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To the Members of the Ways and Means Committee,

I would like to extend this personal reflection on the impact the Hope Partnership has had on the youth at MacLaren Youth Correctional Facility, specifically the Celtic Group. I have had the privilege of participating, with the Ceili of the Valley Society, in a yearly event which brings Celtic music and dance to the facility for four years. The first year it was attended by the youth only, but it made such an impact on them that they asked if it could become a family event. Over the past three years we have watched the pride of the youth as they were able to invite their families to participate with them. They have to work hard to remain a part of this group and they always make us feel much respected and welcome when we come. We share a lot of laughter as we dance and we enjoy listening to their stories of how they are learning more about their heritage. They work hard to maintain the privilege of being a part the group.

I was personally so taken with the enthusiasm of the group that I have become a volunteer at the facility with the express purpose of helping the youth expand their knowledge of Celtic dance and music. I believe that being a part of this group and others that the Hope Partnership facilitates gives these young people something to grab onto...something to look forward to and to aim for. It is so inspiring to see their eyes light up when we come as a group to share with them or when I come as an individual volunteer, to watch them bravely volunteer to get up and dance, to encourage their families and other youth (and staff) to join in the dancing, and to hear their heart felt thanks when we are done. The opportunities that the Hope Partnership brings to the youth help them to build communities and to learn how to be a part of a bigger community.

I believe that the Hope Partnership is a crucial partner in the work of the OYA and I look forward to future opportunities to volunteer at MacLaren. Ceili of the Valley Society always looks forward to the annual Family Ceili event too.

Sincerely,

Elisa Chandler