

Connecting through song and social media: Dixon Hall Music School students give back to Syrian refugee children

TORONTO (March 9th) – Dixon Hall Music School's March Break camp returns for its 10th year with an international twist and an emphasis on cross-cultural friendships. This year, campers will spend their March Break learning about the Syrian conflict and refugee crisis, and will connect with Syrian refugee children in Jordan through the power of song and social media.

Campers and instructors will arrive at House Hart Farm on Sunday, March 11th for the start of camp. Over the course of the week, campers will spend time learning about the civil war in Syria, the resulting displacement of millions of refugees, and the challenges refugee children face in accessing education in their new home. Thanks to a program called Songs for Syrians, a partnership between a New York non-profit, the Syrian Fund and S'Cool sounds, campers will also watch a YouTube video of Syrian refugee children now living in Jordan, as they perform an original song, "Ya Shams Al'Azhar", a song of longing for the home they left behind. After watching and reflecting on the video, campers will work together to compose and perform an original song in support of their new friends, and will make care packages with items like friendship bracelets that will be sent to Jordan for the Syrian children to enjoy. They'll also perform and record their own version of the Syrian children's song, "Ya Shams Al'Azhar", to be played in their classroom in Jordan, and hope to Skype with the children.

"When I learned of the difficulty that Syrian families face accessing education in their new countries, and of the efforts to help them, I knew immediately that Dixon Hall Music School had to get involved," said Bob McKittrick, Director, Dixon Hall Music School. "Doing something for others is the most fitting way for us to celebrate the 10 year anniversary of our March Break camp, especially since we're an organization that relies on the generosity of others to offer our programs and opportunities. We see the positive impacts of music education on our students every day, and are thrilled to connect with Syrian children who are also experiencing the power of music. This gives us an opportunity to educate our campers on global issues, and to use music and fellowship to tell the Syrian youth that they are not alone despite their tragedy, that they have friends on the other side of the world."

In addition to the Syrian learning component, campers will also enjoy a reprieve from the city, participating in nature hikes, interactive workshops, cooking and preparing meals together, and working on music assignments that will culminate in a recital at the end of the week, and recording their performance for the Syrian children to enjoy.

Dixon Hall Music School's March Break camp is free for students to attend thanks to generous support from The Minstrel Foundation.

Dixon Hall Music School serves 350 students per week, providing 12,500 lessons each year in 21 subject areas, in both individual and ensemble disciplines. Lessons are subsidized and cost as low as \$3 per lesson. Students also attend free music and arts camps throughout the year and receive free tickets to attend cultural events. 68% of families with a child attending Dixon Hall Music School have an annual household income of \$29,000 or less. Songs for Syrians is a music and



dance program designed for Syrian refugee children living in Jordan. The program was launched in 2016 in partnership with The Syria Fund, and reaches over 200 children across 4 refugee schools in Jordan.

Dixon Hall Music School is generously supported by The Slight Family Foundation, Toronto Arts Council and the Halsall Family Foundation.

About Dixon Hall

Dixon Hall is a multi-service agency located in the heart of east downtown Toronto.

For more than 85 years, Dixon Hall has offered a variety of supportive programs and services to seniors, at-risk youth, homeless men and women, the unemployed, and other vulnerable populations in Regent Park, Moss Park, Cabbagetown, St. James Town and surrounding neighbourhoods.

