



Singing a different tune *by Marge Nykaza*

Marge Nykaza was inspired in 2000 by a class on women in inner city ministries that she took for her master's in pastoral studies. As part of her coursework, she met with the director of St. Martin de Porres House of Hope, a recovery shelter for 75 women and their children on the south side of Chicago. As they talked, the plans for what would become Hope, Harmony & Healing (HHH) began to take shape – a way for Nykaza's vision to use the musical arts as a means to address social justice issues.

As Cherisse stepped into the elevator, she immediately noticed the flyer: "Come join our choir!" At the time, she was recovering from drug addiction and living at Deborah's Place, a women's shelter in Chicago. But at the thought of singing again – a lifelong dream of hers – her heart lifted, and she knew this was a message for her.

That was in 2002, and now Cherisse Ellis serves as the music program coordinator for HHH, a nonprofit organization that provides a creative music program to offer dignity and spiritual healing to the homeless and underserved in the Chicago area.

Cherisse's journey has been difficult, as it is for most of the participants in HHH, but

despite suffering from cancer, diabetes and neuropathy, she continues on her path to recovery and does it while sharing her song and beautiful spirit. She has experienced personally that HHH is not just a music program, it's a way of living.

BEGINNING THE MINISTRY

We began the music program at St. Martin's during the summer of 2000 with a women's choir, a children's music class and a parent/child music class. During that time, I witnessed daily the healing power of music and song in the lives of so many of the women and children as they struggled to recover from the adverse effects of poverty, homelessness and addiction.

When the summer course ended, I knew in my heart that this was my work, and so I continued at St. Martin's as a volunteer. The shelter directors believed that the music classes were bolstering the residents' self-esteem, improving attitudes and creating a better environment, so they agreed to continue the music program, making it mandatory for

Photo: Cherisse Ellis as soloist with the HHH Choir and the Southside Community Choir in Chicago.

their residents.

At the same time, I began to network and seek funding opportunities to develop music programs at several other shelters and underserved community outreach programs. The connections came together, first with the Sisters of Mercy and the Agatha O'Brien Fund, which enabled me to start a program in 2001 at The Institute of Women Today. This organization included three ministries where I began the music program: the Maria Shelter, a transitional shelter for women and children; the Vincennes Senior Center for seniors in the Englewood community; and Casa Notre Dame, a long-term housing program for women and their children.

Then in 2002, with the help of a Norbertine Grant, I initiated a program at Marah's Transitional House at Deborah's Place, the women's shelter where I met Cherisse Ellis. Also that year, I began to volunteer for a short period of time at Sarah Circle, a drop-in center for homeless women. In December, I began to work with women and their children at The Mantle of Port Ministries, a community outreach program for families from Mexico and Guatemala.

PLANNING FOR SUSTAINABILITY

As I recognized the potential of this creative healing ministry, I knew that a more formal structure was needed to sustain it. I called upon seven friends and acquaintances that supported my work to become board members, an accountant and a lawyer. Harmony, Hope & Healing officially became a nonprofit organization in February 2003. At that time, we articulated our mission to be "providing a cre-



HHH founder Marge Nykaza (left) and music program coordinator Cherisse Ellis performing "His Eye is on the Sparrow."

ative music program offering dignity and spiritual healing to the homeless and underserved in the Chicago area."

As part of my networking efforts for HHH, I served as a music teacher at Epiphany School, a Catholic elementary school in an economically depressed area of Chicago, in 2003-04. The next year, HHH launched relationships with Higgins House of Cathedral Shelter, a men's halfway house, and The Courage Program, an outreach program

for pregnant teens and young mothers.

We currently have one full-time employee (myself) and five part-time employees, who include an administrative assistant, music program coordinator, and three music program assistants (former participants who are choir soloists and help facilitate various activities). We also have a Hispanic music coordinator/consultant, an accompanist and four professional consultants who include a development/grant writer, an accountant, a lawyer and a computer support person.

THE MINISTRY TODAY

We now provide a combination of five music classes and choir rehearsals at six different sites in the Chicago area. These include parent/child classes, making music classes, musical English lessons (ESL), children's classes and senior group piano lessons.

The HHH curriculum has developed to include musical, educational, therapeutic, spiritual, creative and performance components and is offered in four 10-week sessions per year, with the exception of the Courage

Program, which meets once a month. Each activity is conducted in a circle and meets from 50 minutes to an hour and a half. Sessions include breathing and vocal exercises, songs, body movement and topics that support the HHH mission and goals.

One of our most popular and high-profile programs is the HHH Choir, which performs gospel and inspirational music two to three times a month at various church services and events. Some of our singing engagements in the past year have included the Greater Chicago Food Depository's Hunger Walk, Chicago's Prayer Leadership Breakfast, Cabrini Green Legal Aid Benefit and Looptopia.

In addition to our weekly programs and choir performance, HHH has built local and international relationships. We participate with high school students involved in Peace-builders Projects at Catholic Theological Union, Chicago, and college students from the University of Avignon, France, in a group called Planters of Hope. We also have begun a relationship with a school and church choir in Nairobi, Kenya, through our friendship with Grace Mwele. Grace became familiar with HHH through a resident at Deborah's Place when she was visiting the States in 2003. I had the opportunity to visit Grace in 2005 and in 2007 when we were asked by Global Alliance for Africa (GAA) to team teach at an art camp in Arusha, Tanzania. We are planning to return to Arusha in July 2008. Recently, the HHH board of directors decided to begin an official African Outreach, which will include collaborating with GAA to begin a music program in Kabera, the largest slum in Africa. Our hope is that Grace will lead this program.

OUR VOLUNTEERS

We are able to run a successful and far-reaching program because we are blessed with the ever-growing support of a community that believes in and is committed to our mission. With more than 100 volunteers, we are grateful that so many people and organizations are willing to share their time, talent and treasure with us. There is no standard length of commitment for volunteers, although most stay involved in a variety of ways, including singing in the choir, facilitating activities, hosting a choir performance, donating musical instruments, helping with publicity and newsletters, taking photos and videos, baby sitting children during performances, being a guest artist, and the list goes on. We hope to formalize a volunteer training program in 2008.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

As a nonprofit organization, HHH depends on in-kind services, individual contributions, corporate and foundation support, grants, and contractual services revenue.

Various fundraising efforts include a biannual

newsletter, an annual appeal letter, performances and special events. We are grateful to a community of generous friends, foundations and agencies we serve that have supported us from the beginning. They have grown to trust and believe in our mission.

CHALLENGES AND REWARDS

The journey of establishing and operating any nonprofit organization can be difficult. There are concerns about funding sources, quantifying the work for grants, stabilizing programs

GOALS OF HARMONY, HOPE & HEALING

- Use music as a healing tool and a vehicle to enhance life skills while improving overall quality of life;
- Integrate music into daily life experiences;
- Provide opportunities to experience healing and spirituality through music;
- Build self-esteem and confidence;
- Enable the learning process through music;
- Offer a safe place to uncover and/or discover participant's own authentic voice; and
- Provide experiences that invite participants to sense beauty and harmony within themselves and in the world around them.

at various sites, and workload, just to name a few. Despite this and moments of doubt along the way, I can truly say this work is awesome! To the best of our ability, we provide a creative healing and recovery ministry to help individuals impacted by poverty, homelessness, domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse, and aging. HHH also bridges language gaps while enabling participants to use their authentic voices.

PROVIDING A MODEL

When I first started HHH, I dreamed of having sites all over the city and the country. Right now, I believe we best serve by growing internally, laying a solid foundation and providing a model for others to emulate. Here



FIND OUT MORE ...

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SITES WE SERVE:

- St. Martin de Porres House of Hope
www.StMartindePorresHouseofHope.com
- The Courage Program
www.courageprogram.org
- Maria Shelter and The Vincennes Senior Center of The Institute of Women Today
www.instituteofwomentoday.org
- The Mantle of Port Ministries
www.theportministries.org
- Higgins House of Cathedral Shelter
www.cathedralshelter.org

RESOURCES:

- Training in Cross-Cultural Healing Music: Open Ear Center
www.openearcenter.com
- Resource for using music to enhance life and heal: Don Campbell and the Mozart Effect - www.mozarteffect.com/
- Parent/ Child Music Class Information: Music Together - www.musictogether.com

are some of our core principles of performance and ministry:

- Recognize that the arts can be used to address social justice issues.
- Be faithful to the work and keep its commitments. (*The participants of HHH do not ask about my credentials and what degrees I have. They say, "This [music program] makes me feel good" and "Will you be here next week?" They ask me to be faithful!*)
- Build relationships with the agencies we serve.
- Listen with an open mind, heart and ear to those we serve.
- Let music and singing accompany the journey.
- Lead with love!

In February 2008, HHH will celebrate its fifth anniversary as a nonprofit. In the past year, we have impacted more than 5,000 people through various venues, including weekly sessions, performances and special events. With God's help and the faithful support of many, HHH will continue to grow as a strong, viable and creative healing tool for the homeless and underserved in Chicago.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

⇒ What artistic gifts do you and your church have that might serve and empower the homeless and disadvantaged in your community?

⇒ Of the six goals HHH lists, which would be most difficult for your church to carry out? Which is your church already doing?

As a professional singer, pastoral musician and educator, Marge shares her gift and love of music with many communities throughout the Chicago area and abroad. She has a Bachelor of Music with teaching certificate from Eastern Illinois University, advanced vocal training at DePaul University and a Masters in Pastoral Studies from Loyola University, Chicago. Marge has been studying Therapeutic Application of Cross-Cultural Healing Music in Health care and Education at the Open Ear Center in Seattle, WA, and is certified as a Cross-Cultural Music Healing Practitioner.

