



# The Gift of Pure Joy & a Grateful Heart

A Report of the Magic of the  
ACM Lifting Lives Music Camp  
2009-2016



**ACM**  
LIFTING LIVES  
MUSIC CAMP



VANDERBILT KENNEDY CENTER  
FOR EXCELLENCE IN DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES



## TO ALL WHO ARE PART OF ACM AND ACM LIFTING LIVES—



The generous gift of ACM Lifting Lives to the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center has been making magic happen in Nashville and beyond for eight wonderful years.

The impact of this gift has been extraordinary not only in the lives of the Music Campers with Williams syndrome and their families but also in the lives of the songwriters, musicians, producers, stage hands, audiences, and more.

In this report we attempt to share that impact so that ACM and ACM Lifting Lives can experience the significance of their gifts of funds and talent and time.

Above all, on behalf of our Campers and all of us at the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center, we want to express our deep gratitude to ACM and ACM Lifting Lives. "Thank you" does not begin to say it. If only our Music Campers could sing it!

*Elisabeth Dykens*

Elisabeth Dykens, Ph.D.  
Director of Vanderbilt Kennedy Center  
Annette Schaffer Eskind Chair

It would take a book, your Camp means so much to us. Every aspect....  
Mikey gets so much from every little piece of Camp....It's so amazing to  
witness the magic of the Lifting Lives Music Camp....Every person involved  
with each stage from the minute we arrive until departure is incredible.  
The level of care and concern for our children is so evident.

~Parent of Camper

*Lifting Lives*



### **The ACM Lifting Lives Music Camp**

is a week-long residential program open to individuals with Williams syndrome who have a passion for music. They come from around the nation and even Canada.

The Camp has a dual purpose of studying Williams syndrome while providing music enrichment through performance and education.

Campers take part in a songwriting workshop and recording session, along with other music-oriented activities, culminating in a live performance on the world-famous Grand Ole Opry.

From 2009 to 2016, ACM Lifting Lives has funded the costs of the Camp in addition to providing scholarships to campers who would otherwise be unable to take part.

The ACM Lifting Lives Music Camp enables the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center in advancing its mission of improving the lives of individuals with developmental disabilities and their families through research, training, and service.

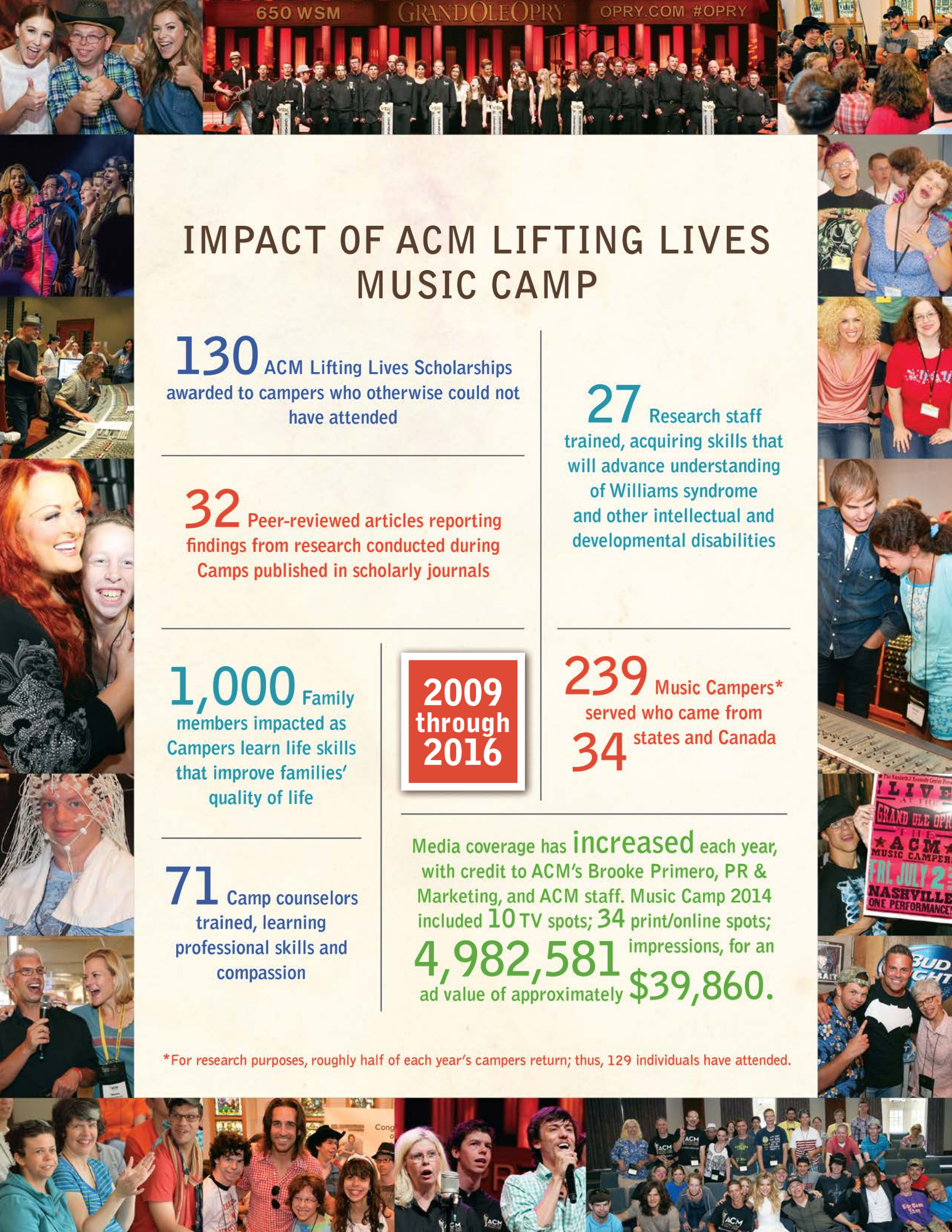
**Williams syndrome** is a rare genetic condition (estimated to occur in 1/7,500 births) that causes medical and developmental problems. It is associated with an unusual pattern of strengths and weaknesses in linguistic and cognitive profiles, as well as intellectual disability.

**THIS IS THE ONLY OPPORTUNITY JAKE HAS EVER HAD TO BE WITH OTHER INDIVIDUALS WITH WILLIAMS SYNDROME. HIS FIRST YEAR AT CAMP WAS THE FIRST TIME EITHER OF US HAD MET ANYONE ELSE WITH WILLIAMS SYNDROME....EACH PERSON ASSOCIATED WITH THE CAMP HAS SUCH AN INCREDIBLY GENEROUS SPIRIT....EACH YEAR IS BETTER THAN THE LAST....THANK YOU, THANK YOU, THANK YOU.**

**~PARENT**







# IMPACT OF ACM LIFTING LIVES MUSIC CAMP

**130** ACM Lifting Lives Scholarships awarded to campers who otherwise could not have attended

**27** Research staff trained, acquiring skills that will advance understanding of Williams syndrome and other intellectual and developmental disabilities

**32** Peer-reviewed articles reporting findings from research conducted during Camps published in scholarly journals

**1,000** Family members impacted as Campers learn life skills that improve families' quality of life

**2009  
through  
2016**

**239** Music Campers\* served who came from **34** states and Canada

**71** Camp counselors trained, learning professional skills and compassion

Media coverage has **increased** each year, with credit to ACM's Brooke Primero, PR & Marketing, and ACM staff. Music Camp 2014 included **10 TV spots; 34 print/online spots; 4,982,581 impressions**, for an ad value of approximately **\$39,860.**

\*For research purposes, roughly half of each year's campers return; thus, 129 individuals have attended.



## LEARNING LIFE SKILLS THAT LEAD TO EMPLOYMENT

The rate of unemployment for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities is significantly higher nationwide compared to that of adults without disabilities. With the support of ACM Lifting Lives Music Camp activities, Campers build independence and social skills. Highlights include:

- Camper who now works in the records department of a major insurance company
- Camper who sterilizes surgical equipment in a hospital
- Camper who now works at a music store in his hometown
- Camper who now gives tours of the Grand Ole Opry—and tells her tours that she has sung on the stage of the Grand Old Opry seven times as an ACM Lifting Lives Music Camper

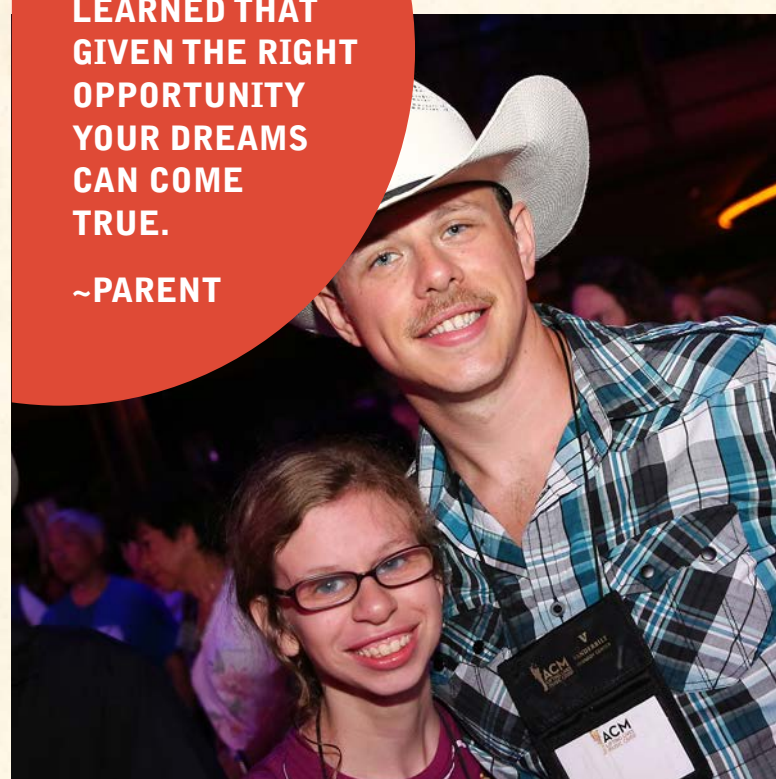
**HE FEELS SAFE AND SECURE AND GAINS A SENSE OF INDEPENDENCE AND SELF-CONFIDENCE. CAMP ENCOURAGES HIM TO TRY NEW THINGS AND ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITY.**

**~PARENT**



**HIS CONFIDENCE AND SELF-ESTEEM JUST SOARED!! HE LEARNED THAT GIVEN THE RIGHT OPPORTUNITY YOUR DREAMS CAN COME TRUE.**

**~PARENT**







## MUSIC CAMP HIGHLIGHTS AND ACM STAR VOLUNTEERS, 2009-2016

### SONGWRITING

- Thom Schyler & LeAnn Rimes
- Chris Young & Brett James
- Gary Allan, Odie Blackmon, & Brett James
- Brett Eldredge & David Lee Murphy
- Dallas Davidson & Jerrod Niemann
- The Band Perry
- Ross Copperman & Heather Morgan
- Eric Paslay & Ross Copperman



### PRODUCTION/RECORDING

- Blake Chancey, Westwood Sound Studio
- Frank Liddell, Javalina Studios
- Mark Bright & Carrie Underwood, Starstruck Studio
- Paul Worley & Luke Bryan, Ocean Way
- Ross Copperman & Jake Owen, Ocean Way
- Ross Copperman & Lee Brice, Ocean Way
- Ross Copperman & Hunter Hayes, Ocean Way
- Ross Copperman & Carrie Underwood, Ocean Way

### OPRY PERFORMANCE

- Darius Rucker
- Big & Rich
- Jerrod Niemann
- Chris Janson
- Hunter Hayes
- Rascal Flatts

### KAROKE

- Julianne Hough
- Wynonna
- Lauren Alaina
- Love and Theft
- Brett Eldredge
- The Swon Brothers
- Montgomery Gentry



**IT'S MY FAVORITE DAY OF THE YEAR. I LOOK FORWARD TO THIS DAY MORE THAN ANYTHING. IT FILLS ME UP FOR THE REST OF THE YEAR.**

**~ROSS COPPERMAN**





## WILD HORSE SALOON

- Lauren Alaina
- The Swon Brothers
- JT Hodges
- Maddie & Tae

## BLUEBIRD CAFÉ

- Casey James
- Scotty McCreery
- Maren Morris

## AND OTHER FUN

- Little Big Town
- Jana Kramer
- RaeLynn

## GIBSON GUITARS

Having the ACM Lifting Lives campers come visit us at the Gibson Custom Shop reminds us ALL what our purpose is – it is to make people happy with the most phenomenal guitar we can make! EVERYONE at the factory can't help but smile at the campers who are enjoying the music played on the instruments we created with our own hands. It touches our hearts and makes all our hard work worth it!

~Maureen Garces, Gibson Custom Engineer

**THEY ACTUALLY DID A LOT MORE FOR US THAN WE DID FOR THEM. IT'S A GOOD TIME. WE'RE DOING KARAOKE. IT'S JUST LIKE ANY OTHER NIGHT WITH FRIENDS.**

**~THE SWON BROTHERS**



## HATCH SHOW PRINTS

The kids make me a better person. Printing with the ACM campers takes me out of myself. They oughta charge us a therapy fee just to be around those beautiful creatures of God, cause they make us feel so good and remind us how graceful is the balance of life.

~Jim Sherraden, Master Printer and Archivist, Hatch Show Print

We make music because we love to make music, and they do, too. That spreads, and it's very inspiring. It changes the spirit of your day, month, week, or year. Having that experience, I feel very fortunate. It was just incredible.

That's real music passion right there.

~Hunter Hayes



## THE ACM LIFTING LIVES MOMENT AT 2011 ACM AWARDS SHOW

The ACM Lifting Lives Moment at the 46th Annual Academy of Country Music Awards, April 3, 2011, in Las Vegas, featured Darius Rucker and 25 ACM Lifting Lives Music Campers—and was broadcast to millions by CBS to the nation and world. Together they sang “Music from the Heart” composed by the Campers with professional singer-songwriters Chris Young and Brett James.

Three days after the broadcast, ACM Lifting Lives reported that media impressions were at 110,733,145 with an approximate advertising value of \$887,968.

**PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES OFTEN HAVE RARE ABILITIES, AND IN SOME CASES THOSE ABILITIES INVOLVE A SPECIAL TALENT OR AFFINITY FOR MUSIC. I AM HONORED TO JOIN ACM LIFTING LIVES AND THE VANDERBILT KENNEDY CENTER TO HIGHLIGHT HOW MUSIC CAN BETTER THE LIVES OF YOUNG PEOPLE WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES ON COUNTRY MUSIC'S BIGGEST NIGHT.**

**~DARIUS RUCKER**

ACM staff received thanks you's from every single family for this opportunity. They said that it was life changing and life affirming and the “nicest thing anyone has ever done” for them.

Families from all over the country emailed and posted comments on Facebook thanking ACM for showing how truly special people with disabilities are. Many said it was the first time they have seen such an uplifting display of special abilities.

Tim Shriver, Chair and CEO of Special Olympics, International, watched the live performance and said that it was inspiring and moving and a huge step for people with disabilities.

On July 28, 2015, Hunter Hayes and the Music Campers performed at a private reception in support of the 2015 Special Olympics World Games in Los Angeles (see photo below).







#### RESPONSES TO ACM LIFTING LIVES MOMENT FROM AROUND THE NATION AND WORLD

- I want to thank you for what you do. I have a 4-year-old son. He had a stroke, seizures, was diagnosed with cerebral palsy. He is the sweetest boy you will ever see. He loves music. Doesn't matter what it is. He stood up and listened to the song that was sung by Darius Rucker. He smiled and loved the song. There needs to be more for children with disabilities. God bless you all, keep him in your heart.
- It does my heart good to know there are so many who, like myself and our wonderful staff and volunteers, share the joy of working alongside our folks as we help to create opportunities for the best quality of life, give breath to their dreams, and stand as advocates for their rights and abilities. Thank you for tonight. I was moved to tears and filled with joy!
- I am from Melbourne, Australia. I have just been watching the ACM awards on YouTube—and have just seen Darius Rucker and a group of beautiful, inspirational people sing the most uplifting song. It bought me to tears. I am the mother of two special needs children (one with autism the other with Asperger's), and music plays a huge part in their lives. I have been criticized over the years for encouraging this love of all things musical and have been told that they would both be better off playing a team sport. I commend you on doing all you can to bring music into the lives of these special people....Please keep up the awesome work.



## ACM LIFTING LIVES MUSIC CAMP IS UNIQUE IN ITS ROLE IN DISCOVERY

The Camp provides invaluable opportunities to understand Williams syndrome and other developmental disabilities. It is the only camp of its kind to incorporate research aimed at understanding the musical passion common in persons with Williams syndrome while also studying other aspects like anxiety.

Vanderbilt Kennedy Center (VKC) researchers have identified novel ways to alleviate anxiety in Williams syndrome. Mindfulness techniques were taught to Campers. They then incorporated these techniques into their daily home routines. This intervention significantly decreased anxiety and stress, and a hormone associated with stress. Such interventions also can help individuals with other developmental disorders.

Because youth and adults with developmental disabilities are at



increased risk for abuse and exploitation, a VKC researcher developed a program to teach self-protection skills during Camp.

Researchers found that persons with Williams syndrome can successfully learn safety skills without compromising their friendly, empathic personalities. This paves the way for safety training in other developmental disorders.

Using imaging techniques to “see” brain activity has led to new understandings of how and why those with Williams syndrome are so attracted to music, and of music’s ability to reduce anxiety and to increase well-being.

I have developed a strong line of research related to the social behaviors of adults with Williams syndrome. The research that was made possible through this camp has been shared with countless families of adults with this syndrome across the country. I am indebted to the ACM Lifting Lives Music Camp for the impact it has made on my career, my life, and on the lives of the countless individuals who have participated throughout the years.

~Marisa Fisher, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Counseling, Educational Psychology, & Special Education, Michigan State University



## AGENDA FOR THE FUTURE — MUSIC IS A HEALER

The partnership of the Academy of Country Music and ACM Lifting Lives with the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center has been life-changing for all touched by this truly unique annual Music Camp that blends service, research, and training.

Through your philanthropy, the musical magic of annual ACM Lifting Lives Music Camps could continue.

The visionary leadership of ACM and ACM Lifting Lives demonstrates the power of philanthropy in expanding knowledge and advancing interventions to improve quality of life for persons with developmental disabilities and their families.

We welcome a new opportunity to explore with you creative ways to bring the extraordinary musical gifts of the ACM community in order to expand our impact beyond Williams syndrome to autism spectrum disorder (ASD) or other developmental disabilities.

ASD is a common, lifelong condition that is now documented to affect 1 in 68 children, affecting many families in the ACM music community.

The Vanderbilt Kennedy Center and its Treatment and Research Institute for Autism Spectrum Disorders (TRIAD) are national leaders in ASD early diagnosis, early intervention and education, supports for families,

innovative treatment approaches, training professionals, and partnering with community musical and other cultural organizations to include families who have children with autism.

ACM and ACM Lifting Lives and the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center could build on our success with Williams syndrome and develop innovative, high-profile, music-related programming and research for children and adults with autism and other developmental disabilities.

With the generous philanthropy of ACM and ACM Lifting Lives, together we can continue to be transformative leaders who are advancing the understanding of music's healing powers for ALL.





## HEART TO HEART\*

In my eyes, do you see something different?  
Well, tell me what it is- that you see.  
I believe you'd understand me better  
If you 'd take the time to stop and look at me.

Heart to heart

We're all the same

We all love to sing and dance and laugh everyday

Soul to soul

I'm just like you

I have hopes and plans and dreams just like you do

I'll always hold you close no matter who you are.

Heart to heart

Music is a powerful connection

It's a part of you, yeah, it's a part of me

A song can knock down walls and build some bridges

And take us all where we want to be.

Heart to heart.

We're all the same

We all love to sing and dance and laugh everyday

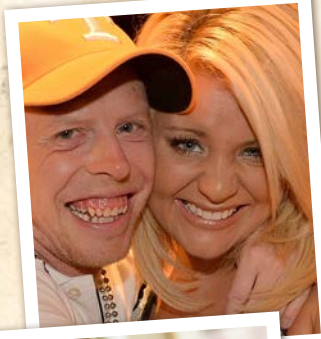
Soul to soul

I'm just like you

I have hopes and plans and dreams just like you do

I'll always hold you close no matter who you are.

\*Composed by ACM Lifting Lives Music Campers with  
Terry McBride and Marv Green



At the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center, science brings hope for persons with developmental disabilities and their families. We focus on genetic syndromes, autism, learning disabilities, and more. We help train the next generation of researchers, health care professionals, teachers, and service providers. Contact: [vkc.mc.vanderbilt.edu](http://vkc.mc.vanderbilt.edu), [kc@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:kc@vanderbilt.edu), (615) 322-8240.

Our Center is one of only a few in the nation to have all three major components of the national DD network: a Eunice Kennedy Shriver Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Research Center, a University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, and a Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities training program—as well as the VKC Treatment and Research Institute for Autism Spectrum Disorders (TRIAD).

*Lifting Lives*

Photos by Getty Images,  
Courtesy of ACM Lifting Lives