



# TUTORING NEWS: INSPIRED YOUTH



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## INSPIRED YOUTH SUMMER PIANO PROGRAM

Inspired Youth offered a six-week program of piano lessons this summer at Edgewater Presbyterian Church. Twenty-six students participated, with 22 children coming regularly. Most of the students took two hour-long lessons each week. Two children came four days each week. Twelve of the students took lessons two years ago in the Tutoring Program's piano session, and ten students were new this summer. Five dedicated, volunteer piano tutors taught the students: Eleanor Bilby, Kassi Holmes, Susan Mattison, Beth Palmer, and Shannon Tokarz.

Eighteen students performed in the final piano recital, which 26 people attended. All the students played well. They had fantastic poise in playing. If they missed a note, they kept going and kept their poise. At the end of their pieces, they bowed enthusiastically. Everyone enjoyed the pieces. The security guard at the end of the hall said, "It was a very nice concert. The singing was beautiful, too."

Students took responsibility for putting on the recital. Andrew and Zuleyka announced the program; Johnesha took photos; Xiomara, Latrice, and others helped serve refreshments. Khadijah and others put away the equipment. Special mention must be made of piano tutor Susan Mattison's cookies. On that hot July day, Susan baked huge chocolate chip cookies for the kids. The cookies were 4½" in diameter and were soft and luscious, a flattering treat for the children.

After the recital Ebony, a young adult grad of the Tutoring Program and sister of four of the piano students, mentioned to Beth Palmer all the work that must have gone into having the students perform. Ebony said, "Never think that what you are doing is in vain. You are planting seeds in the lives of these children. In a few years God will make those seeds grow as we cannot even imagine. I remember when I was in the Tutoring Program. As I grew up, I kept remembering so many things about the program, and it kept being meaningful to me. I know these children will remember the piano lessons and the recitals their whole lives, and it will be meaningful to them."

### HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SUMMER PIANO PROGRAM

This was 10-year old Miguel's first year taking piano lessons. In the first week, he tore through the Level A book. Then he rapidly learned songs in the Level B book. We sensed he underperformed in school (he got straight checks on his report card), and now we see what fantastic potential he has!

Six-year old Daniela had a hard time beginning to play the piano. It took a whole lesson for her to learn to play one finger at a time, not her whole hand at once. It took a whole hour in the fourth lesson for her to learn to play notes with her thumb. It took many lessons for her to play evenly enough so duets could be played with her. By the sixth week she could practice for a short time without anyone supervising each note and phrase. For the recital, she played her two pieces fine, and she didn't cry!

After the recital twelve-year old Johnesha said, "I stayed up late every night last week working on my pieces for the recital." The pieces, ones with complicated rhythms, are often used as standard pieces in piano competitions, and Johnesha played them excellently.

Other highlights: Eleven-year old Alejandro made huge gains from two years ago. Another student learned the first part of "Für Elise" in two days and wants to give her own recital. A 13-year old girl didn't want to play in the recital because she was too shy, but finally she played, and she played very well. Eight-year old Emilio wanted to keep coming to the lessons because he wanted his fingers to dance on the keys like his teacher's, Ms. Eleanor. A mother who couldn't come to the recital came the next day to hear her children play at the lesson, and she videotaped them playing their pieces. After the program ended, 12-year old Zuleyka asked, "When are we going to have another 6-week piano program?"

One of the piano tutors, Shannon, is a college student at UIC, and is thinking of transferring to Boston University. Her mother is a piano teacher and Shannon has taught many piano students as a high school and college student. She noticed that the students' concentration improved during the summer. She said, "They enjoyed playing the keyboards. They also have a good sense of rhythm. I was really proud of Andrew. In the last lesson before the recital, he worked his two pieces to the bone, and he played really well in the recital."

People thought we were teaching children to play the piano. What we were actually teaching was focus, concentration, self-discipline, self-esteem, and patience – all this through the "hands on" activity of making music. It was a wonderful summer.