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## **Ouachita students share passion for music with AHDC residents**

*By Taylor Tomlinson*

April 28, 2014

For more information, contact OBU's news bureau at [newsbureau@obu.edu](mailto:newsbureau@obu.edu) or (870) 245-5208.

ARKADELPHIA, Ark. -- As a residential program for special needs individuals, the Arkadelphia Human Development Center (AHDC) seeks to care for its residents while preparing them for an independent life within the community. With a desire to serve, the Ouachita Baptist University Student chapter of the National Association of Teachers of Singing (SNATS) is using their passion for music to provide these residents with a fun and educational outlet to develop new skills.

In March, members of the OBU SNATS began working in pairs to teach voice lessons to residents of the AHDC. The SNATS members meet with their students once a week to work on anything from stretching exercises to memorizing new songs.

"I was really excited that they wanted to do this and have been impressed with how they have worked with our clients," said Deborah Wilson, volunteer coordinator at the AHDC. "It exposes our clients to something that they are not normally exposed to.

"It also gives them that one-on-one attention that everyone craves," Wilson added. "Our goal is to make their lives as normal as possible and give them the skills that they need, so that if they were to move to a community program, they can be a success."

The idea for the OBU SNATS service project with the AHDC began after the group heard about a NATS workshop dealing with teaching voice to individuals with special needs.

"The members of SNATS were very interested in this, and I wanted to encourage their desire to serve others," said Dr. Margaret Garrett, assistant professor of music and OBU SNATS faculty co-sponsor.

In preparation for the project, the SNATS members spoke with Dr. Julia Lansford, a retired university music professor who now teaches voice lessons to special needs students.

"She spoke with the group about what to expect from the students and how to prepare for the lessons," said Garrett. "She encouraged them to maintain high standards and not underestimate their students' abilities."

SNATS member Todd McNeel, a junior mass communications and speech communication major from Grand Prairie, Texas, found this advice to be particularly true during his lessons.

McNeel and his teaching partner "had an initial lesson to see if our student could match pitch or follow rhythm, and he could," McNeel said. "The main thing was staying consistent, so each lesson we would learn vocal exercises and add on each time. He could never really sing words by himself, but he could always remember a tune."

While the project is centered on voice lessons, the meetings have become more than just educational experiences to both the residents and the SNATS members.

“These students have been eager, kind and fun with their lessons,” said OBU SNATS member Tori Clark, a sophomore choral music education major from Bonnerdale, Ark. “It has come to be more of a sharing a love and interest for music rather than teaching.

“Getting to know them and helping them communicate through music, a means that I am very passionate about, has brought me some of the greatest joy and sense of accomplishment that I have experienced in my education,” she added.

“This project has been emotionally and spiritually fulfilling for them,” Garrett noted. “It is an experience that will impact their lives.”

Other members of SNATS who participated in the project include: Ashley Bundy, a senior vocal performance major from Justin, Texas; Joel Rogier, a senior vocal performance major from Glen Carbon, Ill.; and Josh Wayne, a senior choral music education major from Nixa, Mo.

In addition to Garrett, John Briggs, adjunct instructor of music, serves as the OBU SNATS faculty co-sponsor. For more information, contact Garrett at [garrettm@obu.edu](mailto:garrettm@obu.edu) or (870) 245-5271.