Music Teacher Helps Kids be Jazzed About School, Thanks to You!

"My gift as a teacher is helping kids become their best selves," said middle school music teacher Ryan Murtfeldt, "but I wasn’t getting to share that gift as much as I wanted to."

“I wondered how I could combine my passion for helping kids grow with my responsibility to teach the subject matter.”

Ryan knew he could do better, but wasn’t sure how to get there. He volunteered to be the focus person in a Clearness Committee so he could wrestle with his questions.

“More than anything, the retreats gave me an opportunity to explore my own inner life as a teacher in the company of other teachers,” he said.

Ryan found his answers and returned to the classroom feeling reinvigorated. “I’m happier in my job, and I’m definitely doing a better job teaching!” said Ryan.

Ryan remembers a time when the courage to be real made a big difference with a student who was struggling.

“Thomas, a choir student, was being a total pain, texting on his phone, ignoring my class. I sent him to the office, but he came back and continued to grumble at me from the back row. So, at the end of class I took him aside and asked, ‘What’s going on? This is miserable for me, and probably for you too. What’s the story?’

“And to my surprise Thomas opened up and said, ‘I feel totally disrespected by you!’ I replied calmly, ‘I feel disrespected too. I’m willing do better if you are.’ I offered my hand and we shook on it.

“After that we got along and he stayed engaged in the class. It’s all because I had the courage to be vulnerable with Thomas, instead of trying to correct the behavior.”

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You Helped a Mom Become a Healthcare Advocate
You Connected Young People Who Lost a Loved One
Parker Invites You to Be a Mentor
A Mother Speaks Up for Healthier Lives

“As parent of a child with special needs,” said Cristin Lind, “You get the message to be a mama bear, to be fierce and not back down.”

Cristin’s son, Gabe, has multiple chronic health conditions. After years of challenges to coordinate Gabe’s care, Cristin felt called to advocate for other families. But she didn’t understand why advocacy had to feel like a fight.

“Most of the people teaching me about advocacy had an Us vs. Them mentality,” Cristin said. “But I felt that fighting can’t be the way to improve healthcare.”

Thanks to you, Cristen found her heart’s truth after attending the Courage to Lead for Young Leaders and Activists retreat. There, Parker talked about wholeness of the heart. It inspired Cristin to see that what she wanted for Gabe—and for everyone—was wholeness.

“It was powerful to let go of the idea of my advocacy work being a struggle. I thought to myself, I’ve been given this amazing opportunity as Gabe’s mom to understand the need for wholeness. I could bring wholeness instead of trying to fight.”

Cristin is now serving as co-chair of a leadership team for a nationwide initiative called 100 Million Healthier Lives.

“Before the retreat,” she said, “I would have tried to imitate the way that other people lead. But I’m a mom—I’m not a doctor or a systems expert or a policymaker.”

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Your gifts support
Lennon Flowers had a lot on her plate. She is co-founder and Executive Director of The Dinner Party, a new national organization forging community using potluck dinner parties among people in their 20s and 30s who’ve each experienced significant loss.

She felt the burden of heavy demands and an urgency to make a difference.

“This startup year was a challenging one,” Lennon said. “I felt consumed by endless to-do lists, worries about money, and the gnawing sensation that whatever I was doing wasn’t enough. I was perilously close to burnout.”

Lennon hadn’t made space for her own renewal. Instead she was questioning her every move.

Thanks to you, Lennon attended the Courage to Lead for Young Leaders & Activists retreat.

“Courage to Lead gave me renewed faith in my own inner voice and a chance to silence the noise,” Lennon said. “It was deeply reassuring to be among people whose interest was in asking better questions and equipping participants with the space and tools to find their own answers.”

“I was perilously close to burnout.”

Lennon is weaving Courage & Renewal practices into the very fabric of her organization—thanks to advice from previous Courage to Lead participants and monthly mentoring calls with C&R Executive Director, Terry Chadsey.

She also engaged Courage & Renewal facilitators to lead retreats for The Dinner Party hosts to learn about creating safe space and asking open, honest questions.

“But from a personal standpoint, the retreat was renewing in the truest sense of the word for me.”

“Courage to Lead shouldn’t be just a once-a-year or once-in-a-lifetime experience,” said Lennon.

Lennon has continued to meet monthly with several Courage to Lead participants. They talk on Skype video chat.

“It’s helpful to have an open space where we can be sounding boards and question-askers and space-holders for each other.”

Through your gifts, you’re helping Lennon and The Dinner Party team create community where young people can share their experiences of loss and vulnerability. Thank you!
Looking back, I realize that I was blessed with mentors at every crucial stage of my young life, at every point where my identity needed to grow: in adolescence, in college, in graduate school, and early in my professional career. But a funny thing happened on the way to full adulthood: the mentors stopped coming. For several years I waited for the next one in vain, and for several years my own growth was on hold.

Then I realized what was happening. I was no longer an apprentice, so I no longer needed mentors. It was my turn to become a mentor to someone else. I needed to turn around and look for the new life emerging behind me, to offer to younger people the gift that had been given to me when I was young. As I did, my identity and integrity had new chances to evolve in each new encounter with my students' lives.

Mentors and apprentices are partners in an ancient human dance, and one of teaching's great rewards is the daily chance it gives us to get back on the dance floor. It is the dance of the spiraling generations, in which the old empower the young with their experience and the young empower the old with new life, reweaving the fabric of the human community as they touch and turn.

— from The Courage to Teach

How might you engage in a life-giving “dance” with someone of a different generation?