

Volunteers help Bronx veterans heal by teaching them how to play instrument

BY [MIKE JACCARINO](#)

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(Guitar teacher Kim Farrier gives lesson to VA hospital patient George McGinnis as part of program to help vets take their mind off past.)

They work on healing bodies at the [Bronx Veterans Affairs](#) hospital.

Now they have a way to soothe some souls.

Tuesday, the hospital unveiled a program with volunteers teaching veterans to play an instrument, in some cases to calm demons that have haunted them since their time in combat overseas.

"It releases the tension and, man, there's a lot of tension," said [Eugene Parrotta](#), a 63-year-old outpatient at the [James J. Peters](#) VA Medical Center in West Kingsbridge who suffers from posttraumatic stress disorder.

Parrotta, who lives in [Croton-on-Hudson](#), served in [Vietnam](#) from 1966 to 1968.

"It's perfect," he said. "It's something to take your mind off what you did and what you saw."

"It means a lot, an awful lot," said [Kenny Jackson](#), 61, another outpatient at the hospital and a Vietnam veteran.

"You need little distractions when things look bleak. Your world looks like it's falling apart and you need a diversion," he said. "You feel like no one cares and you're expendable and you need something."

The program traces its origin to [New York National Guard Maj. Bob Coulombe](#) of [Chappaqua](#), who recognized the need and sought out people willing to part with old instruments that could be restored for the patients.

"I heard there were volunteers willing to teach the veterans how to play various instruments," he said. "I put out the word in my community and the donations came rolling in.

"You know, music enters your soul. It takes you away. The sound is healing."

In all, the hospital collected 32 instruments, including a piano, three keyboards, guitars, a violin, a cello, saxophone, flute, clarinet, trombone, accordion and harp.

"You don't solve PTSD. You relieve the tension," said Parrotta, "and music so often soothes the savage beast, if you know what I mean."

As part of Jackson's therapy, he has been taking lessons on the guitar from volunteer [Marki Hitt](#), with admittedly mixed results.

"I've been playing air guitar for 60 years, Jackson joked, "so it's time I finally got my hand on the strings."

Anyone interested in volunteering to teach instruments to the veterans should contact [Jean Cooney](#), head of voluntary and chaplain services, at (718) 584-9000, ext. 5474.

mjaccarino@nydailynews.com

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