

CATHOLIC PARTNERSHIP SCHOOLS

HEALTHY COURIER

VOLUME 5, NUMBER 3

SUMMER 2026

Why social connections matter

When Michael O'Bryan was growing up in Connecticut, he really wanted to perform with the Hartt School's Summer Musical Program at the University of Hartford. But his family couldn't afford it.



Michael O'Bryan

He asked the theater leaders what he could do to become part of the group. They told him, as he recalls, "If you don't mind, maybe you could work for us, and we can let you do the program."

He started sweeping floors and doing whatever jobs were needed. In between, he practiced for his roles as an actor and singer in the musical theater show.

"I'm not trying to brag on myself, but I nailed it [the role] to the point where after four days, they

were like, 'Never mind, you should just be in the program and show,'" he said.

Mr. O'Bryan uses this experience as an example of how people have contributed to his growth.

"If it wasn't for the social connections around me and the people who invested in my life, I wouldn't be in front of you today," he said.

Having social connections and a sense of belonging are protective factors that help you manage stress, according to experts at the Mayo Clinic, a hospital and research institution.

Holy Name's *Healthy Courier* seventh-grade reporters had the opportunity to interview and discuss social connections with Mr. O'Bryan, founder and

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Anime artist thrives on teamwork

For Camden anime artist and poet Reet Starwind, art is more than a way to express his creativity. It provides opportunities to connect with people.

"Art makes people realize that you are not alone," said Mr. Starwind, especially when you find people who share similar interests. "I have connected with people on the other side of the world."

Mr. Starwind is a poet and writer who works with animators, actors, and musicians to create anime art. Anime, which originated in Japan, is an animation and illustration style defined by vibrant colors, stylized characters, and detailed settings.

He collaborates with people who live on the West Coast, in New York, and in Camden to bring his stories to life.

"When you see it all come together and everybody did their part, it just makes you really feel accomplished," Mr. Starwind said in a recent interview with St. Cecilia *Healthy Courier* reporters. "It makes you feel like you're working together for something bigger than you can do by yourself."



Key characters Jak, Jeysin, Marie, and Kimo developed by Reet Starwind's anime team. The lead character artist is Lizzie Burke.

He exhibits these creations on social media, at community events, and on his website Dreamersplaylist.com. His goal is for his team's works to be picked up by a streaming service. "I just want to give back what was given to me," he said.

*(Please see **Anime** on Page 2)*

Anime art is created through teamwork

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Mr. Starwind also writes poetry, another way he connects with people.

“I started writing poetry when I was in high school because I thought it would make me look cool to girls,” he said. “Little did I know the girls that it would look cool to would be a bunch of sweet old ladies!”



Reet Starwind

After he graduated from Rutgers University–Camden, the “sweet old ladies” hosted his poetry readings at gatherings in their homes. Since then, Mr. Starwind has recited his poetry at Rutgers–Camden for graduation and community events.

“Parents and students told me that my poem gave them inspiration,” he said. “It is an honor to know that your poetry connects with others and inspires them to follow their dreams.”

When asked which art form he prefers, anime or poetry, he said the winner is anime because so much goes into the creative process.

“I’d say ... that’s a little more fulfilling, because we’re [the team] able to elevate each other by doing the things that we do, as opposed to something that’s just elevated by what I’m doing by myself,” he said.

The advice Mr. Starwind would give to a kid who is interested in becoming an anime artist or a poet is to be yourself. “You will always be your most creative when you enjoy what you are doing,” he said. “Do what brings you joy and remember to have fun.”

—By *Healthy Courier* reporters,
St. Cecilia

Catholic Partnership Schools Healthy Courier

The *Healthy Courier* is a publication of the Catholic Partnership Schools in Camden, NJ. This issue has been created by reporters at St. Cecilia, Holy Name, and St. Joseph Pro-Cathedral.

Fifth-grade reporters from St. Cecilia include Kylan Dandridge, Yoarlin de la Cruz, Christian Bonifacio Dorado, Liam Gonzalez, Noah Infante, Giovanni Irene Jr., Antonello Jones, Masen Liranzo, Zaina Moulter, Amelia Osorio, and Gladys Ramos. Their faculty advisor is Mrs. Woerner. Sr. Alicia Perna is the school principal.

Seventh-grade reporters from Holy Name include Christopher Aguina, Raidhirys Espinal, Nelania Hidalgo, Nelson Hidalgo, Jayson Lara, Samayaliz Rivera, Cristopher Rodriguez, Gael Samano Flores, Victoria Sanchez, Jamiel Savage, Adrian Sosa, Zoey Stroman-Santiago, Cassandra Urena, and Xzavier Valdez-



Concept art of Jak Ortega as part of the animation process. Illustrated by members of Reet Starwind’s anime team.

Who inspired Reet to do anime art?

Reet Starwind credits his grandmother and the TV show “Toonami” for inspiring his work as an anime creator. “Toonami” is an American late-night program that broadcasts Japanese and American action animation.

“I followed the cartoon “Toonami” every day, and it inspired me to create my own story,” Mr. Starwind said. “My art is inspired by my Black and Latino American culture, and I am proud that I get to share that.”

Mr. Starwind traced his creativity back to high school. “I made my first anime draft around ninth or tenth grade,” he said. That’s also when he started to write poetry.

He also revealed that while “Reet” is his given name, “Starwind” is a pen name. “When I was starting my writing career, I was thinking like ‘Oh, what would be a cool name?’” he said. At the time, he loved *Outlaw Star*, a Japanese anime whose main character is Gene Starwind. —By *Healthy Courier* reporters,
St. Cecilia

Sharp. Mrs. Buchhofer is their faculty adviser. Mrs. Kent is the school principal.

Eighth-grade reporters from St. Joseph Pro-Cathedral include Yeury Coronado, Brandon Flores, Abigail Garcia, Andrea Garcia, Yanely Gomez-Maldonado, Kylar Harris, William Hernandez, Perla Jimenez, Alexandra Meza, Allison Morales, Jazmile Peralta, Miguel Pina, Matthew Ramos, Gianni Reyes-White, Diego Reyes-Xiqui, Eliana Sanchez, Jace Schwartz, and Mark Sevilla. Their faculty advisor is Mrs. Guernon-Wittman. Mrs. Orosz is the school principal.

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Sharing food can build understanding

Half a world away from New Jersey, students in Nepal have been learning about the types of snacks their American peers enjoy. Likewise, students at St. Joseph Pro-Cathedral School in Camden were excited to try some Nepalese foods.

What they didn't expect—in this age of instant communication—was having so much difficulty making a connection! Their best laid plans got interrupted by weather, technical difficulties, distance, and resources. But they persevered.

The Nepalese students attend Kopila Valley School in a valley in the Surkhet Province, according to their teacher, Anjali Karki. Nepal is located in south Asia between India to the east, south, and west, and Tibet/China to the north. It's about 7,600 miles from Camden.

The plan was for reporters at Kopila Valley to sample some American snack foods and for St. Joseph reporters to taste foods from Nepal and then to share their experiences with each other.

“As Americans, we get our food from stores, but since the Nepal people live in the mountains, they don't have the same kinds of stores or markets like we do, so they grow their food and cook it themselves,” said Jace Schwartz, a St. Joseph reporter. “The Nepal people learn the ability to cook and not order take-out food. They cook for each other and themselves. They connect to each other through cooking and eating food together.”

Teacher Karki said “making real-world connections for our students is at the heart of meaningful learning. Education is not just about textbooks—it's about helping students understand the world they live in and their place within it.”

Rowan University anthropology professor Dustin Cushman told St. Joseph reporters that food “connects us to people around the world and helps us learn about different cultures. It strengthens bonds and helps people to socialize through food.”

Professor Cushman noted that in many cultures, elders teach younger family members to cook. “Through these connections, food can be passed down to multiple generations,” he said. “Even when people move from one country to another, the food from their homeland keeps them connected to their culture.”

As of publication, the Nepalese students hadn't tried the American snacks because of weather and environmental problems that disrupted their school schedules. Teacher Karki said she hopes the connection with American students will “provide them with insights, help them see different lives in different parts of the world and make them curious. Most of



Open Street Map Contributors

our students come from places where they don't have any means of knowing the rest of the world.”

For their part, the St. Joseph reporters learned that Nepal has “a very diverse culture consisting of food, culture, and religion. They use lots of flavorful seasoning in their food,” said Kylar Harris.

“We could tell from tasting their food that people in Nepal use many different types of spices,” said Matthew Ramos. “Nepal also makes wonderful food such as momo, which is a very flavorful meal with many spices. When you take a bite of momo, a burst of spices and flavors will unfold and that's what makes it delicious,” he said.

In addition to momo (dumplings filled with chicken), St. Joseph reporters tasted roti (a bread-like food with vegetables and spices wrapped inside), and lassi (a yogurt-based drink.) The food got good reviews.

“The food was a new experience; it had a hint of sweet and spicy. I liked the combination of both tastes, and the sauces that came along with the food were also very good. I'm sure to come back to Nepalese food, it's truly delicious!” said William Hernandez.

Despite the miles that separate them, St. Joseph and Kopila Valley students have one thing in common: They're both learning to be reporters. “They learn about reporting and newswriting in their course, which through this collaboration (with St. Joseph) they can put in action” said teacher Karki.

—By *Healthy Courier* staff, St. Joseph Pro-Cathedral

Challenges of connecting from afar

Time, weather, and resources upended plans by St. Joseph-Pro Cathedral reporters to connect with students in Nepal.

“The time difference between our locations made connecting with the other school hard,” said Migual Pina of St. Joseph. “It would be morning time here, and in Nepal it would be nighttime since Nepal is 11 hours and 45 minutes ahead of us. We wanted to do a Zoom meeting with the students in Nepal while we were in school but weren’t able to.”

Snow days here also interfered. “We weren’t able to come to school to record the videos,” Migual said of the way St. Joseph students planned to communicate with the kids in Nepal. And then there was the matter of resources.

“If the students in Nepal were to try food from the USA, they wouldn’t have the access to the same ingredients we have to make the food,” he said.

Anjali Karki, a teacher at Kopila Valley School, wrote about the difficulties in Nepal earlier this year. “For the last three weeks, it was chaos here. First, terrible air pollution, and then constant rain and terrible wind. We haven’t been able to shoot [the video].”

She explained that air pollution in Nepal comes from a combination of vehicle emissions, industrial

activities, dust from unpaved roads, and seasonal agricultural burning. Surkhet, the province where the school is located, is a valley and very prone to trapping the dirty air which travels from different parts of India, teacher Karki said.

“Unfortunately, this is quite common, particularly during certain times of the year. When air quality reaches unsafe levels, it directly impacts student learning,” she said. “Some students experience respiratory discomfort, reduced concentration, and increased fatigue. On particularly severe days, outdoor activities must be limited, and in extreme situations, students may be advised to stay home for their safety.”

The environment provides a learning experience for the students. The teacher said the students “have already developed a foundational understanding of environmental issues. They have explored topics such as air pollution, climate change, and sustainable living through interactive lessons, projects, and discussions.”

—By *Healthy Courier* reporters,
St. Joseph Pro-Cathedral

How to build social connections

(Continued from Page 1)

CEO of Humanature, a business management consulting firm based in Philadelphia. He’s an expert and researcher in the fields of community development, organizational culture, and human well-being.

Below are some highlights from the reporters’ interview. Mr. O’Bryan’s answers have been shortened and lightly edited.

Q: What are social connections?

Mr. O’Bryan: Social connections are ties that we have with one another as human beings. For example, you have ties that are quick and transactional, like when you go to the store and you’re purchasing food. At the opposite end are deeper connections, like to our parents and siblings.

Q: Why are social connections important?

Mr. O’Bryan: Our relationships are super-important to our health. We are born needing connections and

relationships to survive. Within the first hours after birth, we can’t do anything but cry and use the bathroom. Without relationships, the baby will not survive. As we age, our relationship to others continues to impact our well-being and ability to survive.

Q: Describe your company, Humanature.

Mr. O’Bryan: Humanature exists to help managers and employers make sense of how to create the healthiest workplaces. We help employers understand that investing in their employees’ well-being is directly tied to how well their business performs or how much money they can make.

Q: What advice do you have for kids?

Mr. O’Bryan: If you needed to make or build a garden [to feed your family], you wouldn’t just grow peppers. You would grow everything you need. I would consider your life in that kind of metaphor. You need to challenge yourself to make different connections across your lifetime.