

CHANGING LIVES @ DYS

News from the Ohio Department of Youth Services

Power of Harmony educates, inspires youth

Nonprofit uses music to heal and uplift

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When Dennis Castiglione launched his nonprofit musical program Power of Harmony in late 2019, he had dreams of using music to help youth in correctional facilities grow, heal, and transform their lives.

"We know music is transformative," says Dennis, a volunteer at our Cuyahoga Hills campus since 2011. "Music is an opportunity to express oneself creatively; it's an opportunity for someone to have a voice and share how they feel. It also teaches youth about cooperation, teamwork, and community. These are essential skills they can use for the rest of their lives."

The Power of Harmony's mission was clearly on display May 24, when Dennis brought Latin jazz percussionist Sammy DeLeon and his band to our Indian River campus. The band delighted youth, staff, and guests alike, but the biggest reaction came toward the end of the show, when one youth joined the stage and beatboxed (vocal percussion) as the band followed along.

"To be up there with people who are passionate about music, it was exciting," says the youth, a 20-year-old from Columbus who also plays guitar. "I love music, and after a while it felt like my heart was talking."

Dennis says more shows are planned this summer for our Cuyahoga Hills and Circleville campuses. A former executive of a charitable foundation, he says Power of Harmony's goal is to hold music and a cappella singing classes at least three times a month at each campus and bring a professional group for a live performance every four to six weeks.

DYS chaplains say the classes are big hits with our youth.

"I'm seeing amazing changes in behavior, even from some of the most

challenging youth on campus," says Indian River Chaplain Kimberly Dove. "I'm seeing morale change and confidence grow. That's huge. Kids are bringing that excitement back to their housing units, and now I can't walk through the units without someone asking me how they can get involved."

Calling music "the universal language," Chaplain Eddie Sands at Cuyahoga Hills

they love it."

At Circleville, Chaplain Joshua Stone remembers seeing a group of youths singing the Black national anthem, "Lift Every Voice and Sing," as they left a class and returned to their housing units.

"I never thought I would've seen or heard that from those guys," he says with a chuckle. "Power of Harmony's wonderful with the kids. Their ability to encourage our youth and get them to do things they're not comfortable doing – singing a solo in front of their peers and enjoying it, for instance – is really impressive."

Power of Harmony is one of several musically themed charities operating under [Harmony Foundation International](https://www.harmonyfoundation.org/). For more

information or to donate, visit [harmonyfoundation.org/power-of-harmony](https://www.harmonyfoundation.org/power-of-harmony). [Click here for a sample of musical acts](#) that work with Power of Harmony. —DYS—



Sammy DeLeon and his band perform for Indian River youth and staff May 24.



Power of Harmony co-founder Dennis Castiglione, center, at Cuyahoga Hills.

says the music classes are breaking down barriers among youth of varying races, backgrounds, and ethnicity. "Power of Harmony puts everybody on the same level," he says. "That's why I love it, and once the kids get involved,



Power of Harmony volunteers work with youth at Cuyahoga Hills.