

## **The Union Colony Children's Music Academy**

The Union Colony Children's Music Academy (UCCMA) was founded in 1989 in the basement of Martha Halquist's home. Now, as the academy celebrates the end of its twentieth year of existence, current Director Amy Johnson is proud to say the program reaches anywhere between four and five hundred students.

The academy offers classes in early childhood music and movement. They accept students anywhere from one week to twelve years old. Students take classes accompanied by their parents until age four when they transition into new classes with their peers. Older children have the opportunity to take classes specific to an instrument such as keyboard, piano, guitar, and other stringed instruments.

The benefits of musical instruction such as this are tremendous. Research has shown it helps with language development, impulse control, fine motor skill control, gross motor skill control, spatial awareness, and social mechanisms such as turn taking. This type of instruction has also been shown to help children with special needs to improve in many functional aspects. The UCCMA offers classes for special needs children in both Loveland and Greeley. In these classes, instructors will tailor lessons to help the children to work on the specific tasks they are trying to master.

Eight years ago, the UCCMA became a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization. This shift required them to establish a board of directors and to write bylaws, among other things, but it has also opened many new doors for the UCCMA. The UCCMA is now able to raise funds through tax-deductible donations, and to do some grant writing in order to receive funding from organizations such as the Community Foundation Serving Greeley and Weld County. In the past, they have received grants from the Foundation's funds such as the Arts Alive Fund, the Littler Youth Fund, and the Women's Fund. These donations allow the UCCMA to offer classes for teen mothers and for the deaf and hard of hearing free of charge.

The UCCMA is also able to provide scholarships, and it is very important to Director Amy Johnson to allow access to all families who wish to be involved in the Academy. In order to do this, they strive to keep advertising and administrative costs low. They pay their teachers, buy materials, and print brochures, but their main monetary focus is providing for the students. She said they do not turn families away. Money is never an issue. Because of the UCCMA's generosity, they give out around \$8,000 in scholarships per year.

The Community Foundation Serving Greeley and Weld County has also provided the UCCMA with other forms of support. Due to Foundation policies, the UCCMA had to take a year away from receiving funding from them, but during that year, the Community Foundation still helped them find funding from other organizations such as Hunter's Dream for a Cure. The Foundation has also helped the UCCMA by providing some of their staff with trainings in different areas that are essential to running a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization.

The UCCMA does so much more than just teaching children about music. It helps with their development, provides opportunities for families to experience music together, offers classes designed for special needs children. There are cost-free opportunities to single mothers and deaf and hard of hearing children, and scholarships are available to any family that needs them. These classes also allow members to connect with each other and to create networks of families in similar situations. The UCCMA believes that music is for every child, and the outreach that their program provides proves that they are willing to put their money where their mouth is and ensure every child has access to that opportunity.