

Vitamin L News

Volume 2, Issue 1

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Vitamin L turns 15 this August!

We invite you to our 15th birthday kickoff in conjunction with the Hangar Theater's 30th birthday on Saturday, August 7th at the Hangar Theater in Ithaca. The shows (and birthday cake!) will be at 10:00 and noon.

Tickets are \$5.00 and can be purchased at the Clinton House Ticket Center or by phone (607) 273-4497. Come early (9:30 and 11:30) for a magic show!

We will also have a birthday themed raffle with wonderful prizes on August 7th. You don't have to be at the event to win. For info about purchasing raffle tickets, call (607) 273-4175.

A Note from Jan & Janice

Dear Friends of Vitamin L,
Summer is here with the beauty of nature all around us. Vitamin L is gearing up for outdoor festivals and celebrations. Our winter and spring have been full of wonderful concerts featuring the talented youth we are blessed to work with.

Special thanks to our advisory board, our parent volunteers, our supporters and friends who help us continue Vitamin's work of character education through music!

- Jan & Janice Nigro

The Vitamin L Project is a non-profit Project of CRESP (Center for Religion, Ethics and Social Policy at Cornell University).

We welcome tax-deductible donations to help further Vitamin L's work.

Growing up with Vitamin L

Eleven short years ago my eight year old daughter bounced off the school bus and announced that they had the “best assembly ever” at school that day. Her eyes were sparkling as she described a performance by a group called “Vitamin L”. “Mom, you would love them too” she said, “their songs are about trying hard to be good people.”

A year later Kaitlin (now age 21) auditioned, and commenced a 10 year journey with Vitamin L, followed by her brother Brian, who is currently a chorus member (age17). Throughout the past decade, my husband David and I have not only learned to Walk A Mile...but as many other Vitamin L parents, we’ve driven many a mile to concerts and festivals as willing and grateful supporters of the Vitamin L Project.

What is it about this project that has connected our family so deeply?

Kaitlin identified it clearly when she said “you will love it too...the songs are about trying hard to be good people.” As parents, we held high hopes that we would raise children who were kind, caring and socially responsible. As our small children reached middle school age we discovered sadly, that it was challenging to find places in their world where these values were the central theme. For us, Vitamin L became a partner in our

parenting...for our children, an opportunity for music to become a vehicle for empowerment. Each time they stepped on stage they experienced the thrill of being a performer, coupled with the opportunity to reach out and make the world a better place. Vitamin L has been a place for our kids and many others to “practice being good people” and to get support and acknowledgement for doing so. So as parents you bet we have been happy to Walk a Mile...and drive hundreds more!

Over the years I have been amazed by the commitment this small organization has maintained to their mission of spreading goodwill through music. As a member of the Vitamin L Advisory Board for the past 3 years, I have had the honor to do my small part and to share the burden and the joy of that mission. As our children have grown, so has Vitamin L, from a chorus of 15 children to the Vitamin L Project of more than 70 participants; from performing 10-12 local concerts a year to performing from San Diego to Miami for tens of thousands of children and adults.

It has evolved into a project with a solid strategic plan, which includes involving families in meaningful ways, and the creation of working committees for fundraising and devel-

opment — all to support the mission of reaching as many children as possible. I get excited when I realize that this increased support from families and friends will give the Vitamin L Project the potential to touch the lives of thousands more children each year. Together, we are stronger and better.

As our second child begins visiting colleges, there is a lump in my throat, along with a feeling of positive anticipation for the new chapter in his life that will begin. I know that, just as his sister has, Brian will make good choices ...he has had a great deal of “practice being a good person”.

I smile as I remember his role as a “supplementary vitamin” at concerts; dancing and singing along, as he watched Kaitlin on stage. He then moved into the role of a full-fledged chorus member, singing the songs and spreading the uplifting messages he grew up hearing. Vitamin L music has helped us grow up as a family; as parents and children we had “scripts in our heads” to provide inspiration...humor...and guidance through some of the rough spots. I believe that to do the job well, it does takes a village to raise a child...we’re just glad that Vitamin L was a part of ours!

- Elizabeth Stilwell

“Vitamins L — a partner in our parenting...an opportunity for music to become a vehicle for empowerment.”

Letter from a Vitamin L Alumnus

I first became a part of Vitamin L at the age of 11, in my fifth grade year at Belle Sherman Elementary school. Janice and Jan were holding tryouts for a new singing group they were organizing. Looking back on my own interest in trying out, I had not even a clue of the growth and power that



would come to manifest itself in my time with Vitamin L. I was chosen along with 10 other young singers to travel around the state, performing song and dance at schools and special events.

Our mission was a chance to spread a message that I knew, even at the age of 11, was in dire need of being delivered. Jan's lyrics chal-

lenged listeners to love themselves despite put downs from peers, to celebrate our differences as beings upon this earth, and probably the most prophetic and influential message for me as a singer; Vitamins L asked people to truly experience and share in the lives of one another, rather than pass premature judgments. We called this song "Walk a Mile".

At the age of 15 I discontinued traveling and singing with the group but I would never stop carrying on the messages that were so deeply planted in my heart. Today I am a graduate student at Roberts Wesleyan College, studying Social Work. I am hoping to eventually obtain my PhD in this field. When I am not busy with school work I continue to play music with a band known as Oculus. In the band I play the Flute, African percussion, and sing. Like Vitamin L, Oculus has been able to travel together to spread a positive message through song and dance.

We have even been blessed with the opportunity to travel abroad, specifically to South America. In January, 2003 we were invited to

perform a month long tour in Brazil. Needless to say this experience was tremendous! It gave us the opportunity to spread our message to the international community as well as connect deeply to the rich musical culture of Brazil.

This summer I am planning to participate and help manage a community farmers market to be held in Conway Park on Cascadilla St. in Ithaca. Organic farmers from around Ithaca will provide produce to be sold for next to nothing. I will specifically be running a program in conjunction with this effort called, Hip Hop Beats to Organic Eats. Through harnessing the musical talents of the area's youth I hope to help teach and learn the relationship between the Hip Hop music of today and the traditional rhythm and beats of Africa. My life long passion with African drums and a real appreciation for the art of rhythmic poetry will provide the material to be taught. I hope to get the areas youth intricately involved in the farmers market effort, using music as a means to bridge that gap between music, good

“Jan's lyrics challenged listeners to love themselves despite put downs from peers...”

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In November, The Vitamin L Project was given a \$7,000 donation to honor the life of Ithaca youth Matthew Jones, who passed on in a car accident. The family giving this loving donation wishes to remain anonymous. We are very grateful for this generous gift.

Enabling Our Message to be Heard

For seven years, John Lloyd has made the music of Vitamin L audible to the fifth graders at the back of the gymnasium, and his skill has balanced out our voices so that even the timid first-timers are heard. Lloyd started working with local bands when he was a teenager, back in Chittenango, New York, where he grew up. Since then he has worked for thirty-nine years as a sound engineer, controlling the voices and music of such revered musicians as Harry Chapin, Eddie Kendricks, and Martha Reeves. On joining up with Mariani Sound at age 23, Lloyd's first assignment was manning the sound on a six-month tour with Johnny Cash. Only four years later, Lloyd started Lloyd Sound Inc., which provides sound and lighting for concerts and special events, as well as troubleshooting



John arrives early, checks out the facility, sets up and tweaks the gear, and is ready when the performers arrive.

services and the design and installation of sound systems. He and his wife Roxanna run the busi-

ness right out of their home in Cortlandville.

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"Vitamin L can lead kids into all sorts of wonderful places where they can help out..."

Parent/Teen Mediators Extend VL Values

Vitamin L kids work hard to perform inspiring music that can really help make a difference in children's lives, but their efforts are, by no means, limited to the stage. Vitamin L can lead kids into all sorts of wonderful places where they can help out, and one such place is the Community Dispute Resolution Center.

The CDRC is committed to helping people

resolve their conflicts through a process called transformative mediation. Parties in conflict sit down for a mediation session with two mediators, whose job is not to solve any problems but to provide for both parties an environment where they can focus on specific issues and hear each other clearly. Being a mediator requires a great deal of patience and commitment, so naturally when the CDRC was looking for able teenage

mediators they contacted Janice and asked her to send some kids their way. Zuri Sabir, Christel Trutmann, Joanna Fine, Jake Boes, Abby Dubovi, Chris Frank, and Lauren Meador are all now proud to be on the CDRC staff as parent/teen mediators. Whenever a family needs a place to constructively talk about a problem, one of these seven Vitamin L kids is there to help.

- Chris Frank

Letter from a Vitamin L Member

I can still remember the first time I got up there, on stage, to sing with Vitamin L. I was nervous, scared, and fearful of all the eyes looking upon me, expecting me to do well. But I looked at each face, and slowly, one by one, I did not see faces that would criticize me if I failed, but faces that wanted to have fun, wanted to hear the music. These were the faces of the future, and I could help teach them and mold them by sharing with them the morals of Vitamin L.

Vitamin L songs are catchy songs, funny songs, and songs that make you want to get up and dance. But Vitamin L songs are important to me for one extra and special reason. These songs teach values and character, such as honesty, endurance, that people are diverse and unique, standing up for what is right, that you should think for yourself, and many more. Vitamin L goes around from school to schools and conferences to perform. Most schools learn some of these songs in advance, so many times the kids will sing along with us on stage. And through their exposure to these songs I believe that they will become better people.

These songs don't just teach the kids, but they also teach us, those that sing the songs. I can't tell you how many times I've

been in a conflict or a situation where a Vitamin L song will pop into my head, such as once when I saw a kid getting bullied in my school, I went to help the kid out, and when the bully asked why and my response was the chorus to the song "Some Rights in this World". When I'm running the mile in school or taking a hard test, the song "Endurance" will start running through my mind.

This can be really annoying sometimes, especially during a hard, timed math test, and you want to burst out in songs like "Endurance", and songs like "Express Yourself" just make it harder, but that's what I love about these songs, they're catchy and full of values.

Also at home, since I'm a Chinese American, I have often been told to keep my feelings inside, not to express certain feelings in public, to be respectful around adults and to only speak when addressed and not to interrupt adults talking. To make sure that I do not do disrespectful things and to do my chores, there are

rules at home which I have to follow. In my new freedom to express myself, my parents had to remind me that there also were rules to follow, and that there needed to be a balance between the two.

The last concert I had was at my old elementary where I sang the song Rules. The feeling of seeing all those sparkling eyes looking up at us, their huge grins, their wavering voices as they sing along, these are the feelings of gratitude I get. The only gratitude I need is that knowing somewhere, someday, down the road, I have helped make a difference in a person's life. That is what makes this worth it for me. Vitamin L means so much to me, the people who are in it, who organize it, who listen to it, but most of all the songs themselves. It's what the L in Vitamin L stands for, Vitamin Love, because everyone needs a little bit of love to grow up healthy and strong, and that is what I do, I help kids receive and give love.

- Jesse Dong,
Vitamin L Member

Letter from a Vitamin L Alumnus

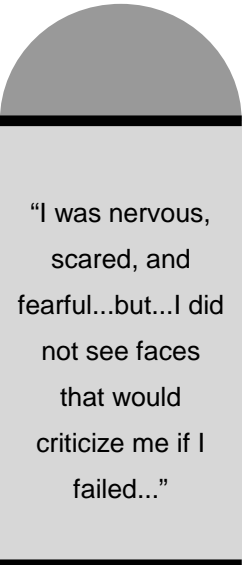
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healthy food, and positive self esteem.

Thank you Jan and Janice for your inspiration and faith in me as a person. I

will carry it with me always. And thank you to all the Vitamin L members of the past and present for keeping this message alive!

- Jhakeem Haltom,
Ithaca, NY



Lloyd Boosts VL Sound

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The company has, over the years, worked the sound for more than 400 well known acts, with such variety as Smokey Robinson, Reba McEntire and Chicago. And, hey, Vitamin L! Vitamin L's mission appealed to John. "The thing that interests me most about being associated with Vitamin L, is being a part of them and the message they send to today's youth," said Lloyd. Lloyd said he enjoys golfing, and bowling, though his business takes up most of his time. But when your business involves backstage passes at Rusted Root concerts, what's not to like?

- Christel Trutmann



Cultural exchange opportunities are abundant in Vitamin L — here some of the Hamilton concert crew cavort with denizens of downtown DeRuyter.

More Good News!

We announce with gratitude that the Helen T. Howland Foundation awarded The Vitamin L Project a \$5,000.00 grant for general support. We also give thanks to the Community Foundation of Tompkins County, which serves as the administrative partner for the Howland Foundation in Tompkins County.

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