



VOICE



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE CHESTER CHILDREN'S CHORUS

FALL 2024

A RECIPROCAL RELATIONSHIP

Swarthmore College senior Bella Wiebelt-Smith is often exhausted after a three-hour physics lab on Monday afternoons. While many students would enjoy a long nap or TV binge session afterward, Bella grabs a bite to eat before heading to the Chester Children's Chorus to tutor high school sophomore Na'Leah in math.

Bella has been Na'Leah's math coach for three years.

"Being a math coach allows me to think about someone else for an hour, and that's been good for me. If I am having a bad or very busy day, like on Mondays, I stop and think about seeing Na'Leah and how much fun we'll have together doing math and catching up."

Bella is one of 44 Swarthmore College student math coaches who work one-to-one with CCC middle and high schoolers. A biology major, Bella works with Na'Leah three times a week, recently adding an extra day to focus on science.

"Na'Leah inspires me," said Bella. "She's just so fun and happy. She's determined and works hard. I appreciate that about her."

Bella makes a point to discuss short and long-term goals with Na'Leah.

"It's been cool to see her goals go from wanting to pass math or catch up on assignments to this semester, where she said, 'I'm going to pass both of my math classes with As.'"

Na'Leah is on her way to achieving that goal.



Bella and Na'Leah

"I've benefited greatly from the Math Practice Program," said Na'Leah.

"I'm so grateful for the opportunity the CCC has given me to work with a coach, especially Bella. She's the best, and I love her."

CCC Lead Math Teacher, Kevin Downs, has watched the bond between Na'Leah and Bella grow.

"Na'Leah and Bella's budding relationship is quite special, though not unique in our math program. We've been fortunate that several student-coach pairings have lasted three-plus years, and our data shows those students progress at a higher rate than those who've worked with multiple coaches."

As Bella's time as a math coach winds down and she becomes an alumna of Swarthmore College, she hopes other alumni and community members will support the CCC.

The Math Practice Program in Action

The CCC assesses every student annually to measure their math proficiency. The 2024 assessment showed that within one year:

- On average, our children improved by one grade level.
- Our children averaged two full years of progress in areas practiced with their math coaches.

"At Swarthmore, we get used to having so many available resources that we sometimes forget that this isn't always the case everywhere. If I need a tutor, I'll email someone to start the process, and it will be free for me," said Bella. "But for students, especially students from Chester, those resources aren't right at their fingertips, free, and ready to go. To me, this is why the CCC deserves so much support." 🎵



On a bright and sunny morning in June, eight-year-old Na'Kai stands in a sensory garden with a clipboard noting what he can smell, hear, and see—flowers, a nearby truck, and butterflies. His 20-year-old counselor and CCC alumnus, Micah, helps Na'Kai write everything down. Nearby, 18 other rising fourth graders are also taking notes about the world around them at the Scott Arboretum of Swarthmore College. This is an unlikely scene at a children's choir summer camp, but it is just one of the many ways the Chester Children's Chorus (CCC) is unique.



This summer, 42 new children joined the CCC during the five-week Summer Learning Program (SLP), which is designed to decrease summer learning loss, build academic and social skills, and, most importantly, give our children a summer to remember. In addition to music and math, the SLP incorporates science, swimming, reading, art, photography, and even cooking into the curriculum.

Meet some of the faces of the SLP who work tirelessly to create a joyful summer experience for our children.

SCHOOL'S IN FOR SUMMER

CONNECTING WITH THE GREAT OUTDOORS

Rachel Warren and Danielle Berger from the Scott Arboretum teach the Arboretum class, which introduces fourth graders to plant sciences. The class is designed so that students form a stronger connection with nature and experience a sense of awe and wonder while outdoors.

"For this summer's Arboretum class, I focused on designing a course that concentrated less on plant vocabulary and more on nature experiences. I wanted the students to feel it was safe to take risks in nature, to explore in the gardens and the surrounding Crum Woods, and to have fun while doing so," explained Warren. "Students even contributed to a research study to better understand how children connect with nature."



Rachel Warren

Arboretum photos by Rachel Warren



BECOMING SCIENTISTS

Using uncooked spaghetti and marshmallows might sound like an odd way to learn science, but it's just one experiment our fifth, sixth, and seventh graders conducted in the Liz Vallen Science for Kids Program (SFK). Vallen served as the program adviser for 20 years before passing in 2024.

The biology, chemistry, and physics classes are hands-on and immersive. Tossing concrete discs from a second-story walkway to measure strength exemplifies that!

"It's wonderful to see the children engage enthusiastically with science in state-of-the-art labs guided by college professors and students," said SFK Program Adviser and Professor Emeritus of Math Deb Bergstrand.



John Wehmiller (left) and Jeremy Polk

SEEING OTHER PERSPECTIVES

Since its introduction, our photography elective has been popular with middle and high schoolers. Jeremy Polk, media center manager at Swarthmore College, has taught the course for six years.

“Every summer, the kids share with me their energy, curiosity, positivity, humor, and the lightness of childhood,” said Polk. “Seeing their creativity shine, witnessing their pride when we display their work, and simply having fun together have been the most rewarding aspects of my 11 years at Swarthmore.”

This year, the class was renamed the John Wehmiller Creative Photography Program in honor of John Wehmiller, a dedicated advocate of the CCC who has been photographing concerts for more than a decade. Wehmiller joined the class this year to demonstrate many aspects of film photography.

“It is very gratifying to contribute to the archive of photos so we can look back on the students’ growth during their CCC years,” said Wehmiller. “It is equally gratifying to see how the summer photography program has grown under Jeremy’s guidance—the creativity that emerges in just a few short weeks is remarkable!”

MEETING NEW FRIENDS AND CHARACTERS

Around 10:15 in the morning, 15 volunteers from the local community enter the CCC headquarters to read with rising third graders. When they hear the door open, the children jump up to greet their new friends who introduce new worlds and ideas through books.

Kim Downs, an elementary teacher for 19 years, has organized and led the reading program since 2016. “Miss Kim” as she’s affectionately known, assesses students prior to the SLP to understand their phonemic awareness, fluency, and comprehension skills. She then uses the data to place students with a one-on-one reading volunteer or in small groups for guided phonics.

“The best part of our reading program is how excited the kids get when it’s time for reading,” said Downs. “They love spending time with their volunteers reading a book in their favorite spot. It creates a positive love of reading.”



Kim Downs



TAKING THE STAGE

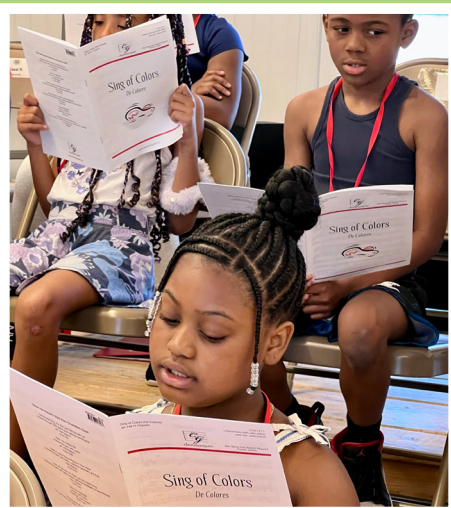
All the hard work during the five weeks of summer culminated in two concerts that featured classical and Disney sets. The CCC made its debut along the Main Line at Our Mother of Good Counsel Church in Bryn Mawr, where both concerts were standing room only. High school senior Daniel Peterkin guest conducted the second movement of Leonard Bernstein’s “Chichester Psalms.”

The children also displayed their summer projects at science, art, and photography exhibits for concertgoers and the Swarthmore College community. 🎵



Daniel Peterkin

SUMMER SNAPSHOTS



GCC seniors and alumni serve as SLP junior counselors and program assistants.

A FAMILIAR FACE JOINS THE CCC

Becky Slate still talks about her first day working as a part-time P.E. teacher during the CCC's Summer Learning Program in 2013.

"We were outside playing, and a huge thunderstorm came out of nowhere. At that time, our office was in the train station, but it was locked during the day, so there was nowhere to go. I didn't know anyone since it was my first day," recalls Slate. "I had to take the children into the tunnel under the train trestle to hide from the rain."

"I called Elisa (the CCC program coordinator) to say we were stuck, and the kids were a bit scared. Elisa was with the children in the church where we held dance class and said, 'Listen, hang tight. We can't come for you because lightning struck the church and started a fire.' That was my very first day. Everyone was quite surprised when I showed up on Tuesday."

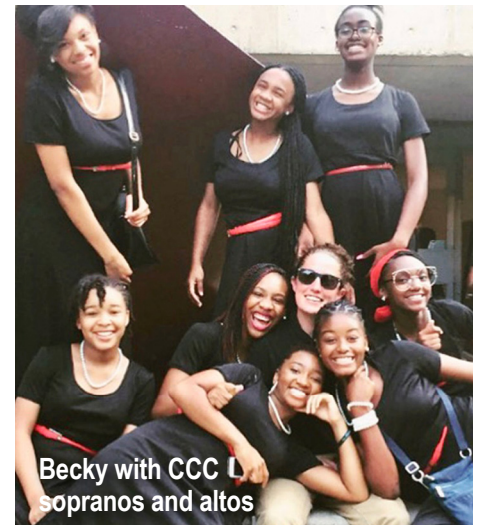
Becky returned every summer for 10 years with added responsibilities, including serving as a lead teacher.

She has seen the CCC grow into the education-focused organization it is today, with intensive math, science, and reading programs.

"Our children are incredible. I've watched four years of graduating seniors, who started in the CCC as third graders, grow so much and demonstrate such talent and capability both on and off the stage."

In January 2024, Becky joined the CCC as the newest full-time program coordinator, replacing Elisa DeNofio, who retired this year (yes, the same Elisa from Slate's first day).

Becky's primary responsibilities include managing round-trip transportation for more than 100 children, communicating with parents about schedules, facilitating auditions in Chester schools, assisting with budget planning, and coordinating the summer schedule. As she settles into her new role, Becky hopes to use technology to chronicle the CCC's history and to update student records.



"We are thrilled to have Becky join Team CCC as our full-time program coordinator. Becky has been a constant presence in our Summer Learning Program for a decade. Her energy and enthusiasm are matched only by the children's," said CCC Managing and Education Director Dana Semos. "Becky's creativity and organizational skills, combined with her familiarity with and care for the children, make her the perfect addition to our CCC family." 🎵

CCC MUSIC VIDEO PREMIERE COMING SOON!

If you follow the CCC on social media, you've likely seen a few hints about a special project we've been working on this year. If you don't follow us, now is the time to start! Mark your calendars for the music video premiere of "If You Knew," an original song by CCC Executive and Artistic Director John Alston, in January 2025.

Our children participated in two film shoot days—one at Swarthmore College and the other at four murals throughout Philadelphia—led by Philadelphia filmmaker Ben Kalina.

The song highlights the inherent potential that lives in all children.



"I dream about the day when all children, including our beautiful Chester children, will have the opportunity to fulfill their potential, to have all the experiences they need to become the wisest, happiest, and healthiest versions of themselves," said Alston.

Imagine a country where economic and political policy were driven by what is best for children. Imagine what our children could become."

The project is made possible by a grant from the Pincus Family Foundation. 🎵

Stay tuned for a special event with John Alston and Ben Kalina in the New Year!

A FAMILY'S LEGACY

Music runs in Melinda (Hoyt) Paulsen's blood. She was born into a musical family, learning to play piano at age six, followed by the violin. Her two older brothers chose piano and wind instruments, and her parents—Kathy and Bill—were semi-professional singers. Her mother sang in a church choir for nearly 40 years.

"I can still remember how the family sang many hours a day to pass the time during cross-country road trips in the unairconditioned Chevrolet station wagon."

Melinda went on to study music and Women's Studies at Swarthmore College ('86), during which time she volunteered to renovate homes in nearby Chester.

"A group of friends introduced me to the project and had me carrying the crowbar around and tearing down walls. We took homes close to being demolished and made them livable for people. I went a few times and thought, 'My goodness, this is a whole different bag of beans than Highland Park, New Jersey, where I grew up.' Chester was a whole different world."

That experience opened Melinda's eyes to what can easily be taken for granted. Years later, while working as a professional soloist and music professor in Germany, she heard about John Alston's work with the Chester Children's Chorus and remembered her time in Chester. The pair met for the first time in May of this year.

"It was very good to meet John and get a sense of the fire that's driving him," said Paulsen. "The Chorus is so central to the social interaction for these children. They come to Swarthmore and have a whole group of friends they might not see otherwise. They have the chance to explore other subjects like art, learn to swim, practice math, and fill in gaps that they might have. The Chester Children's Chorus is a wonderful place for me to invest."

Paulsen has since made a substantial six-figure gift to the CCC—the largest in its 30-year history—in honor of her parents.

"The fact that the CCC is doing music and math is near and dear to my heart because my father was a math professor. Many professional musicians



From left to right: Bill Hoyt Jr., Kathy Hoyt, Melinda (Hoyt) Paulsen (Swarthmore '86), Bill Hoyt Sr., Tim Hoyt (Swarthmore '82).

came from his side of the family," said Paulsen. "I think the passion they all felt for music he felt for math."

This idea of the children coming to Swarthmore and having someone—including Swarthmore College students—help them think in mathematical terms and others helping them think in musical terms is meaningful to me. I am also very invested in getting kids to read. I would be thrilled if the CCC could bring that delicate little plant and let it become a big tree."

Paulsen refers to the CCC's Summer Reading Program, designed to help third graders develop a love of reading. Read more about it on page 3.

"Wow! What an extraordinary gift from an extraordinary soul. We are now positioned to become the program our beautiful Chester children deserve," said CCC Executive and Artistic Director John Alston. "I can't even think of the words to thank Melinda properly, but I am honored that her family's legacy and love of music will continue with our children."

Over the next several years, the funds will be used to expand the CCC's academic programs, perform Mozart's Requiem in 2025, invest in video production to increase awareness of the CCC, and to ensure the CCC's future.

"I hope this gift can help secure a future for the CCC so that it can still be around in 30 years," said Paulsen. 🎵



A portion of Paulsen's gift will fund the CCC's Mozart Requiem performance in 2025.

PHOTO BY JOHN WEHMILLER

Create Your Legacy for Our Children

Just as the music of Handel's *Messiah* and Mozart's *Requiem* stays with our children for the rest of their lives, so does your generosity. The Chester Children's Chorus relies heavily on your support to continue helping Chester children reach their fullest potential.

Our **Strong Future Legacy Community** allows you to create lasting change for our children for years to come through an estate gift.

How It Works:

- Include a provision in your will or trust for the CCC to receive a specific sum or a percentage of your estate.
- Name the CCC as a beneficiary of all or part of your IRA, 401K, 403B, or other retirement plan.
- Name the CCC as a beneficiary of your life insurance policy.

Contact Us to Learn More

We are happy to discuss your vision for a legacy gift. Contact CCC Director of Development Carolyn Marzo via email at ckohn1@swarthmore.edu or call 610.328.8617.

Visit us online for additional information:

<https://swarthmore.giftplans.org/>.

“ I have volunteered with the Chester Children's Chorus for more than 15 years. I have been to dozens of concerts and never tire of seeing these beautiful children sing, dance, and shine with pride. As an alumna of Swarthmore College, I especially believe in supporting this program. My husband joins me in his love of attending as many concerts as possible and supporting this incredible treasure for the local community through a legacy gift. ”

—Carol Swingle and Todd Speece



“ As longtime supporters of the Chester Children's Chorus, we understand the immense value of its people and programs in uplifting the amazing children they love and serve. Pledging a legacy gift ensures that our support will continue long past our ability to make annual contributions. ”

—Karen Veseley and Evan Siegelman



PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS

Home means everything to the Karl family. Stephanie Karl, along with her husband Ken, started the groundwork for Helen's Hope Foundation in 2007 to honor her mother, Helen, who spent her childhood in and out of foster families and orphanages, never being adopted.

The Foundation has avidly supported the Chester Children's Chorus since 2013.

“The CCC was one of the first organizations that applied to Helen's Hope that year,” said Mallory Silva, the organization's director and Helen's granddaughter. “When we read the application and met with the staff, we were blown away by the history and the thought behind starting the program.”



Dana Semos, CCC's managing and education director, credits Helen's Hope Foundation with helping create that sense of home at the CCC.

“During the summer, our children are with us all day, five days a week. The grant from Helen's Hope allows us to

create a joyful and intensive learning program that incorporates music, math, science, reading, art, and more. Many of our children tell us that they wouldn't have anything else to fill the time if not for the Summer Learning Program, and for that, we are genuinely grateful to Helen's Hope Foundation.”

Silva and the Helen's Hope staff feel that connection with the CCC.

“For us, the CCC sounds like a family. It is a home for the children to go to—outside their own homes—where they feel part of something. My grandmother never really found a real home, but she found people and programs that helped her, just like the CCC. The Chorus is truly a life-changing program,” said Silva. 🎵

To learn more about Helen's Hope Foundation, visit helenshopefoundation.org.



CCC STAFF

John Alston, *Executive & Artistic Director*
 Dana Semos, *Managing & Education Director*
 Sean Tripline, *Assistant Music Director*
 Carolyn Marzo, *Director of Development*
 Kevin Downs, *Lead Math Teacher*
 Christina Meehan, *Communications Manager*
 Becky Slate, *Program Coordinator*

VOICE FALL 2024

Design: Karlyn Rosen Aires
 Photography: John Wehmiller and
 Swarthmore College Staff

The Chester Children's Chorus is an affiliated program of Swarthmore College and receives generous in-kind support from the College, as well as a generous financial contribution. The CCC raises over 90% of its own funds to cover direct expenses. Official tax receipts for charitable contributions to the Chorus come directly from the College.

CHESTER CHILDREN'S CHORUS
 500 COLLEGE AVENUE
 SWARTHMORE, PA 19081
 610-328-8180

DON'T MISS A BEAT! JOIN OUR EMAIL LIST

Get concert and program news as well as a behind-the-scenes look into the CCC.

Sign up online at
ChesterChildrensChorus.org/signup

or scan this
 QR code with your
 phone's camera:



UPCOMING CONCERTS!

WINTER WONDERLAND— THE BEST OF STEVIE WONDER

Saturday, December 14, 2024—7:00 p.m.

Sunday, December 15, 2024—4:00 p.m.

Lang Music Building at Swarthmore College
 Saturday performance to be livestreamed

DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. CONCERTS 2 LOCATIONS!

Saturday, January 18, 2025—4:00 p.m.

Lang Music Building at Swarthmore College

Sunday, January 19, 2025—4:00 p.m.

Our Mother of Good Counsel, 31 Pennswood Road, Bryn Mawr, PA 19010

SPRING CONCERTS—BEATLEMANIA

Saturday, May 17, 2025—7:00 p.m.

Sunday, May 18, 2025—4:00 p.m.

Lang Music Building at Swarthmore College

ALL CONCERTS ARE FREE AND OPEN TO ALL.
 Seating is limited and on a first-come, first-served basis.



As part of the CCC family, your financial support helps our children reach their fullest potential. More than \$1.5 million needs to be raised for our program each year. Please consider making an end-of-year gift online or via mail. Thank you for believing in our beautiful children.

Donate online: ChesterChildrensChorus.org/give

Donate via mail: Chester Children's Chorus, Attn: Gift Records
 Swarthmore College, 500 College Ave., Swarthmore, PA 19081

CONNECT WITH US ON SOCIAL: ChesterChildrensChorus thechesterchildrenschorus ChesterChildrensChorus

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