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Unprecedented Harp Concerts Bring Joy and Hope to Rikers Island Jail



In a truly remarkable and unexpected event, the ShareLove.Fund organization, together with 15-year-old concert harpist Russell Jakubowsky and his teacher, Ms. Wendy Kerner, delivered two consecutive harp concerts at the women's ward of Rikers Island Jail. This unprecedented initiative took two years of planning and aimed to bring smiles, foster hope, and create a life-changing experience for incarcerated women, including those in the prenatal ward.

The event took place on International Women's Day, March 8, 2023, in Rosie's, the women's ward at Rikers Island Jail. Russell Jakubowsky, a remarkable 15-year-old concert harpist and the Youth Leadership Board President of Global Diplomacy and Economics, joined forces with Ms. Kerner to present awe-inspiring performances that spanned a total of four hours.

The event was hosted and organized by ShareLove.Fund, a non-profit organization dedicated to empowering at-risk youth and women. The organization is known for hosting impactful events throughout the year, creating pathways for empowerment through music, education, and vocational training, and is dedicated to fostering a brighter future for at-risk youth and incarcerated women.

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The concerts were an unprecedented endeavor, as Jakubowsky became the youngest musician to perform within the high-security facility. Under the guidance of Ms. Kerner, a harp faculty member at Sacred Heart University in Fairfield, CT, the duo captivated the audience with a carefully curated program that touched the hearts and souls of the women in custody.

Ms. Kerner, renowned for her mastery of the harp, played with heartfelt emotion, aiming to bring dignity and solace to women in challenging circumstances. Witnessing the transformation in the faces of the custodial women as the music resonated through the ward, Ms. Kerner felt privileged to provide a moment of ease and comfort amidst the harsh realities of their lives.

The event at Rikers Island Jail was preceded by recordings of musical renditions provided by Russell Jakubowsky and his sisters to various correctional facilities, including New York City jails and New York State prisons. These recordings, which included therapeutic harp music and original compositions, were made available to the inmates through the tablet program facilitated by American Prison Data Systems (APDS). This initiative aimed to bring the healing power of music to incarcerated individuals and provide them with a sense of connection and hope.

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