



BERKSHIRE HILLS MUSIC ACADEMY

Life Skills,
Vocation,
Music & Arts

WHO WE ARE

Berkshire Hills Music Academy is a unique college-like program for young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities who are looking to expand their social, vocational, and life skills in a music-infused environment.

FOR MORE INFORMATION
VISIT US ONLINE

berkshirehills.org



	About Us	5
	Life Skills	9
	Vocation	11
	Music	13
	Art	15
	Health & Wellness	17
	Residential	19

Our campus is located on a forty-acre property in South Hadley, Massachusetts, in the midst of the culturally vibrant Five College Area. Overlooking a panoramic vista of mountains and within walking distance of shopping, entertainment, transportation, and employment sites, BHMA offers a rare combination of beauty and convenience.



OUR STORY

BHMA was founded and incorporated as a nonprofit by a group of dedicated parents and professionals in 1999. It was among the first of its kind to use music to help individuals with disabilities grow their independent living skills. The vision of developing the strengths and celebrating the abilities of our students has endured over the past two decades. As the BHMA community has diversified and the campus has expanded, music and arts enrichment remain woven throughout all areas of our program. We continue to offer dynamic class options and provide innovative vocational opportunities, while empowering our individuals to lead meaningful, fulfilling lives.

THE VALUE OF MUSIC

Music uniquely stimulates all areas of the brain, promoting significant opportunity for enhanced learning and retention. Our highly trained staff employs the therapeutic value of music to help students, regardless of experience or aptitude, improve and increase:



SOCIAL SKILLS

Teamwork, problem solving, and self-advocacy



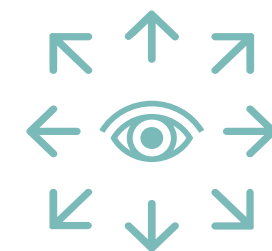
COGNITIVE FUNCTIONING

Focus, attention, and engagement



COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Speech, articulation, and language organization & retrieval



PHYSICAL ABILITIES

Gross and fine motor skills, spatial awareness, and organized muscle responses

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

We provide a growth-oriented experience for individuals with ID/DD who have the following profile:

Ages 18 to 30
Demonstrates basic self-care skills
Stable medical and mental health
Ability to communicate wants and needs
Interest in or aptitude for music
Looking for a transitional or long-term placement
Average full scale IQ of 50 to 80

Common diagnoses include:

Autism Spectrum Disorder
Blindness/Visual Impairment
Chromosomal Disorders & Deletions
Down Syndrome
Global Developmental Delays
Williams Syndrome

Two-Year Transition Program

Day or residential
Functionally based academics
Social, vocational, and life skills classes
Private music lessons and ensembles
Structured schedule combines core classes and experiential learning

AGES 18-30

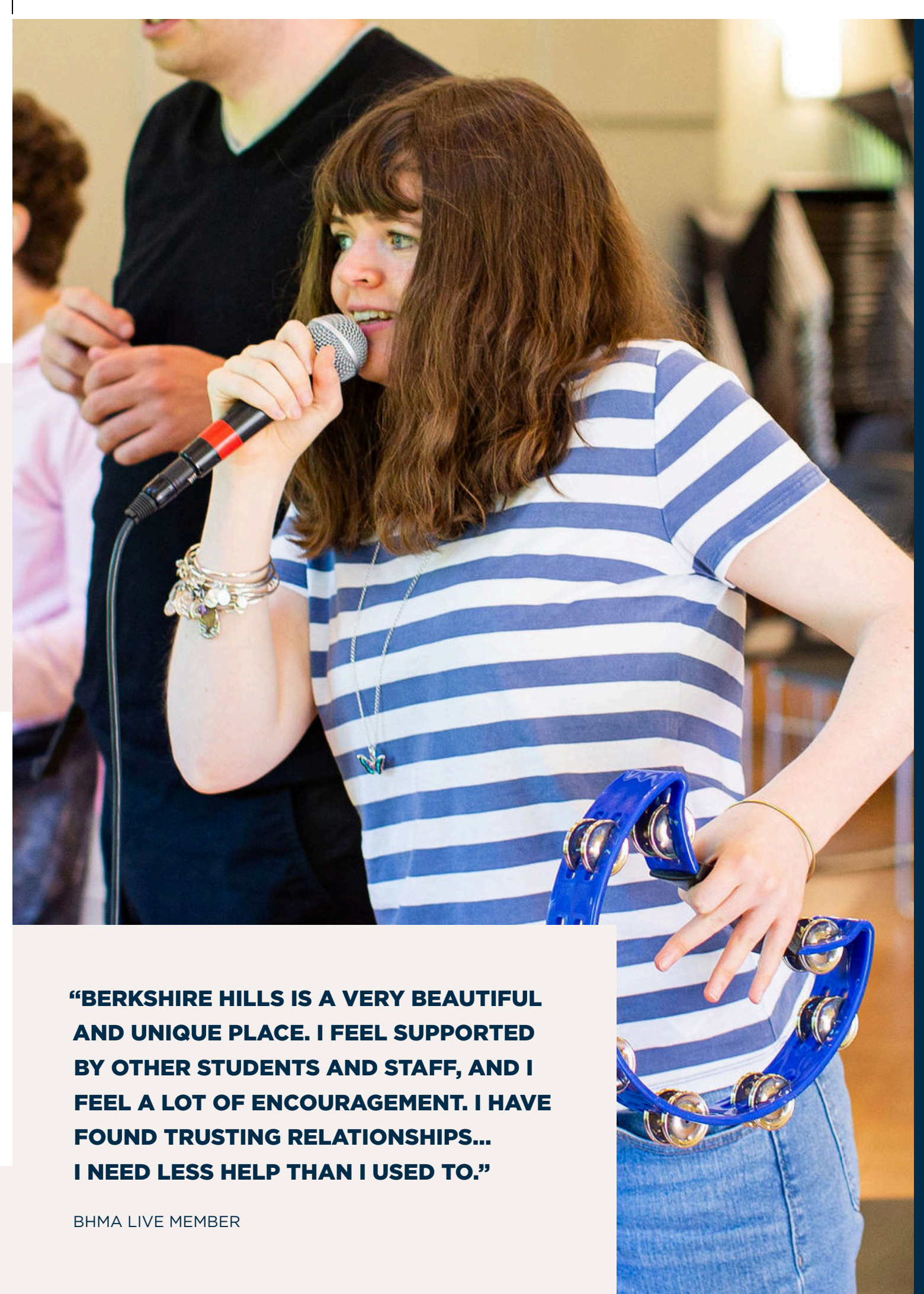
Long-Term Independent Vocational Experience (LIVE) Program

Day or residential
Focus on paid employment
Vocational options include general, music, art, or a blended program
Continued music, social, and life skills classes

LONG-TERM OPTION
FOR GRADUATES OF THE
TWO-YEAR PROGRAM

We accept 3 sources of funding for tuition:

1 School district 2 Self-pay/private 3 Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services (DDS)



“BERKSHIRE HILLS IS A VERY BEAUTIFUL AND UNIQUE PLACE. I FEEL SUPPORTED BY OTHER STUDENTS AND STAFF, AND I FEEL A LOT OF ENCOURAGEMENT. I HAVE FOUND TRUSTING RELATIONSHIPS... I NEED LESS HELP THAN I USED TO.”

BHMA LIVE MEMBER

LIFE SKILLS

Life Skills classes use a multifaceted approach to increase each individual's ability to live with greater independence. Small-group, person-centered instruction focuses on the practical application of core topics, including nutrition & cooking, money management, social skills, and community safety & travel training. Our comprehensive curriculum utilizes individualized and group exercises to prepare students for life, work, and relationships.

Nutrition & Cooking

Nutrition and Cooking courses teach healthy eating and basic cooking techniques, while promoting safety. In a state-of-the-art kitchen, students use assistive technology and adaptive tools at their own stations, allowing them to manage more of the cooking process independently. Gradually, recipes may increase in difficulty and length as they work toward the goal of creating a variety of full, balanced meals.

Money Management

The Money Management Program is highly personalized and provides the opportunity to practice responsible spending and decision-making. Using assistive technology, this tiered learning system teaches students how to allocate money, build a weekly budget, and conduct transactions at the bank and store. Individuals open and maintain their own bank accounts with staff support, and may implement a variety of methods to manage spending in and out of the classroom.

Social Skills

Relationships, boundaries, and communication are the fundamental themes of our Social Skills classes. Teachers draw from a variety of curricula and incorporate interactive activities, including role play, games, discussion, and video modeling, to meet the needs of individuals with different learning styles. Lessons emphasize the importance of respect and the impact our actions can have on others—establishing an understanding of how to be part of a community.

Community Safety & Travel Training

The Community Safety Program combines classroom instruction and off-site outings as students learn to safely navigate the community. Training exercises demonstrate how to identify road signs, landmarks, and hazards, as well as how to interact with community members and respond to unexpected situations. Each individual's level of community independence is determined by a series of assessments—some will continue to strengthen their skills with staff support, while others will explore different modes of public transportation through the Travel Training Program.

Electives

- Around the World
- Creative Writing
- Current Events
- Experimental & Plant Science
- Functional Math
- Functional Reading
- Independent Living Skills
- Internet Use & Safety
- Literature Exploration
- Newspaper/Yearbook Group
- Self-Advocacy

Assistive Technology

The integration of assistive technology into our program has changed the way students learn and practice a variety of skills. Devices and applications allow users to easily create visual and audible schedules, routines, and social stories that are broken down into individual steps. These tools provide consistency and continuity as students complete tasks and transition between activities with greater independence. From cooking and banking, to personal hygiene, our applications empower students to be more in control of their learning process.

VOCATION

TWO-YEAR TRANSITION PROGRAM

Students build foundational skills through pre-vocational training in the Two-Year Transition Program. A variety of worksites provides hands-on experience, helping our individuals grow their knowledge base and identify where their strengths and interests lie. They develop their confidence as they practice working as a team, managing time, and communicating effectively.

LIVE PROGRAM

Students in the LIVE Program expand on their vocational training through our three track options: art, music, and general vocation. This customizable approach is tailored to each person's goals. The underlying objective is to provide innovative choices for our individuals to pursue meaningful, paid employment—instilling in them a sense of self-worth and promoting independence.

TWO-YEAR TRANSITION PROGRAM

Year One

In the first year, small groups of students participate in weekly internship rotations at local nonprofits. Each site requires individuals to demonstrate flexibility while learning different tasks and responsibilities. These volunteer partnerships allow students to establish basic work and social skills, build a resume, and give back to their community.

Year Two

In the second year, students participate in the Music & Human Services Seminar, which combines fieldwork and classroom instruction. Each week, ensembles of four to six individuals prepare, rehearse, and present music programs for older adults at over a dozen elder care facilities. Performances give students the opportunity to apply and enhance the skills they have learned in the first year.

LIVE PROGRAM

General Vocation

Students who follow the general vocation track receive support as they seek, apply for, and maintain jobs in the community. Vocational advisors teach the basics of how to write a resume and respond to interview questions, while preparing individuals to meet employer expectations and advocate for themselves in the workplace. BHMA has established connections with many area businesses and nonprofits, providing different opportunities for paid employment.

Music Vocation

BHMA offers individual and group performance opportunities as part of our music vocation track. Students may pursue solo careers through enrollment in the Music Management Program—helping them establish and market their identity as an artist. Those who join our working bands or dance groups dedicate daily time to practice, and are paid to perform at a wide variety of venues throughout the year. Sharing their passion on stage raises visibility, promotes acceptance, and changes perceptions of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Art Vocation

The Ascending Artist Program allows individuals who have demonstrated an interest in the visual arts to express their creativity, while fostering their vocational skills. Students meet at our off-campus studio and use accessible mediums to produce bright, engaging, and dynamic pieces of art. The artists instill beauty into our community, and keep the profits from the sale of their work.





MUSIC

Music is at the center of our unique program, and we use it as a vehicle to advance skills for communication, independence, and employment. We welcome all individuals, from beginners to expert-level musicians, who share an intrinsic love of music and have a willingness to learn. Our highly trained staff employs the therapeutic value of music to help students express themselves, connect with others, and build self-confidence.

Lessons

The Two-Year Transition Program includes two private lessons per week. Students are paired with instructors based on their interests, learning style, and level of musicality. Each individual is encouraged to establish new skills, in addition to furthering their study of preferred instruments. Following the Two-Year Transition Program, LIVE members may continue developing their repertoire in private lessons.

Instrument Options

- | | |
|------------------|--------------------|
| • Voice | • Brass |
| • Keyboard/Piano | • String |
| • Guitar | • Drums/Percussion |
| • Woodwind | • Dance |

Ensembles

Ensembles are collaborative music experiences designed to teach participants how to be in a band, listen to one another, and channel their creative energy. In a supportive team environment, individual parts combine to form a full and complete piece. With over a dozen ensembles offered each semester, students are exposed to an array of musical genres.

Ensemble Options

- | | |
|-------------------|---------------|
| • Chorus | • Folk |
| • Musical Theater | • Reggae |
| • Jazz and Soul | • World Music |
| • Rock and Roll | • Percussion |

Performance Opportunities

BHMA provides a number of individual and group performance opportunities. At Variety Hour, our weekly performance lab, students present pieces they are working on in their lessons, and staff members offer positive feedback and constructive critiques. Each semester also features formal concerts, including ensemble and solo showcases. These experiences give students the chance to demonstrate their musical growth and practice their social skills, including stage presence, public speaking, and audience participation.



Music Vocation

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Music & Movement

Our Music & Movement Program is designed to stimulate, stretch, and energize the mind and body together. A natural extension of music, movement is an active channel to develop spatial awareness, coordination, and body mechanics. Yoga, Zumba, and Dance Ensemble provide a series of exercises that require listening, following, and implementing directions. Students may also opt to take private lessons in various styles of dance.



ART

Our art classes and programs give students who are interested in the visual arts an opportunity to express their creativity. Using a range of mediums, from printmaking to photography, individuals can pursue art as a passion project or as a vocational track. BHMA's off-campus studio provides a focused environment for making art.

Art Classes

Students in BHMA's art classes make beautifully colorful paintings, prints, and ceramics. Individuals take ownership over their artistic method—they set up and break down their workstation, and select what colors and materials to use. As they paint and mold, they build transferable work skills, such as task and time management.



Ascending Artist Program

The Ascending Artist Program allows individuals who have demonstrated an interest in the visual arts to express their creativity, while fostering their vocational skills. Students meet at our off-campus studio and use accessible mediums to produce bright, engaging, and dynamic pieces of art. The artists instill beauty into our community, and keep the profits from the sale of their work.

Art Studio

Successful sales at local art shows and businesses paved the way for BHMA to expand its visual arts program and secure its own studio. Providing an authentic work experience, students increase their autonomy as they leave campus each day and go to their jobsite. The space encourages self-discovery through artistic exploration and intentional learning.



Photography

In Photography class, students become familiar with digital camera equipment as they learn how to compose and capture a photo. Working individually and with one another, participants explore a variety of photography opportunities through community outings. By sharing photos with peers, students collect feedback that informs the editing process and helps them finalize their work.



HEALTH & WELLNESS

The Health & Wellness Department cares for the overall health of our students, including their physical, social, and emotional well-being. Our nursing staff and clinical team work together to establish and maintain personal support plans. This collaborative and thorough approach ensures that each individual's needs are met and safely managed.

Health Class

Men's and Women's Health Classes provide a safe space for individuals to learn about adult health and sexuality. The primary goal is to help students develop the skills and knowledge necessary to have fulfilling relationships and navigate them independently. Lesson plans are adapted from a variety of curricula and ensure accommodations for individual learning styles, while allowing for group discussion and student-led topics.

Emotional Well-Being Class

Emotional Well-Being focuses on identifying and understanding a wide range of emotions. The class uses games, role-play, written exercises, and projects to illustrate how each person experiences and interprets their feelings differently. Incorporating music, movies, and media into classroom instruction encourages individuals to draw connections and apply what they have learned to their everyday lives.

Clinical Support

Each student is assigned a clinician to aid in their transition to BHMA and support their social and emotional development. While many experience anxiety or have other related mental health diagnoses, we encourage all individuals to access this resource. Our clinicians consult with teachers, families, and other professionals to create and employ visual aids, social stories, or personal support strategies.



Medical Support

Our nursing staff is dedicated to ensuring the health and safety of the BHMA community. In addition to providing basic first aid for minor injuries, the department maintains health records for all enrolled individuals and manages medical appointments for residential students. The nursing team also works with outside providers to administer medication in accordance with state regulations.

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Athletics

Participation in sports teaches valuable lessons about dedication and teamwork. BHMA students may compete in Special Olympics soccer, basketball, bowling, and swimming. Through practices, community games, and tournament play, athletes gain self-confidence and learn the importance of sportsmanship.

RESIDENTIAL

BHMA Residential Life provides a structured environment that fosters personal development and independence. Each student is assigned an advisor who focuses on delivering individual instruction of core skills. This transformative experience also includes resident-driven activities, outings, and clubs.

CORE SKILLS

Increasing independent living skills is central to the mission of the BHMA Residential Department. Advisors help students with the following core skills:

- **Laundry**
Students use on-campus washers and dryers, giving them the time and space to learn each step of the laundry process. Weekly practice allows for skill building and mastery.
- **Hygiene & Grooming**
Residents at BHMA have basic self-care skills, but may receive support completing their personal care routines. Verbal prompting and limited physical assistance is offered to ensure thorough task completion.
- **Room Maintenance**
Daily and weekly cleaning is built into the residential schedule to establish the importance of maintaining a healthy living environment. Students may utilize visual checklists to help them keep a tidy and organized space.
- **Student-Made Dinner**
The Residential Department offers regular opportunities for group meal preparation. This allows individuals to enhance the skills they learn in cooking class and create a variety of meals from start to finish.
- **Leisure Planning**
Students are encouraged to research and select activities of interest for their weekends. Building a budget for upcoming plans informs the money management process and teaches students how to structure their free time.

Self-Advocacy

Self-Advocacy Group educates individuals about their human rights and empowers them to speak or act in support of their goals and values. Information is presented about issues as they relate to adult life—bringing awareness to the resources available and how to access them. Using a discussion-based approach, students have an outlet to talk about their interests and gain the confidence to advocate for themselves.

Collegiate Partnerships

Located in the heart of the Pioneer Valley, BHMA's proximity to the Five College Area has proven to be highly beneficial for our students. In addition to campus concerts and athletic events, we offer more formalized, regularly scheduled opportunities for engagement with neurotypical, college-aged peers.

• Social & Recreational

Best Buddies matches each resident one-to-one with a college student, and together they attend regular events and enjoy community outings. Participants from the Boltwood Project at the University of Massachusetts Amherst come to BHMA on a weekly basis and offer a rotation of group enrichment activities. These programs provide a platform for developing connection and companionship.

• Exercise & Fitness

At the UMass Amherst Body Shop, students are assigned a personal trainer who tailors a workout plan to support their individual fitness goals. The Mount Holyoke College pool and track are also frequently used, just a short walk from the BHMA campus. Our collegiate partnerships help to reinforce the importance of exercise as it relates to overall health and well-being.

Activities & Clubs

There are numerous offerings for recreation, fitness, and fun—some are fixed, while others fluctuate based on student interest. Popular options include:

**Baking Club | Fishing Club | Gym Trips | Hiking Club | Rock Climbing | Spanish Club
Special Olympics | Therapeutic Horseback Riding**



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"WE NEVER DREAMED THAT HIS LIFE WOULD BE SO RICH AND FULFILLING. HE HAS BEEN GIVEN SO MANY OPPORTUNITIES TO CONTINUE TO GROW AT BHMA. THE FOCUS ON ABILITIES RUNS THROUGH THE WHOLE PROGRAM AND EMPOWERS THE YOUNG ADULTS."

BHMA PARENT



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Berkshire Hills Music Academy does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, gender, sexual orientation, religion, or national origin. All individuals are afforded the rights, privileges, and activities generally made available to program participants. Berkshire Hills Music Academy is an equal opportunity employer.