

Chatham YDC String Ensemble

by Matt Jenkins, communications officer

Chatham YDC Director Charles Dingle is always looking for unique and innovative outlets to help the students under his care to flourish, and his relationship with Peter Zlotnick, education director with the Greensboro Symphony got him thinking. “Years ago, he [Peter] used to bring ensembles to the Guilford Juvenile Detention Center” said Dingle. “When I became the Director here [Chatham YDC] I immediately called him and said, hey man, I want to get the same ensembles coming here.”

The idea of conducting this pilot program at Chatham was realized under the guidance of Bethany Uhler, a Greensboro-based cellist and a doctoral student in the University of North Carolina at Greensboro's music program.

She selected several students who now gather on Saturdays to learn how to play string instruments and read sheet music. Everyone involved in this pilot program believes it's important to have kids who can appreciate the opportunity to learn something new, and work as a group. “Because of the setting, kids have to come in, stay focused and be dedicated to what they signed up for,” Jada stated. “Before this, nobody would have come out and said I like classical music, but now others have seen it's cool and want to try it.” It seems putting classical music into a language they can understand has earned it a newfound appreciation with this crowd. Uhler's strong desire and motivation to be involved in a program like this comes from having a family member in prison; however, it was a struggle logically to make that happen within the adult system. When she connected with Dingle and others at Chatham YDC, she said, “from the onset, everyone was so supportive and open, which was really exciting.

“I believe in exposure,” Dingle said. “I try to open doors to a lot of different experiences for these kids.” Jada confirms she has benefitted from the experience and this is something she would like to continue learning and sharing in the future. “I feel like this is a great program and people should be honored to be a part of this.” Uhler, Dingle and the youth string ensemble of Chatham YDC are breaking new ground by going back to the classics.

