

FALL NEWSLETTER 2022



DJ MARTIN

SANTA MARIA

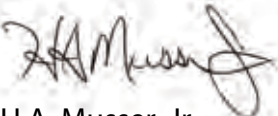
COMMUNITY SERVICES

From Santa Maria

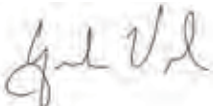
In 1897, Sisters Blandina and Justina Segale turned five dollars seed money into an organization dedicated to helping families help themselves. Santa Maria Italian Educational and Industrial Home began as a settlement house serving Cincinnati's Italian immigrant population, providing educational, recreational, and other social services to the community. Today, Santa Maria's coaches provide families with educational tools and resources to build strong families, promote healthy residents, and foster neighborhood revitalization.

"Do what presents itself, and never omit anything because of hardship or repugnance." That was S. Blandina's motto. Nearly 125 years later, the organization she co-founded is inspired by her motto and continues to help families overcome obstacles in order to achieve their educational, financial and health goals.

We hope you enjoy the fall newsletter!



H.A. Musser, Jr.
President & CEO



Guillermo Villa
Board Chair



Guillermo Villa
Board Chair



H.A. Musser, Jr.
President & CEO

Mission

Santa Maria is a catalyst and advocate for Greater Price Hill families to attain their educational, financial, and health goals.

Vision

Our vision is for Greater Price Hill to be a vibrant, thriving, and self-sustaining community.

Changing the Game: Conversations with DJ Martin

Danny Burridge, Youth Development Director at Santa Maria, remembers very clearly the first time he met DJ Martin. It was February 2021, and Danny had just started his new position at Santa Maria's Joe Williams Family Center (JWFC). Youth Development staff were looking for youth to attend a

group session, but since it was still the middle of the pandemic and a snowstorm was coming on fast, it was not surprising that only DJ, and his little brother Evan, showed up. DJ was 12 then; wiry, bubbly, full of clever comments, and had a crazy head of hair. He also wasn't the best-behaved, Danny recalled. After the group

session was canceled, DJ, Evan and Danny went outside to shovel the sidewalk in front of the JWFC, but DJ was way too busy throwing snowballs at Evan and Danny to be very helpful with snow removal. Danny said he couldn't help but like DJ: "I could easily see that glint of intelligence and determination in everything he did."

Danny wasn't the only one who noticed these elements of DJ's personality. The other youth workers at the JWFC knew that DJ had

a lot of potential, but he also had a hard time staying focused in school and staying out of trouble. Nancy Laird, the JWFC Administrative Assistant and Resource Navigator who has been working in Lower Price Hill for 40 years, tells stories from a few years back when Oyler's School Resource

Officer would have to chase DJ all over the school grounds to try to get him back into class. She also recalls working together with DJ's mother, Melissa Miller, at the Price Hill Recreation Center to provide opportunities for neighborhood youth. At the same time, Nancy was also working directly with DJ's mother to

support her as she struggled with depression and anxiety.

Neighborhood-wide problems in Lower Price Hill related to poverty, crime, and substance abuse soon landed DJ's dad in jail, and left his mom even more isolated as she struggled with her mental health challenges. Then, in 2019, she was diagnosed with cancer, though DJ and his siblings didn't immediately find that out.



DJ Martin

DJ Martin (continued)

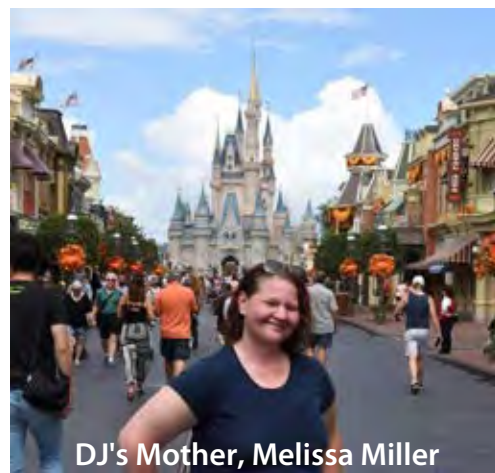
At that time, DJ was coming to the JWFC, or just “the Center,” as kids in Lower Price Hill call it, with his older brother, Johnny, to play basketball, board games, and other activities that aren’t readily available on the streets of Lower Price Hill. In sixth grade, DJ started getting even more formally involved with Santa Maria’s youth programming by joining in-school, social-emotional groups at Oyler school. He remembered that he liked everything about those groups, but especially the other kids, as well as Santa Maria’s Jessica Polzin, and Jim Holmstrom. Mr. Jim and Ms. Jessica (along with Nancy) have been foundations of the Lower Price Hill community for many years, working with generations of families (Jim was the director of the youth program for 40 years and Jessica has worked in the program for ten years). Without a doubt, DJ’s transformation over the years—and even within the past year—can be at least partially attributed to Santa Maria’s Youth Development program. There is no limit to the value of having positive mentors and safe group spaces in a young person’s life.

Over the past couple months, Danny has been having more conversations with DJ when he comes to the Center to hang out, play basketball or other games, or get help looking for a job (which has been his main focus in the past few months). Danny asked DJ what he’s learned as a result of being in Santa Maria’s groups and participating in activities at the Center. DJ said that he, “used to be selfish and couldn’t do anything with other people,” but now, he said, “I learned to be on a team, to do teamwork, because you actually can’t do much on your own.”

As DJ pointed out, there were specific issues in his life, and specific responses that sprung from his own determination and sense of

self-worth that made him want to do better. Santa Maria staff and programs played a role in providing him with alternative activities and positive mentors, but DJ has had to do the hard work himself. He learned how to look out for himself, and how to lean on other people when he needs support.

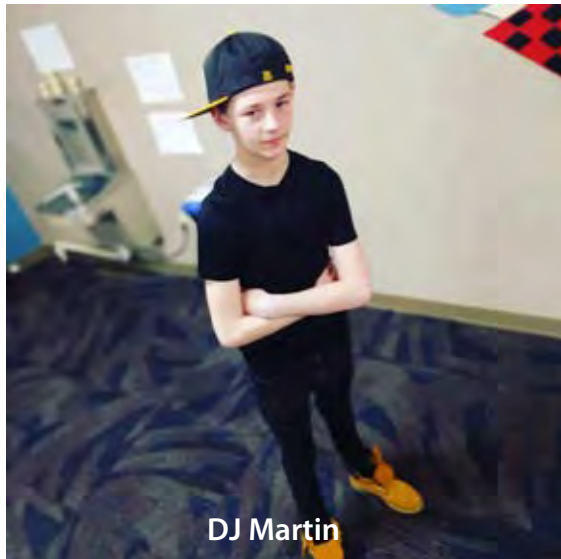
In 2020, when DJ was in seventh grade, he and his siblings finally learned that their mom had cancer. And after a long, hard-fought battle, she sadly passed away in June 2021. At that point, DJ said, he wanted to give up, but it was then that his older sister, Johnna, stepped up for him. She cared for him, talked to him, and helped him think things through. She eventually took him in formally to her house as well, now as his legal guardian. DJ is grateful, but he still struggles with the loss of his mother, especially with the holiday season approaching. “Now,” he said, “Christmas just ain’t the same, nothing is the same. I don’t even like the holidays.”



DJ knows that his behavior, “used to be everywhere,” but when Danny asked what really made that change for him, DJ said, “when my mom got sick it was time for me to act my age. I realized that I had to be a role model for my younger brother and sister. I had to cut some other people out, the people

DJ Martin (continued)

I was hanging out with... I just couldn't do it with my behavior... and then especially after seeing my dad in jail, you know, I realized that I had to be better than my dad."



And if the tragedy of his mom passing wasn't enough, just months later, in November 2021, his sister Johnna's infant baby, DJ's nephew, also passed away after just two days of life. With Johnna struggling with the loss of her mother and son, DJ needed to seek help from another source. Just then, someone else stepped up for him: Abdullah Powell, better known as "Brother Abdullah," a creative music producer and artist who had worked with the Cincinnati NGO Elementz. Brother Abdullah had just begun volunteering in Lower Price Hill at both Oyler School and Santa Maria's youth program.

With Brother Abdullah's help, DJ created the music and wrote the lyrics to a song that memorialized his late baby nephew, but also expressed the pain and anguish he felt at losing someone so special to him. DJ talked about how the writing of that song was a big accomplishment for him in his life, and how it also helped him process his emotions. He said, "I wanted to make a song when my

nephew passed away because it broke my heart and it was a sign, and I wanted to make a song about it. Working on that and then having the song finished helped me to deal with depression." And as proud of the song as he is, DJ is also very guarded about it; he keeps it posted on YouTube, but only shares it with a select few people. He only gave Danny the title after many conversations, and Danny consistently expressing his interest in hearing it.

DJ is such a unique young man and has lived experiences at his young age that most of us could never even comprehend, but at the same time he demonstrates typical character traits of youth who live in Lower Price Hill. He is street-smart, hyper-vigilant, slow to trust people, but loyal once you gain his trust. He doesn't mince words and he doesn't waste them either. He's overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles just to start another school year (now in the tenth grade), to keep showing up to the Center, to keep showing up for his friends and family, and to keep showing up for himself.

When Danny asked DJ a few months ago, why he keeps coming to the Center even though he now lives 15 minutes away from Lower Price Hill with his sister Johnna, he responded: "It helps to come to the Center to play basketball and everything these days, but it's not even about the basketball so much. I just like to be around people. At the Center, I feel like I'm part of something, something that helps me to better myself. Being around y'all, it's a good influence... y'all help me talk about stuff."

So, while Santa Maria's work with youth at the Center is geared toward teaching youth "social-emotional" and "life skills" that will enable them to succeed in school and in their

DJ Martin (continued)

future careers, when Center staff hear that they're helping a kid to just "talk about stuff," they know that's a huge victory. But DJ is taking things even further as he plans out his



future and works to make his goals a reality. He described where he's at in his life by saying, "You gotta learn to go through the motions, take the proper steps toward a goal... that process stays the same no matter what. What changes is what you're working toward. You can't get comfortable, you gotta learn the new motions... you're only a kid until you're 13... I ain't no kid no more, maybe my body and my age says that I'm a kid but I got a grown person mindset. I'm gonna do what I want. If I want something I'm gonna go get it. And I don't give up. I keep trying over and over... Ain't nothing I can't get through. It might not work the first time, but maybe the second or third time it will."

The last time Danny and DJ talked, DJ talked about his summer job working on the "Green Team" for Community Matters, a nonprofit

organization in Lower Price Hill, where he was tasked with helping to cut down honeysuckles, picking up trash and maintaining community gardens. But he quickly moved on to his plans for the future, "I want to go to trade school to do body work on cars." Danny asked DJ how he got interested in that and he replied, "One day my grandpa was outside working on a car, and he asked me to help him change a tire, and so I did, and I picked it up right away, the first time. It just made sense to me." Danny started telling him that sounded like a great career, but before he could finish, DJ interrupted saying, "but not my whole life... I want to be able to do other stuff too. I also want to be a mechanic for the military... You know, once you're in the game, you gotta figure out how you're gonna change the game too."

DJ is changing the game in his life without a doubt. And anything that he may lack economically he makes up for in dreams, determination, and mindset. Danny doesn't doubt for a second that DJ will be successful in his future. And like a lot of other kids in Lower Price Hill, he may even change the way we understand success itself along the way.



My First Turkey

Over the 125 years Santa Maria has been of service in Cincinnati, we have partnered with many organizations, including the Council of Social Agencies, which later became the United Way of Greater Cincinnati. We combined our services over the years with other organizations such as The Jordan Center, Literacy Center West and The Madonna Community House. And we have housed other organizations like The Good Samaritan Free Health Center, which began by renting rooms in our East Price Hill office and now has its own building. Santa Maria thrives on our formal and informal partnerships, and we love being able to expand services with the help of our partners.

Another organization that once called Santa Maria home was Over-The-Rhine Senior Services. In 1969, Kathleen Prudence began volunteering as a jumper for their Meals on Wheels program (not to be confused with Santa Maria's meals-on-wheels program that ran from 1972-2014). A jumper is the person who delivers the meals to the senior citizen – most volunteers for Meals on Wheels work in pairs – a driver and a jumper.

Santa Maria was still called Santa Maria Institute back then and was located at 21 West 13th Street, at the corner of Elm Street at that time (where Washington Park stands today). Kathleen and her roommate, Dolores, were Mount St. Joseph University students and Dolores worked at Senior Services. Kathleen soon quit her job at Closson's and began volunteering at Senior Services full-time.

"They were open during the week and provided a hot lunch for Seniors and a place to do crafts, play checkers or cards," Kathleen reminisced. In September of that year, Kathleen was hired on as an assistant with Senior Services. "I just helped out where needed – serving food, doing crafts, visiting with the older people. There were probably about 20 regulars and most of them were such amazing people," she said.

Several Sisters of Charity were active in Over-the-Rhine at the time. One of them was Sister Ludmilla who ran Santa Maria. Kathleen said, "They were always bustling around the streets ministering to the people who lived in the inner city. They reminded me of stories about St. Francis Cabrini," an American nun, and the first U.S. citizen to be canonized as a saint by the Roman Catholic Church in 1946. "I remember being told not to let Sister Ludmilla catch you coming to work looking scruffy. Being dressed neatly was a sign of respect to the people you served," Kathleen said.

Kathleen recalled one very memorable Thanksgiving before Senior Services moved out of Santa Maria to a new location on Vine Street in 1970. Santa Maria was closed, but Kathleen and Dolores received special permission to open the center for Thanksgiving dinner. "We cooked everything in my apartment, and then carried it to the Center. My first turkey!" Kathleen exclaimed.

Kathleen remembered that day, "Almost everyone came to dinner and loved it, even Mr. Mike, who was the Center's cook. He always pretended to be a grouch and was skeptical about our ability, but he loved being told he wasn't allowed to do anything except sit down and enjoy the meal." A good time was had by all.

Kathleen continued to live in Over-the-Rhine until the mid 1990s, and raised three daughters there. She volunteered with the Drop Inn Center and Community Council, and helped found the Peaslee Neighborhood Center. She became a Licensed Practical Nurse and moved to Portland, Oregon to be closer to her grandchildren. But, even after all these years, she will never forget that memorable Thanksgiving at Santa Maria.

Sisters of Charity and Associates Share Santa Maria Memories From the Past

Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati Associate and Santa Maria Board Member, Maureen Maxfield, recently asked Sisters of Charity and their associates for their recollections of Santa Maria over the years. Here are some quotes they shared!



Patmarie Bernard, SC: "I started volunteering with Santa Maria in 2006 in planning for the Women's Health Fair and served on this Committee... I served at the Senior Wellness Clinic as an RN for approximately 15 years. I even did some ZOOM clinics during COVID.

I served on the Board of Directors for 9 years... I continue to volunteer, and will always support and advocate for Santa Maria."



Nancy Bick Clark, SC Associate: "Several Associates collected cleaning supplies for Santa Maria from mid-September through about October 9 for the special service project (from the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati). Karen Martin

coordinated the Associates. Pam Korte kept a bin on her porch in Madisonville for donations. Sue DiTullio kept a donation bin at Earth Connection for people to drop off items."



Mary Bookser, SC: "When I was the head of the Service Learning program at the [Mount St. Joseph] University, I used to have students do various forms of service at Santa Maria. Occasionally it was long-term service, often it was a short-term service like helping with the pre-Christmas program, etc."



Joyce Brehm, SC: "I worked at Santa Maria before I entered the Sisters of Charity in 1972... S. Kateri Maureen Koverman was going to open an office on Warsaw Avenue and she needed someone to be there when she was

not... I have many stories of having worked for S. Kateri. She opened a Teen Lounge in the basement of the recreation center. The Teen Lounge was nothing more than some tables and chairs and carpet and a juke box. Part of my job became to be there once or twice a week in the evening. The purpose was to give teens a place to go to get off the street... During the summer months, on Friday evenings, I would go to the hill behind the Price Hill library. I could plug in a movie projector in the library, run an extension cord to the back. We hung a sheet between two trees. This was the movie screen."

Sisters of Charity (Continued)



Carol Brockmeyer, SC: (as told to Maureen Maxfield) "Carol Brockmeyer's mother, Antoinette Scalia Brockmeyer was taught by Sisters Blandina and Justina and her daughter, Carol Ann Brockmeyer was inspired by their

dedication and joined the order, becoming Sr. Anthony Brockmeyer, SC."

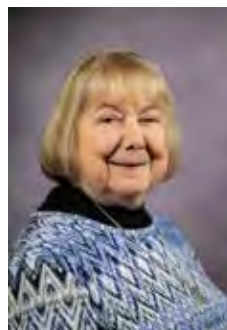
was sent to work with preschoolers. That's what Santa Maria did since Blandina's time – work with preschoolers!...Another day I asked the tots about a song they wanted to sing, thinking it would be a children's song. Instead a little boy started singing 'They say you are too young to be in love,' the Nat King Cole song, which he likely learned from his mom. Years later, I served on Santa Maria's Board."



Cathy Colque, SC Associate: "I volunteered at Santa Maria when it was located at 13th and Republic. I am pretty sure I was in high school...I would go down once or twice a week and help with the children."



Mary Jo Mersman, SC Associate: "When I was in school at Seton a group of us would go to Santa Maria after school one day a week to help kids with homework and to play with them."



Shirley Dix, SC: "I have fond memories of living at the Santa Maria Convent at 13th and Republic Streets in Over-the-Rhine around 1967-68, while I worked at Springer School for Special Needs. Many of the sisters living at the convent

worked in different fields and they would tell stories about their ministries at the dinner table."



And here is what Maureen Maxfield, SC Associate and Santa Maria Board Member had to say: "My first experience with Santa Maria was a Christmas party for the children in Santa Maria's day care center located in a building on Seton High

School's campus in 1986 or so. It was hosted by the Mission Effectiveness Department of Sisters of Charity Health Care Systems, through S. Rosaleen Simpleman's leadership. Staff were then invited to the 3rd floor convent at Seton HS for treats hosted by S. Roslyn Hafertepe, who lived there." Maureen also volunteered as a tax preparer for Santa Maria clients over 12 years and added, "It was a wonderful service as there were several high-cost tax prep sites right across the street!"



S. Victoria Marie Forde, SC: "When I was a young sister, I was sent down to Santa Maria for my summer job, with a group of young sisters. This was before I made final vows. Santa Maria was located at 13th and Republic and I



The Sharing Table

Santa Maria Community Services, Inc. was pleased to be able present our annual fundraiser, The Sharing Table, on September 15, 2022 after a two-year hiatus! The event, hosted at ARCO Cincy, was attended by over 150 supporters of Santa Maria. Special guest speaker, Dr. O'dell Owens, gave a presentation raising awareness of childhood poverty in Cincinnati and WLWT's Courtis Fuller was the emcee for the evening. Nehemiah Manufacturing is Santa Maria's 2022 presenting sponsor. Dan Meyer, President and CEO of Nehemiah Manufacturing said, "We are proud to be the sponsor of such a great organization that works tirelessly every day to make a difference to individuals' and families' lives."



Santa Maria's 125th Birthday Party

Santa Maria was so happy to celebrate our birthday at a party at the American Sign Museum on November 3, 2022. "Santa Maria's 125th birthday was a lot of fun," said Santa Maria Board Member and Planning Committee Chair, Mike Gentry. "We had a lot of great positive reactions to both the Agency, and the venue, and what we were doing here tonight. People really seemed to enjoy themselves and had a number of very positive comments about what was going on." H.A. Musser, Jr., President and CEO of Santa Maria, said, "In 1897, Sisters Blandina and Justina Segale turned \$5 seed money into an organization dedicated to helping families help themselves. Santa Maria is thrilled to be able to celebrate this milestone and continue our mission 125 years later."





SANTA MARIA
COMMUNITY SERVICES™
125 years of helping families help themselves

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