/caregivers relied more on each other for support. In recent years, caregivers have

dropped their children off at the learning center in a rush, often not interacting with the staff or their children beyond a “hello” and “goodbye”.

Over the course of the Lullaby program last year, Linda watched the group of adults (who initially sat in the room quietly during the sessions) slowly begin to interact. “I noticed the parents were conversing and getting to know one another. They started saying, ‘Hey, if you’re running late, is it okay if you pick my kid up or hold my child there for me until I get there?’” she shared. This newfound camaraderie extended beyond Brightside’s walls as parents organized playdates for their children. Russell emphasized how diving into the emotional stories behind the songs created a platform for families to bond over shared experiences.

More importantly, caretakers’ interactions with their children have changed thanks to the vulnerability of creating these pieces. Linda noticed that the families have begun to take their time when they enter the doors of 4920 Brightside. She now sees parents helping their children wash their hands in the sink when they come in. They’re also spending more time talking to their children before heading out, often saying “I love you” and giving them a morning pep talk.

Russell was so impressed by how the Lullaby Project impacted her community that she was eager to bring in as much music programming as possible. Linda booked another Musicopia program for her learning center: [Bucket Drumming](#). “We did the Bucket Drumming program, and my school-age kids really enjoyed it.” She noted how the program was beneficial beyond being fun, adding, “It was more than just about making the beats with the drums. It was also about learning discipline, like when to stop and to go. They had no choice but to pay attention.” While caregivers were not involved in the music-making aspect of this program, like they are with Lullaby, it was still an opportunity for them to witness their children’s creativity and growth. Watching their child play music with their peers helped them rediscover the joy of being part of their child’s world and remember the importance of taking the time to be present.

Looking ahead, Linda is excited for future collaborations with Musicopia, including the next cohort for the Lullaby Project for caregivers who were not involved in the program last year. The families at Brightside seem just as thrilled; Linda shared that a parent already asked, “When does music start?” Through programs like the Lullaby Project and Bucket Drumming, Musicopia creates opportunities for primary caregivers and children to connect, even in a world that often moves too quickly. Ultimately, the Lullaby Project at Brightside Academy is doing more than enriching young children with music — it’s building interpersonal connections that will last a lifetime.

If you want your community group to experience the Lullaby Project, please contact Nathan Rifenburg, Program Director, at nathan@musicopia.net.