

Rye Brook youth brings gift of music to the elderly

By I.C. Ingram

On a recent Wednesday afternoon, with the aid of her keyboard and a microphone, nine-year-old Josephine Yalovitser arrived at the King Street Home to perform, infusing energy into the residents as she sang, played solo pieces or was joined by a parent on the occasional duet.

On July 26, dressed in blue flip flops, a teal knee-length pleated skirt, and a pink top with the sparkled phrase "diva girl" on it, the precocious young girl set up her piano and began her performance with three original compositions before heading into an assortment of tunes by various artists and composers.

"The residents absolutely just love her," said Beverly Peltz, a staff member at the home whose work includes providing recreation for the elderly residents.

Another staff member, Jamel Sams, said Josephine's soft voice helps calm many of the patients, and envisioned a bright future for the young girl.

"She's like a young Mozart," he said. "If she keeps going, she's going to be a star."

Josephine would consistently hop up between songs, offering the residents an introduction to the next song, as they snacked on cookies and drank lemonade.

With each successive number, more and more residents--many of whom are bound to wheelchairs or beds--gradually began listening more intently, reacting



Josephine Yalovitser plays keyboard for residents at the King Street Home in Rye Brook on July 26.

to the tunes with greater applause, clearly invigorated by Josephine's performance.

One resident, a gentleman with gray combed-back hair, sat in a wheelchair listening carefully as he tapped his fingers along to a rendition of "Alleluia."

A short while later, after receiving the words for the "Fiddler on the Roof" song "Sunrise, Sunset," residents mouthed the words, nodded to the rhythm, and sang along softly as Josephine and her father, Michael Yalovitser, performed.

Josephine, who will be entering the fifth grade at Ridge Street Elementary School in Rye Brook, said one of the reasons she comes to play for the residents at 737 King St. is that she remembers visiting

her grandmother before she passed away, recalling how happy the visits had made her.

"I come here to make them happy," she said.

The nine-year-old also dreams of becoming a pediatrician and she sees something therapeutic about her visits.

"I want to be a doctor," she said, as she sipped from a can of soda after the performance. "And when I come here I feel a little bit like a doctor."

She suggested that some of the residents, many of whom have either physical or mental ailments, might have forgotten their child's name or their old home address, but noted that when she plays she
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sees a change in their faces and imagines that the music might trigger a feeling or pleasant memory from a different time.

A couple of residents spoke about the young girl during her performance.

"To come here is remarkable," said an alert, gray-haired woman as Josephine played a sonata by Mozart. "A lot of children wouldn't really care for that."

The resident said everyone at the Rye Brook home enjoys watching Josephine and remarked on the young girl's poise and clear love for what she is doing.

"I think she's precious and I think she's extremely gifted," she said.

Josephine, who started playing piano when she was three-and-a-half years old and has performed in various competitions, recalled her legs shaking from nerves the first time she came to play at the family-owned, 120-bed facility.

She described the difference being that at competitions she is aware that judges are just there to compare her performance to other participants and look for errors, whereas at the nursing home, they're actually there to listen.

Another patient, a woman with white shoulder-length hair, spoke emphatically about Josephine's music.

"I love it," said the resident, whose condition restricted her to a bed during the performance. "I think we all do. She sings these sweet songs."

Turning to speak to Josephine's mother, Tatyana, she added: "You must be very proud of your daughter."

After the performance was over and Mr. Yalovitser began to pack up the keyboard, Peltz assured residents that they'd see the family the following week.

"Same time, same place," she said.