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An Introduction

2020 ACCELERATOR AWARDEES

THE LEWIS PRIZE FOR MUSIC was initiated in 2017 to amplify and support efforts at the nexus of systems change and music. As the The Lewis Prize developed, we came to recognize and center the work of Creative Youth Development as core and fundamental to the transformation of inequitable systems for the better.

The mission of The Lewis Prize is to partner with leaders who create positive change by investing in young people through music. We believe young people with access to high-quality music learning, performance and creation opportunities will mature into thriving individuals with the foresight and willingness to positively impact their communities. As a result, our vision is for every young person, regardless of who they are or where they live, to have the opportunity to access culturally responsive music programs from a young age. We do this by finding and awarding ambitious leaders who are already strengthening young people in their communities through rigorous and diverse music programs. The inaugural 2020 Accelerator Awardees affirm the potential of creative youth development to fulfill the promise of civic-rooted futures for young people who are too frequently marginalized.

The 2020 Accelerator Awardees each received \$500,000 to support an emergent systems change effort at their organization. From a body of 187 applicants, representing 32 states and the District of Columbia, these three organizations stood out for doing the reciprocal work of both leading young people toward tools for social transformation and being led by young people toward more radically just futures. The 2020 Accelerator Awardees are Brandon Steppe, Founder and Executive Director of David's Harp Foundation (San Diego, CA), Ian Mouser, Founder and Executive Director of My Voice Music (Portland, OR) and Sebastian Ruth, Founder and Artistic Director of Community MusicWorks (Providence, RI).

The Lewis Prize for Music invited these essays about responsive and collaborative leadership from each of the awardees because we believe they have something essential to say to the field of creative youth development and the arts at large. These organizations are engaging systems change at the individual level by transforming beliefs, attitudes and culture to create new standards for equitable practices and policies alongside many stakeholders and partners in their communities. They are following the leadership of young people by centering next generation change makers in their strategic approaches toward justice. In combination, these essays offer a robust understanding of how we can all champion young people's voices and creativity for the benefit of our communities. We hope that the themes and synergies across the essays inform and advance music and creative youth development as drivers of <u>systems change</u> in communities across the United States. we can all collectively engage in the work of championing the young people in our communities.

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Accelerator Awardees

ACCELERATOR AWARDS \$500,000 EACH

ACCELERATOR AWARDS PROVIDE MULTI-YEAR SUPPORT TO ENABLE LEADERS AND ORGANIZATIONS TO MAKE SUSTAINED PROGRESS TOWARD AMBITIOUS COMMUNITY CHANGE INITIATIVES THAT ALIGN WITH THE LEWIS PRIZE FOR MUSIC'S VALUES AND VISION.



BRANDON STEPPE and The David's Harp Foundation (San Diego, CA) have developed "Beats Behind the Wall" for incarcerated young men and women to develop job skills through music and "Beats Beyond the Wall" for their further development and employment as instructors and audio engineers upon release. Founded in 2009, The David's Harp Foundation (DHF) holds a safe and creative space for 300+ youth learning project-based music and media production. In 2018, DHF developed recording studio backpacks to provide access to art, mentorship and training/job placement to youth incarcerated in juvenile detention facilities and diversionary probation centers.



IAN MOUSER and My Voice Music (Portland, OR) bring songwriting, recording and performance to lockdown facilities, such as mental health treatment and detention centers, to help young people heal. Ian founded My Voice Music (MVM) 11 years ago from his experiences as a youth counselor in a mental health facility. MVM's team believes that music is uniquely effective in helping youth voice their experience, be heard, and realize their ability to impact their communities. MVM counters the effects of trauma by engaging young people as artists and poets with powerful stories to share. With its free neighborhood-based studio, MVM provides a safe space for young people to return to community life. MVM has codified its methods and is poised to share its practices across Oregon.



SEBASTIAN RUTH and Community MusicWorks (Providence, RI) are identifying and rethinking the euro-centric norms of classical music to foster more egalitarian and inclusive musical practices. Founded in 1997, the organization believes that music plays a pivotal role in forming a strong and loving community that gives young people, their families and professional musicians a base of strength from which to imagine new possibilities. The program is grounded in a long-term chamber music residency, with 14 professional musicians teaching, performing, and building community in the Providence neighborhoods most affected by systemic racism and poverty.

Brandon Steppe

BEAT'S BEHIND THE WALL: SYSTEMS CHANGE, ONE RELATIONSHIP AT A TIME

It is my personal experience that just one positive relationship can dramatically change the course of a young person's life. Creative Youth Development music learning, performance, and creation opportunities are the perfect platform to develop that relationship. My name is Brandon Steppe, and I am the Founder of the David's Harp Foundation.

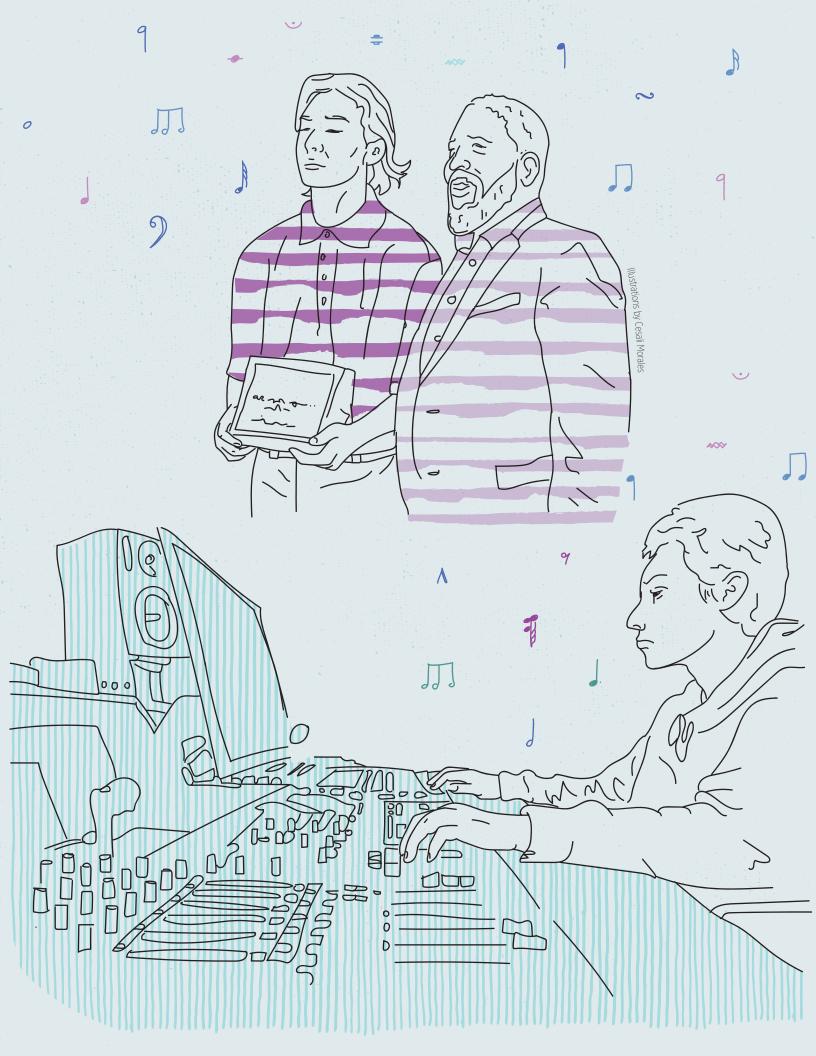
In 2006, I left a corporate job to build a professional recording studio in my father's garage located in my native Southeast San Diego neighborhood. Our community of 45,000 has one major "Discount Outlet" grocery store, one sub-standard hospital, and three times as many gangs as after school arts programs. Despite these challenges, we remain resilient and creative. We transform walls into a canvas and produce rhythmic poems from pain so it was not surprising when a 16-year-old high school sophomore named Rayvon learned about the studio and asked me if I could teach him to make the Hip-Hop music that he loved.

I agreed to teach Rayvon and, 10 minutes into our first studio session, I saw just how powerful the platform of music production was with youth in my community. As Rayvon learned how to produce Hip-Hop accompaniment ("Beats"), I learned that young people are, in fact, people. I learned that very few adults engage in honest dialogue with youth which leads to distrust. I began sharing both my success, knowledge and experience, as well as my failures, fears, and struggles. Once I took off my "perfect mentor mask", he dropped his tough façade and we began a conversation that would eventually evolve into an authentic relationship. Once the word got out that I was trading improved school grades for time in the recording studio, my garage studio was packed with young people from the community. This was the genesis of The David's Harp Foundation.

Today, art remains the solid platform on which we build these relationships with youth who openly share their artistic dreams and our talented Artist Mentors who help to channel that creativity into effective programming and real opportunity, and program partners who create space for us to interact. These relationships are the catalyst that is changing our community and the systems that our students are navigating.

MEET FRANK...

We met "Frank" inside East Mesa Juvenile Detention Facility in March of 2018, shortly after he had been sentenced to 360 days inside the "Youthful Offenders Unit" for a probation violation. Frank was originally sentenced for "Possession of a Destructive Device with intent to sell"... he had a bag of fireworks. To complicate matters, Frank's mother was suffering from an addiction that resulted in a divorce from Frank's father. The violation that resulted in Frank's 360-day sentence was "Aggravated Assault"... a fight with his dad over the divorce. It is hard for me to write this without becoming emotional because, even though he was only 16 years old, by the time we met Frank he



had very little hope that his path would lead anywhere besides the State Penitentiary.

MEET THE DAVID'S HARP ARTIST MENTORS...

When positive change is the goal, there is absolutely no substitute for a relationship founded in love and transparency. The David's Harp Artist Mentors are Teaching Artists who are focused on earning genuine relationships with young people using music and media production as a platform. In January of 2018, we developed "Mobile Studio Backpacks" filled with the same music production tools that our artist mentors use to begin creative conversations with youth at our production facility. In February of 2018, we brought these backpacks into East Mesa Juvenile Detention Facility for the first time. Music production is simply the very cool platform we use to help facilitate and honest dialog between young people and caring adults that are committed to walking with them as they navigate various systems. We call it walking through the mud together.

Adrian Cantero, one of our Artist Mentors and a DHF program graduate, was one the team members that met Frank inside East Mesa in March of 2018. Adrian joked with Frank as I asked them to recall Frank's tough facade the first time that they met. "It was like he really wanted to be a part of the group, but he was scared that he wouldn't know how to do it" Adrian joked. "I wasn't scared, I just didn't want to show ya'll my talents yet." Frank proudly responded before taking a more serious tone. "It was tough inside, before you guys came into East Mesa, I really didn't have anything that I thought I was good at."

BEATS BEHIND THE WALL...

With no prior music production experience, Frank enrolled in our popular 6-week, "Beats Behind the Wall" music production program and assumed the role of "Audio Engineer" for his cohort of aspiring artists. The production process is a special place where young people can not only learn new skills, but also assume new positive identities. Frank did not know it at the time, but he would soon learn that he is an Audio Engineer.

As the songwriting process progressed, Frank was responsible for recording, mixing, and mastering the group's original hip-hop song. All the while, Our Artist Mentors were building trust with Frank through our restorative "check-in" process every session. We believe that authentic relationships are built on the foundation of honesty and transparency. Our Artist Mentors lead every check-in by transparently sharing an "High" and "Low" from their week. Students are never required to participate in check-ins, but we have not had a student in 10 years that has not eventually participated in the process. Frank was no exception. He passed on check-ins the first two weeks but was leading check-ins with his peers six months later.

THE FIELD TRIP...

Students experiencing incarceration in the "Youthful Offenders Unit" (YOU) that are enrolled in our concurrent 6-week program are eligible to attend a field trip to our recording studio facility located in Downtown San Diego upon program completion. After finishing the 6-week course with perfect behavior, Frank earned the much-coveted field trip to the David's Harp Studio where he was able to engineer his first session behind our state-of-the-art mixing console. It was Frank's first time at the console and he quickly settled into his role, recording three songs that day for his production group. Then Frank shocked everyone! He wrote a rap song to his mother and boldly stepped behind the microphone for the first time to record it. These are the lyric from his song:

"My whole life I was told a lie -My father told things about my mom to make me cry -How can you expect a little boy to leave his mom to die -You took me in told me you loved me but it was all lies -And now I need you the most you kicked me out to die -I started banging the streets and chasing the high -How could you choose that other female over me -Its like you locked me up and threw away the key -I'm not giving up - I'm not giving up - I'm not giving up on me -I'm chasing my dreams - I do what I want - you ain't gonna stomp on me"

No one knew that Frank rapped until that moment. After reading Frank's lyrics, you may think that tone in the studio was somber that day but could not be farther from the truth. There were smiles, handshakes and encouraging words from everyone in the room. Frank's peers, our team, the officers that brought him, and his Artist Mentor Adrian celebrated with him that day. Frank's pain became art and he saw his story as valuable for the first time.

THE INTERNSHIP...

After successfully navigating our six-week songwriting curriculum, Frank was serious about exploring Audio Engineering as a potential career option. Building on established trust in our partnership with Probation and Juvenile Court Schools, we started an audio engineering internship inside East Mesa. Frank was one of three students to mentor his peers as Audio Engineering Interns inside the facility. Frank developed leadership, collaboration, and communication skills, and discovered the value of working with peers to produce music. The social/emotional successes of self-discipline, achievement, and supportive care inspires students, providing vision and a real opportunity to look forward to as they are welcomed back into the community.

Frank was thriving in the internship program. He maintained perfect behavior for the entire internship! Sadly, his release date was pushed back 3 months because there was not a foster care placement for him. In those 3 months, our Artist Mentors were present, but Frank felt defeated. Once he was released, Frank immediately went on the run from probation to reunite with his mother in the San Francisco Bay Area. After 4 months on the run, Frank reached out to us and we helped him turn himself into probation. He resumed his internship and 3 months later was released and welcomed back into the community at the studio

THE EXTERNSHIP...

As Frank transitioned back into the community on probation, our Artist Mentors were there to welcome him back into the community. We provide youth that have successfully navigated the internship program a \$15/hour job in audio engineering with local venues and "houses of worship". Students are paid through our partnership with San Diego Workforce Partnership and develop a professional resume that leads to employment in Audio/Visual work in the San Diego hotel industry. More importantly, this process allows our AM's to walk with youth as they navigate the probation process.

Frank began his internship at Harbor Church as an Audio Engineer. Our Artist Mentors were there to facilitate this process and Frank earned his first paycheck!

There is no sufficient metric to measure the value of love and consistency in a young person's life. In our creative community, the relationships we have are everything. Walking through the mud with young people as they navigate systems is our desired outcome. Frank's pathway to success is a perfect example of what we deem a successful relationship although it is not linear. Along the way, he has had setbacks. He has experienced homelessness, food scarcity, and uncertainty. In fact, in the time between the first and second drafts of this article, Frank was taken into custody for a probation violation. To some, this may seem like a failure, but we know better. Frank knows that he has people that he trusts to walk with him as he navigates life. Frank knows that we love him and believe in him. We are in constant communication and when he is released, we will be there to continue walking in the mud together.

Frank's journey represents just one of four programs in which we work together as an inclusive, creative community to provide youth aged 14-22. As youth found our programs and later developed their leadership of those programs, our programming has become increasingly more relevant. We have moved past youth boards and work side-by-side with young people to participate in every aspect of the organization. We are committed to developing and hiring Artist Mentors, administrators and an Executive Director exclusively from the diverse pool of young people that have grown up in our studio community. Currently, 40% of our team are program graduates and that number will continue to increase as we fulfill our goal to turn over the entire organization to program graduates by 2029.

When I founded this organization in that small garage in Southeast San Diego 11 years ago, I never would have dreamed that we would be impacting youth in the Juvenile Justice System with music. The truth is, music is just the platform. It is the authentic relationships forged in the creative process and genuine love that are the catalyst to positive change in our community. At the David's Harp Foundation, the future is young and talented.

lan Mouser

MY VOICE MUSIC: USING MUSIC TO HEAL AND FOSTER A NEW GENERATION OF LEADERS

THE POWER OF MUSIC

I first discovered music's power while working as a counselor in a residential treatment facility in Portland, Oregon. One morning I brought my guitar in and picked a few songs in the hallway as kids on the ward woke up. With each song, I saw the calm wash over a unit typically filled with tension and emotionally explosive reactivity. A few days later one boy asked me to teach him to play a song for the facility's annual talent show. There was only one catch— the show was two weeks away. Rather than going it alone, I asked the boys on the ward to form a band. I brought in instruments, helped them write a song and learn simple parts that together made a big sound.

During the two weeks of rehearsals, staff saw big shifts in the boys' behavior. Through the focus required to learn an instrument and the vulnerability required to perform, they seemed to have more strength to tackle the challenges they faced in life. These kids who had every reason to be angry and stuck started to open up. They were attending school more frequently and having breakthroughs in therapy. I realized that the rhythm and repetition of learning instruments provided focus and an embodied way for them to process stress and trauma. Writing lyrics helped them to process their stories. Collaboration built community, grounded in kindness and group learning.

With encouragement from the treatment center director, I started to develop a traumainformed approach to music instruction and group facilitation and taught workshops in other facilities. Unbeknownst to me at the time, a substantial body of research reveals that the most essential elements to overcoming trauma are: a positive relationship, belonging to community, challenging achievable goals, and rhythmic/ somatic activity — all of which happen through songwriting, performance and recording.

MY VOICE MUSIC (MVM)

In 2008 I founded My Voice Music to use songwriting, recording and performance as a way to help young people to cope and heal. In the twelve years since we started, our team has worked with thousands of youth coping with trauma in over 50 mental health treatment facilities and juvenile and migrant detention centers. Our aim is to flip the script for these young people. The songwriting and recording process gives them an opportunity to be seen and heard, to share a message with the world on their terms. Songs are amazing. They can be a first step towards hope, a radical middle finger, funny and inspiring, all at the same time.

In 2011, after a parent enquired whether her daughter could work with us after discharging from treatment, we launched a pilot program which would later become MVM Studios: a music center where kids from all backgrounds come together to rehearse as bands and hip-hop collectives or to work independently at our after school program. While the program is open to youth from the general public, one-third of participants are transitioning out of residential



facilities or referred by social service partners. 81% participate for free or reduced tuition. Our teaching and mentorship in this program is informed by the same ethos as our work in residential facilities, emphasizing strengths while being responsive to the challenges every youth faces.

THE POWER OF LONG TERM SUPPORT

All of our work is informed by the awareness of how powerful long term support can be in helping to disrupt all cycles of trauma, poverty and violence. MVM's mentorship model is designed to offer long-term support and walk with young people through childhood into young adulthood, providing opportunities to grow from being the recipient of services to actively being of service themselves. From summer rock camps for 9 to 13-year-olds, to student leadership training for 14+, to 'transition age' drop-in recording sessions for young musicians ages 18 to 24, our programs are designed to provide musical instruction and support that will be a scaffolding for kids into adulthood.

Over the years, I have been amazed and humbled by the passion of the young people at MVM. The first time I truly realized the power of young voices was at MVM's first student concert at a "real" music venue. A couple of month's prior to the show, two middle-school-aged youth had been killed in gang violence. In response, we hosted an after school writing and recording workshop in that community and invited students from this workshop to perform. Student after student got up on stage. They demanded change from their community- not sympathy. They called out a system that was built against them, and their two friends who had been murdered. They shook with passion as they spoke powerful truths. This did not happen because of a "youth music program". It happened because youth had an opportunity to step up to a microphone.

Since then, over 75 youth have worked with us as teaching artists and have helped refine a program based on the trauma-informed, strength-based approaches MVM was founded on 11 years ago. The two women who have directed camps for the past three years started with us when they were 12 and 14, respectively. Approximately 25% of teachers are former students. These youth have become artists and contributors to Portland's dynamic music scene, writing songs that are informed by their life stories and their passions. We see this work of lifting our former students as teachers and leaders as systems change. Amplifying the work of these artists only affirms that youth can and should be autonomous in determining their own pathways to healing.

IMAGINE

Many of the young people we serve have faced challenges that most adults will never know. They have withstood traumatic events and learned to survive when the adults in their lives failed them. Their strengths are innumerable: they are survivors and problem solvers. These are the young people who have the power to stop generational cycles of poverty, addiction and violence. We need more people that see them as capable of being change makers in their own lives, to responsively support them, and to provide opportunities that reveal their strengths and talents, both to themselves and those around them. We need adults that are willing to be silent so that youth can speak. When we do these things we help the leaders, that our communities so sorely need, realize that they are needed.

We need a world where empathy exists alongside the recognition of ability, regardless of where a person finds themselves, where no one is told to "be resilient", but is given opportunities that reveal their own, already present, immeasurable resilience; a world where it's understood that you cannot medicate-away trauma, nor place it behind bars; a world where instead of creating interventions to employ, we build relationships where our common humanity is recognized. This is the world that the MVM community aspires to create.

I am inspired when I think about the world that can be created by the youth we work with at My Voice Music. When young people are provided opportunities to share their gifts, their talents, and their voices, they are able to step into their power. To the extent that we are willing to listen to their voices, we will all be better for it.

Sebastian Ruth

CONTINUAL RENEWAL: EQUITY, EDUCATION, AND AN EVOLVING ORGANIZATION

BACKGROUND

I started Community MusicWorks informed by experiences I had growing up in an alternative public high school that based itself on the educational ideas of Paolo Freire among others. Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was published just a few years before the school's founding in the mid-1970s, and many of his ideas were central in the school philosophy-- young people guiding their own learning, a democratic school governance where students carried significant leadership roles, and a curriculum that followed events of the day.

I also had had experiences at Kinhaven, a summer music school in Vermont that fostered an environment for high school aged students to form deep bonds in a loving community surrounding the study of music.

The project of Community MusicWorks was to establish a musician residency in an urban community and to create musical spaces that could be a home for professional and youth musicians alike to grow in a musical community animated by values of love, self-guided learning, and social justice.

SOCIAL JUSTICE *PRACTICE OR PRAXIS*?

We have often defined our work as existing at an intersection of social justice practice and musical practice. Guided by Freire and other philosophers, we have sought to combine the seemingly unlike fields of liberatory education and string music education. Despite this commitment from our founding, we have come to understand over the past several years that we need a deeper understanding about what social justice and specifically anti-racist *praxis* truly means across our organization—what is the evolving, dynamic understanding of justice in the organization that will inform and be informed by our actions?

A discussion two years ago focused on the most effective way forward: would it be most effective to focus first on setting policies and measurable goals, or to focus on learning at the individual and spiritual levels?

We decided the latter was the most effective way forward. Until every member of our organization is fully invested in their own learning of the histories of racism and its ramifications, of the oppressive truths of our present reality, of our own biases; and the unlearning of habitual patterns, assumptions, and adherence to the status quo, policies and new procedures won't get us far enough. We have felt that as each person goes deeper into her/his own learning, decisions we make as an organization will be informed by an increasingly clear vision of what active anti-racist *praxis* can be—a constant interplay of learning and action where each informs the other.

This choice is one my colleague Ashley Frith, Director of Racial Equity and Belonging, advocated for. It is also consistent with Freire, who cautions against actions that attempt to undo oppressive conditions and only serve to re-inscribe the very patterns we're looking to break because they don't get at the root of the oppressions in ourselves.

The forces of structural racism are so deeply entwined with our country's history and white dominant culture so pervasive that it can sometimes feel that there's no hope of making positive change as individuals, as a small organization, or even as a committed community of like-minded organizers across the country. That said, activist Grace Lee Boggs and others remind us that the patterns we set in our very local communities may be the most potent and promising actions we can take.

CMW'S EQUITY-FOCUSED WORK TODAY

Leadership and equity work at CMW has meant committing to a process of learning, with humility,



on an ongoing basis. The systems in which we work are all part of the problem, and there is no stepping outside these systems to solve problems. I think of it as swimming in polluted water: while you're swimming you may be too close to the water to recognize how unhealthy it is to be there. Therefore we need to evaluate, analyze, reflect on an ongoing basis, and be willing to make significant changes. It's about how we move through the world, it's about how we examine decisions, relationships, repertoire choices, pedagogy. And from a place of increasing awareness, conversations become proactive and productive, instead of defensive and stuck.

We are now deepening our understanding of equity, diversity, and belonging through: 1) a social justice/ equity task force; 2) a monthly seminar to support ongoing learning among our staff; 3) a new staff role (mentioned above), the Director of Racial Equity and Belonging, which will facilitate learning across the organization and across the MusicWorks Network of organizations; 4) a weekly reading for staff, board, and the Network focused on the societal oppressions that affect so much of our work; and 5) a weekly discussion hour, sometimes in racial affinity groups, to support our continued learning and dialogue.

Overall, we have come to understand that equity work is ongoing work. Just as Freire describes an educational practice that needs to adapt and change as the world changes, so organizational practice needs to be constantly attuned to a growing understanding of the systemic oppressions affecting people's lives.

EVOLVING OUR YOUTH PROGRAMS

As we think about students who move through CMW's programs, we have been focused on how students gradually add skills of artistic citizenship at age-appropriate levels along the way. The hope is that young people increasingly see their musicianship as a pathway to greater agency and participation in their communities through music.

For a six-year-old entering the programs, this may mean that in their lesson they are doing techniquebuilding exercises alongside short interviews with their teacher in which they are considering what fairness means to them related to current events. When they're ten or eleven, artistic citizenship may mean participation in a group discussion with their ensemble peers about a current event, and what they are learning about it from school, home, or from peers. And at age sixteen, students may be working with peers in the Phase II program to consider how they can use their voices as young artists to make a significant contribution to discourse in the city.

A growing thread in our work involves reimagining the ways students engage with the music they learn, including with pieces we all play together around social justice themes. A few years ago, the whole student body learned and wrote new lyrics to the protest anthem We Shall Overcome. Studying the history of the song, we learned that people in different struggles have contributed lyrics specific to their times. Inviting CMW students to dig in and reflect on the question of overcoming in their communities animated the experience of learning that song in new ways. That sparked an annual tradition of choosing a song for us all to engage in, and also sparked a new class theme of students writing their own music as part of the experience of learning violin, viola, or cello.

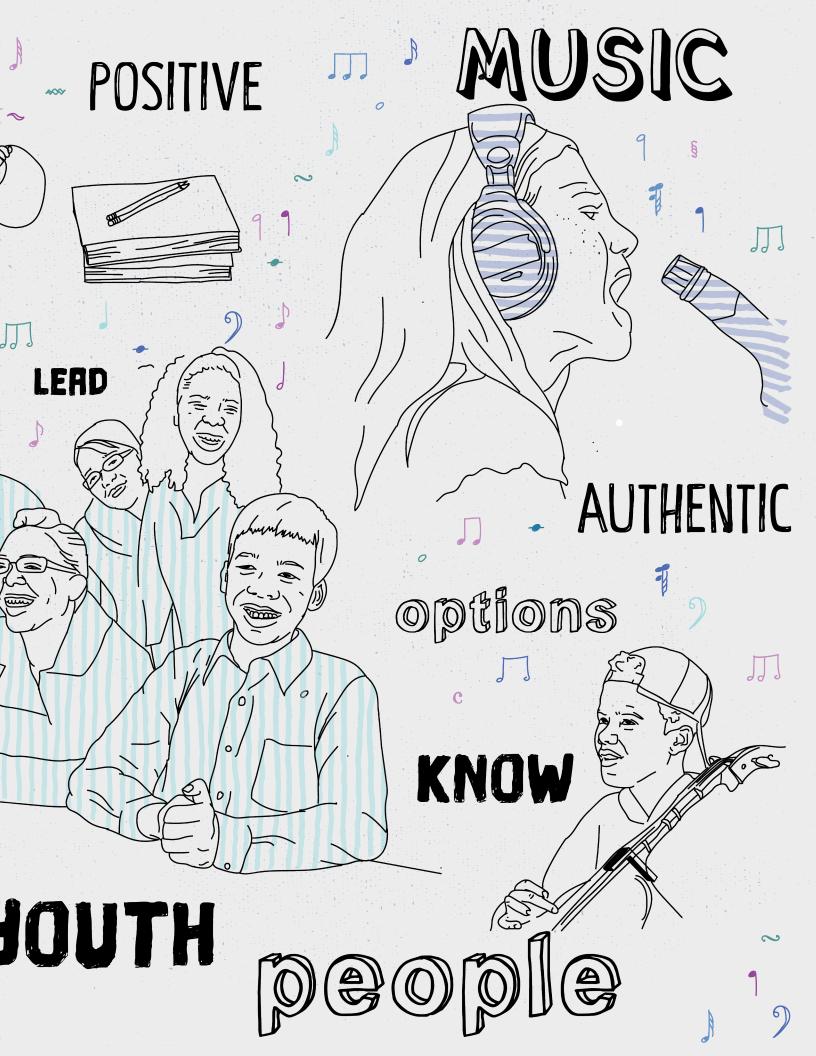
Every spring when teens in our Phase II program create and host the annual "Youth Salon" I am filled with a sense of hope and excitement for a youth-led future in our programs and our city. Seeing young people tackle complex contemporary challenges and creatively weave their musical voices into an event of dialogue, performance, and interaction affirms the belief that a liberated future starts with the wisdom of young people.

More broadly, I think a liberated future grows out of the proliferation of youth arts spaces like CMW, which nurture in young people a sense of belonging, and where young people grow to expect their voice and leadership to effect change in both their local communities and in civic spaces across our society.

CONCLUSION

The path to social justice practice, anti-racist practice, and equity in our organization is an ongoing project without a singular destination. We know that considering young people's lives, our work cannot proceed on their behalf without a deep commitment from all adults in the organization to be learners, and to be understanding the implications and roots of our work. No project of equitable practice situates that work only in young people and their outcomes. The whole project takes on its significance when everyone is on a journey of awareness and change.





the lewis prize for music

community | collaboration | leadership

www.thelewisprize.org

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