

## Cincinnati Hills Christian Academy Wins 4C Youth Award!

*Students initiate dance program that also builds self confidence*

CINCINNATI (Dec. 8, 2016)—The Starbound Stewart Project, an afterschool dance program initiated and led by Cincinnati Hills Christian Academy (CHCA) seniors Meghan Lawlor and Morgan Renners, has been awarded [4C for Children's Champions for Children: the Next Generation Award](#). The award honors high school students in grades 9-12 who are taking action on behalf of the children of our community.

The Starbound program offers 10 weeks of once-a-week free dance classes to Stewart Elementary School third- and fourth-graders, many of whom are from low-income, immigrant families that don't have the resources to afford private lessons. In the past two years, more than 60 students have passed through the program.

### Promoting Dance and Self Esteem

Meghan and Morgan initiated the program in 2015 through CHCA's Student Organized Service program. A handful of additional volunteers from the school have also helped, including two sophomores who are leading an additional session this year and who will carry on the program after the founders graduate next spring.

The CHCA's students' love of dance and gymnastics was the impetus for founding the program, but their vision reaches far beyond just teaching students the basic techniques of dance and fun routines in hip-hop, jazz and ballet. They also want to promote the development of self esteem and confidence in the elementary students.

"We wanted to create a time and space where the girls can feel safe to just be themselves and express themselves through dance," says Morgan. "When they accomplish something that they didn't think they could do, you can just see their faces light up."

As instructors Meghan and Morgan don't focus on how well the girls dance or if they have perfect technique or presentation. The important thing, they say, is that the girls are trying, working together and supporting each other.

### Paying It Forward

The CHCA students have spent the better part of their lives involved in gymnastics and dance, which has given them both much more than just technical skills. The extracurricular activities have become ways the seniors express themselves, deal with stress and difficult times and create friendships. Through Starbound, they want to pay forward all that they have received to the children at Stewart.



Meghan Lawlor (back row, far left) and Morgan Renners (back row, far right) celebrate with children from Stewart Elementary School following their dance recital this fall. Meghan and Morgan are the founders of the Starbound Stewart Dance Program.

"We are so passionate about gymnastics and dance and have received so much joy and happiness by participating," Meghan says. "It's become our release for emotions. So it's our hope that through this program we can help these kids, who have seen and experienced so much in their young lives, develop similar coping strategies."

But the impact of the program isn't just on the students participating. At the end of the 10-week sessions, the dancers participate in a short recital attended by parents, family members, teachers, and members of the community. "The kids look so forward to the recital and love to show off what they've learned," Morgan says. "Everyone in the crowd is so proud, which just heightens the girls' confidence. It's such an amazing thing to be part of!"

Karen Hordinski, CHCA's outreach coordinator, says there is a positive ripple effect that continues for the students, their families and the school as a whole after the sessions are over.

"Stewart teachers say that they notice a positive change in the students' attitudes and performance after they attended the Starbound sessions," Karen says. "Meghan and Morgan's commitment to planning and leading this program is no small task, but the results are enormous!"

According to Meghan and Morgan, the recipe for the program's success is simple: "We're just really passionate about this program and the children we serve," Meghan says.

The presentation of the Champions for Children: The Next Generation Award will be made at the [4C for Children Gala](#) presented by PNC on Feb. 11, 2017.

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#### **About 4C for Children**

[4C for Children](#), a child care resource and referral agency headquartered in Cincinnati, offers free child care referrals, provides training and coaching for those who work with young children in early care and education programs, facilitates a federal child nutrition program and advocates for children and families at the local, state and federal levels.