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2026 CARTHA *Nimma Resilience Fellow*

I came to education through a winding path, but at its core has always been a deep interest in how children experience the world—and how community helps shape that experience.

My work with kids began in high school as a counselor at Catholic Youth Camp, where I spent summers guiding elementary-aged children through games, challenges, and moments of reflection. Those early experiences showed me how powerful child-led interaction can be. When kids are given the space to process what they feel and consider the perspectives of others, growth happens naturally and meaningfully.

That curiosity followed me into my current role as a teacher in the Autism Day Program at ChildServe, where I work with young children ages two to six with diverse behavioral and communication needs. The classroom is a place of constant learning—for the students and for me. I have come to understand behavior as communication, and each day requires patience, creativity, and a willingness to meet children where they are. The work is often challenging, but it is grounded in connection, trust, and has led me to my next step in education: a masters degree in special education at Iowa, starting this fall.

Outside the classroom, I have found another avenue for connection through music. Over the past year, I began writing children's songs and starting a weekly music night at my house, drawn to the way music invites play and shared attention. I was looking for ways to have friends over and satiate the love I have for writing and playing music. Now, we have a solid contingent of people that come over every Tuesday for dinner and music. We call it "Two Verse Tuesday", as we all write two verses to a song every week to perform. Performing in my community, including at the Front Porch Festival in the Longfellow neighborhood, has opened up new ways of engaging with both kids and families. After my *Porch Fest* performance on September 28, 2025, I met Usha Balakrishnan, CARTHA Founder, who happened to listen to me singing just because she was performing right afterwards. After my set, she invited me back to play guitar as we sang "*We Shall Overcome*" together—a moment of shared purpose that reflected the kind of connection I value most. I was singing this song in English and Usha was singing the same tune...but in Hindi!

That encounter led me to being designated as a CARTHA Fellow. CARTHA's ongoing programs are aimed at bringing together people from different disciplines to engage in conversations around grief, healing, and global challenges through creative collaboration. What draws me to this work is the belief that meaningful solutions come not from a single field, but from the intersections between them—where analysis meets art, and where individual stories become collective understanding.

Whether I am in a classroom or on a front porch with a guitar, I am motivated by the same idea: that growth happens in relationship. Through my work with children and my involvement with CARTHA, I hope to continue building spaces where people feel seen, heard, and connected—especially the next generation, who will carry that sense of community forward.