

# Beamz Away

By Sue Davis - Outreach

**B**eamz Away is an incredible interactive musical system that gives students a way to interact despite physical limitations. It has so many great benefits from improving one's eye-hand coordination, fine and gross motor skills, cognitive level, sensory and social/emotional skills, along with an array of other therapeutic benefits.

**What is the Beamz?** The Beamz controller, when connected to a PC, Mac, or iOS device, allows one to make great-sounding music within minutes regardless of musical background and become immersed in this unique music-making and learning experience.

**How does it work?** When connected to a Windows-based PC, the student chooses what activity they want to do. There is an array of activities to choose from, including a broad range of early learning, math, music education, and interactive storybook songs, and playing realistic virtual musical instruments. Students can have fun playing musical instruments, regardless of musical experience or ability, or they can add sounds to songs being played by simply touching light beams with their hands.

For instance, while playing the early learning song "ABC Phonics," the student can add in the letter sound, play the object's sound representing the letter in the music, or add musical instrument sounds to the song depending on which light beam he/she touches. Such fun! Who knew a zebra sounds more like a hyena than a horse.

Students who are more advanced can create their own songs either by adding to a song that is playing or by playing virtual instruments while engaging with the light beams to create an original piece. It provides great social interaction. A group of students could each be responsible for interacting with one of the four light beams, and I think one could also interact directly on the computer simultaneously as the light beams. Oh, the creativity! And, did I mention it can all be recorded?!

The Beamz comes with 100+ interactive songs and includes lesson plans and therapy guides for schools and therapists. I haven't had a chance to experiment. Still, the website, claims, "the Beamz is



*Student uses the Beamz controller.*

accessible, meaning it's compatible if your family member requires the use of a switch, adapted keyboard, touch surface, an eye gaze or other access method," which is fantastic for some of the students I serve.

If interested, go to their website to apply for a Beamz <http://share-your-blessings.org/programs/>. Click on "Apply for Donation" under Project Maestro. They are happy to provide Beamz units to qualifying families, schools, therapists, and organizations that assist individuals with special needs, but there is a limited number, so apply ASAP! ❖❖