



Ushindi and Lawrence, two journeyers during the Illuminated Project, at BLINK.



# Impact at the Intersection of Arts and Wellness

VOLUME 1: THE WONDER EDITION, 2024





Students and staff at Parker Woods Montessori (Cincinnati Public Schools) listening to MMM. In one year of MMM, students listen to 8-10 symphonies worth of music at school, with more than half the year representing music by living composers. Photo by Kyle Wolff.

# MORE THAN MUSIC:

## How 4 Minutes A Day Transforms School Culture

By Bryce Kessler

It's the beginning of another music class at Incline Elementary which sits on the edge of Lake Tahoe, close to Reno, Nevada. With spring break in the rearview mirror and summer break quickly approaching, the students shuffling into the music classroom are feeling a little stressed and burnt out. Many students are unable to sit still and focus their fragmented attention... until Ms. Righellis turns on a video to start the class.

A smiling animated music note named Mel O. Dee jumps into frame. Mel takes a deep inhale and exhale before settling into stillness, and the students hear a familiar voice. "Hello. It's time for Mindful Music Moments, so let's get ready to listen." The students and teacher follow along as the voice guides them, "Place your feet on the floor. Hands on your lap or on your desk. Sit up nice and tall. Close or focus your eyes, and find your breath moving in your body... As you listen today, just notice. How does this music make you feel?"

Mel O. Dee fades away and the screen is illuminated with a captivating kaleidoscope of color that responds visually to calm-

ing orchestral music that begins to play. Some students close their eyes; some lay on the floor, grounding their entire body; and others gaze softly at the meditative visuals on the screen while thinking about the prompt. Ms. Righellis keeps an eye on her students, but is also taking these few minutes to center herself before teaching today's music lesson. The music plays for a brief three minutes and the voice returns to say, "Fantastic job! We'll be back soon with more Mindful Music Moments."

Mel O. Dee waves goodbye as Ms. Righellis turns off the video and asks her class how today's Mindful Music Moment (MMM) made them feel. After practicing with the program over the past year (often 2-3 times a week with rotating music classes), the students are already improving their skills in self-awareness and self-management. "MMM calms me down," says 4th grader Aisha. "It helps me stay focused during class after we have been really crazy," says 3rd grader Silas."

At the end of the year, Ms. Righellis and over 100 of her students wrote heartfelt letters to The Well about the positive impact

MMM (and our brand new animated videos) had during their first year.

*"The results have been invaluable. Many of my students look forward to it, and they really enjoy the different types of music as well as the physical effect it has on them. Students who are constantly disruptive, hyperactive, or on edge instantly calm their bodies down when I put on the MMM. For many, it's the only time in class that they are successful because they can focus on their breath."*

*Not only has MMM had a great impact on student behaviors, musical learning, and bodily awareness, but it has also helped me to regulate my emotions and maintain better classroom management as a teacher. I love it because I get to do it with the students rather than just monitoring them."*

- MS. RIGHELLIS



# A TRUE BLESSING

## 5 Years Of Mindful Poetry Reaches All Ages

By Bryce Kessler

It's April 2024—National Poetry Month—and 90 5th-grade students at Wilson Elementary eagerly find their seats in the cafeteria. Their ears immediately perk up when they hear a familiar voice. “Hello, it’s time for Mindful Poetry Moments,” says Stacy Sims, The Well’s Founder & Executive Director and the famous voice of Mindful Music Moments that Wilson Elementary hears each morning.

But instead of music, today they are listening to the poem “Small Kindnesses” by Danusha Laméris. After the mindful moment, the sound of scribbling pencils fills the cafeteria as they write their own poems listing small kindnesses. Soon, sounds of writing are replaced by scissors, construction paper, and fluttering magazines as they cut and glue collages of kindness—led by Artist In Residence Julia O. Bianco.

Over the course of April, The Well engaged 140 students throughout Cincinnati with this practice of poetry and collage as part of its Mindful Poetry Moments (MPM) program. From these special visits, 13 original poems written or co-written by 37 students in grades K-5 were published in this year’s annual MPM anthology.

Incubated in 2020 with The On Being Project and now having completed its 5th anniversary season, MPM holds a grounded space for mindfulness and poetry in four major ways: daily mindfulness content for schools and individuals, special engagements with students in schools, regular virtual gatherings for over 100 adults around the world, and an annual publication of new poetry works by all ages.

Our 2024 theme “Ways of Loving, Ways of Giving” emerged when curator Haleh Liza Gafari selected our poems for inspiration: “Song” by Adrienne Rich, “Those Winter Sundays” by Robert Hayden, “Small Kindnesses” by Danusha Laméris, and “A Blessing” by Samyak Shertok. Each spoke to “heartfelt people, navigating the ups and downs of life, celebrating, grieving, and allowing poetry to open their hearts and inspire them to tell their own stories,” as Haleh wrote in her foreword.



Students and visiting artist Julia O. Bianco at John P. Parker Elementary (Cincinnati Public Schools) show off their magazine collages and collaborative poem on the board inspired by the poem “Small Kindnesses” by Danusha Laméris.

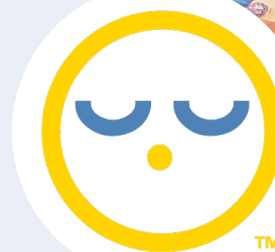


A student at Academy of World Languages (Cincinnati Public Schools) After-school Cr8 Club making their poetry collage.

## BY THE NUMBERS

Our Virtual Gatherings in April held space for **130 participants** from **17 US States plus Great Britain.**

Our 5th-Anniversary Anthology published **112 new poems** by **114 unique poets.** They represented **12 US States plus Scotland and the UK.** 60 of those poems were written by **81 unique students** in grades K-5.



TM

# MINDFULNESS IN MOTION

## Exploring Mind-Body Connection in Schools

By Charli Littleton



My True SELF facilitator, Miss Ashley leading a fun movement game with Cr8 Club students at John P. Parker School.

After the final bell rings and the hustle and bustle of end of day excitement begins to settle at John P. Parker, a Cincinnati Public School, the harmonious sound of twinkling chimes faintly sweeps through the hallway. Imagine following the gentle ringing, noticing a calming sensation enter your body, allowing the soothing of your mind.

That is the journey after-school students take to Miss Ashley, a facilitator of The Well's My True SELF program. She smiles down at a line of students standing just outside her classroom doorway. One by one she invites each student to inhale and exhale with a Koshi chime, their body and mind at peace before welcoming them into the room. Once inside, a curious scent of lavender wafts from a diffuser and fills your lungs with floral, woody air. The dimmed lights create a warm glow that eases you into the safety of the space.

Cr8 Club, a dynamic after school program in collaboration with Kennedy Heights Arts Center (KHAC), a Cincinnati-based non-profit, aims to provide a supportive environment for children to explore their creativity through art, music, and social-emotional learning (SEL). KHAC was enthusiastic about partnering with

The Well for the second year to continue integrating a mind-body focus into the program at two Cincinnati Public Schools, John P. Parker and Academy of World Languages.

The integration of The Well's SEL program, My True SELF (Social Emotional Learning Fun), is an innovative approach that introduces mindfulness techniques into Cr8 Club. During circle time, facilitators guide the children through short meditation exercises that allow them to center themselves before group sharing. With practices like group movement games, mindful art-making, and Mindful Music Moments, students are able to discover new ways to express their feelings and connect with one another.

Through consistent participation in My True SELF, students begin to find balance and are able to channel their restlessness into creative expression, using their body to explore emotions rather than feeling overwhelmed by them. The once-distracted child becomes an engaged member of Cr8 Club, demonstrating curiosity and enthusiasm for learning. Their journey illustrates the powerful impact of integrating social-emotional learning with creative expression, showing that with the right support, every child can thrive.



**Students begin to find balance and are able to channel their restlessness into creative expression, using their body to explore emotions rather than feeling overwhelmed by them.**



# PROGRAMS, PRACTICES AND CONNECTION:

## A Wellspring of Community Joy



To nourish the magic of the eclipse's arrival, The Well collaborated with Pyramid Hill to present **Total Eclipse of the Arts**, a day-long retreat for 130+ members of our community to mindfully prepare and enjoy this once-in-a-lifetime experience. Here, Amy Tuttle leads participants in a morning meditation at the start of the retreat.



Inspired by the wedding chapel at Luna Luna, The Well invited Pam Kravetz to officiate marriages at the **Planet Love** Pocket Park during Pride month. Organized in part by members of 2023's True Body Project summer cohort of ArtWorks youth apprentices. Photo courtesy Kyle Wolff.



Well's True Body Project is dedicated to helping teens and people of all ages grapple with the complexities of living in a human body. **Sona and Soma** is the culmination of a 10-week youth apprenticeship program in the summer of 2024 in partnership with ArtWorks, during which young people ages 14–20 explored mindfulness, movement, and concepts of performing identity via sonas—masks or avatars—and the internalized lived experience of having a soma, or body. The work and catalog were presented in the 2024 FotoFocus Biennial. Here, youth apprentices are featured with Romain Mayambi, a photographer and guest teacher for the program.



The Labyrinth in our **Wellness Garden**, created and nurtured by The Well, The Well's artist-in-residence Julia O. Bianco, and Campsite Art Park's Sean Mullaney. The Wellness Garden serves Camp Washington as a new public greenspace, with its creation throughout the summer bringing in numerous volunteers, facilitator artists and educators engaging in outdoor, arts-centered community activities.



**Sona and Soma**  
Apprentice Artist  
Regan Jordan's  
work. *Regan Jordan,  
Regan- Angelique  
Begonia, from  
Inner Nature, 2024.  
Diptych, 36 x 24  
inches. Courtesy of  
the artist.*



**ILLUMINATE** Journeymen Lawrence, Ushindi, Kori (as hostess Caroline) and See Drye visit Black Art Speaks' Black Lives Matter mural at BLINK where See Drye helmed a letter.



Asa Featherstone IV records unhoused youth during The Well's visit to UpSpring's Summer 360 camps in Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky. The Well shared two workbooks of activities inspired by the cosmos and nature with the UpSpring youth, recording their voices reciting their ideas about space and wonder to be integrated into the **Wonder Commission**.



# Dear Friends:

What makes you feel well? Full of wonder? Resilient? At Ease? Hopeful?

The Well has been creating restorative programs centering art, music, writing, movement and mindfulness as gateways to wellness, wonder and belonging since 2005. We're delighted to share our layered and nuanced programming with you. Broadly, our work falls into these categories:

## ARTS AND CULTURE

**Mindful Music Moments** brings the musical equivalent of 8-10 symphonies a year directly into schools and classrooms in Greater Cincinnati and beyond, reaching 100,000 youth each year. Its new music commissions bring together musicians, composers and students to create new music especially for youth.

**Mindful Poetry Moments** published its fifth volume of poems written in April as part of its school and adult programs in National Poetry Month. The 2024 book features 60 youth poets.

This year's **True Body Project** youth apprenticeship program with ArtWorks was focused on lens-based work. 12 youth apprentices made a body of work on the theme of Sona and Soma, featured in the 2024 FotoFocus biennial along with a catalog of the work.

## CIVIC AND COMMUNITY

This year, Artist in Residence Julia O. Bianco created a **Wellness Garden** in Camp Washington adjacent to our Planet Love pocket park with new pathways and a labyrinth oasis amidst existing found-object sculptural elements.

## EDUCATION

The Well's programs are a mainstay in 300+ schools nationally (50+ locally) to support educators in helping students to become ready to learn while engaging in creative, art-fueled rituals. The Well's **My True SELF** program provides curriculum, facilitation, training and resources to help mitigate a youth mental health crisis and allow for creativity and learning to emerge.

## HUMAN SERVICES

The Well is considered a leading **trainer and collaborator** to support resilience in complex work systems. This year, The Well is providing training and ongoing support to Hamilton County's Job Readiness Training for youth, Art Academy students, Cincinnati Public Library branches among others.

It is clear to us that our depth of experience in centering art and connection toward human and community cohesion is ready to meet this moment's deep need. We need your support to do this work. Please read on. If you see something that brings you joy and hope, consider a donation to A Mindful Moment, the non-profit that nourishes the work of The Well.

Mindfully,

Stacy Sims  
**Founder and Executive Director**

Morgan Mazone  
**Board President**

## MISSION

The Well works at the intersection of arts and wellness. Its mission, nourished by the nonprofit **A Mindful Moment**, is to improve the mental and emotional well-being, connectedness, and effectiveness of all persons through arts integration, mindfulness, music, movement, and healing-centered practices.



The Well's Board and Staff in February, 2024 at the kick-off for The Wonder Commission. From left to right Former Board President Alisa Smith, Emeritus Trustee Susan Tew, Current Board President Morgan Mazone, Patrick Raneses, Bryce Kessler, Board Member Brian Raphael Nabors, Stacy Sims, Emeritus Trustee Dr. John Tew, former board/staff member Kami Lerma, Board Secretary Jill Smith, Board Treasurer Jane Fisher, Board Member Mike Nauman, Board Member Rana Dotson. Photo by Deogracias Lerma.



# MINDFUL MUSIC MOMENTS™

created by THE WELL

Mindful Music Moments was piloted in 2016 at The Academy of World Languages (Cincinnati Public Schools) where it remains a beloved tradition. The Well created the program to address an increasing number of students struggling with chronic stress, depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation at younger and younger ages. After hearing the morning announcements every day while working with a group of students, Founder Stacy Sims proposed a daily, school-wide experience of listening, breathing, and nervous system regulation in order for students and staff to settle into curiosity and learning. Since then, the program has blossomed into an award winning, national program.

**In 2023/24, more than 118,000 youth in more than 300 schools across 20 US states participated in MMM.**

Thanks to support from community arts partners and local donors, 91% of schools received MMM for free during 2023/24. That trend has continued this 2024/25 school year. In Ohio, our amazing partners include Summermusik, Columbus Symphony, Canton Symphony Orchestra, and The Cleveland Orchestra. To see all of our national music partners and generous funders, visit [TheWell.World](https://www.thewell.world).

**Here are some of the evolutions of Mindful Music Moments within the past two years, inspired directly by feedback from teachers, administrators, and students.**

- NEW daily animated video content created in collaboration with Pixel Fiction, Kattspaw Audio, and Lightborne Communications, Inc.
- NEW weekly worksheets by Stacey Moyer, a local Cincinnati music teacher.
- NEW daily Spanish translations by Adriana Prieto Quintero.
- NEW music selections requested by students including Disney soundtracks, video game soundtracks, naturescapes, and music by over 20 living composers.



Students at Parker Woods Montessori (Cincinnati Public Schools) watch the new daily animated video versions of MMM. Photo by Kyle Wolff.

## NEW MUSIC COMMISSIONS

**Sound Intersections** by Nate May, in collaboration with Omope Carter Daboiku and Talon Silverhorn. Documentary film by Clay Kessler.

**The Hope Commission** by Sonia Morales-Matos, in collaboration with Summermusik, inspired by the journey of Little Amal (The Walk Productions) and local Cincinnati refugee families.

**The Wonder Commission** by Brian Raphael Nabors, inspired by astrophysicist Alan Lightman, performed by Antigone Music Collective and youth voices from UpSpring Cincinnati. Documentary film by Asa Featherstone IV.

**Beginning Spring 2025– The From Scratch Project: A 30-minute piece composed by local high school students participating in the Cincinnati From Scratch program, inspired by 300 composition ideas from local elementary students.**



Rosland Elementary (Bend-La Pine Schools) students listening to Mindful Music Moments together in the gym to start their day. Photo by Central Oregon Daily News.



In our April virtual gatherings, guest facilitators shared an opening meditation, reflection and a writing prompt inspired by one of the curated poems, 10 minutes of writing time, and group sharing. From those deeply profound hour-long gatherings emerged 52 new published poetry works (often generated in those brief 10 minutes) by 33 different poets from around the world. The Well published an additional 60 poems in total—written or co-written—by 81 different students—the most poems by students ever received or published for MPM.

One especially moving poem was written by Seattle 4th-grade student Arjun. Following some health difficulties in the family, Arjun felt inspired by “A Blessing” by Samyak Shertok to use his voice through poetry to express his gratitude for being alive.

In short, we feel truly blessed by this poetry community who continues to show up year after year in support of each other and awe-inspiring poetry.

Image: Former Cincinnati Poet Laureate, Mexican-born American poet and educator Manuel Iris is our 2025 curator. Photo by Hailey Bollinger.

## A True Blessing

By Arjun Kodukula, Grade 4

Inspired by “A Blessing” by Samyak Shertok

*A blessing you and me  
up and down  
left and right  
the chances that life is here  
that we have life never mind the fact that we live like this,  
these luxuries we do not care about  
these small blessings*

*This life is a blessing  
A blessing worth more than a million dollars*

*The fact we live, the way we are fortunate enough to open our eyes and see the passing days*

*This is a blessing, a blessing giving us these precious years of our life,  
this is more than one blessing  
It is a true blessing.*



2024 Curator Haleh Liza Gafari kicked off our August Book Launch.

**“Sometimes when a poem catches us, it changes us.”**

HALEH LIZA GAFORI, MPM CURATOR 2024



Photo by Manny Inoa.





## IMAGINE BELLA ACADEMY OF EXCELLENCE

August 2023 marked the beginning of the third year of partnership between Imagine Bella Academy of Excellence, located in Cleveland OH, and The Well. At Imagine Bella, The Well supports a dedicated Mindfulness/My True SELF teacher who sees each student at least one time a week in “specials.” The aim for the new school year was to maintain a whole student, whole school reach while making strides to support and include the whole community in an effort to bring social emotional learning initiatives to all.

Image: Students meditating during their weekly mindfulness class special at Imagine Bella.

## KENNEDY HEIGHTS ARTS CENTER

Kennedy Heights Arts Center integrated the My True SELF curriculum in their afterschool program, Cr8 Club for the 2nd year. Two local Cincinnati schools, Academy of World Languages and John P. Parker School saw a marked improvement in their pre-program and post-program assessment using the DESSA-mini – a standardized assessment for SEL. Initially, 43% of students were identified as having a “need for instruction” in SEL, a figure which dropped to 19% by the end of the year. There was also a 10% increase in the number of students scoring in the typical range and a 20% improvement in the number of students identified as having a strength in the area of SEL.

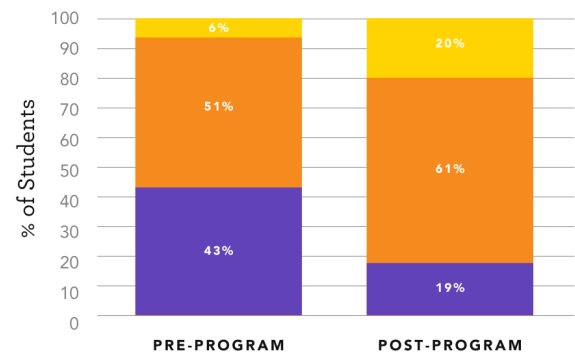


## My True SELF

in partnership with KHAC's Cr8 Club

**2023-2024 OUTCOMES**

Change in Social-Emotional Competence Scores



**THEWELL™** Results obtained using the DESSA-mini universal screener

## UPSPRING

UpSpring, a Cincinnati-based non-profit that works with unhoused youth, utilized the My True SELF curriculum over this past school year. The Well held professional development training for all staff in order to integrate the program themselves into each of their classrooms. The students' scores showed a 100% reduction in the number of students showing a need for additional support for SEL instruction.

Image: Bryce Kessler and Charli Littleton leading UpSpring students in a guided Wonder Meditation with live cello accompaniment.

