

# MY 2024 SNTS VICTORY

*Chris Koraltan, SNTS Winner*

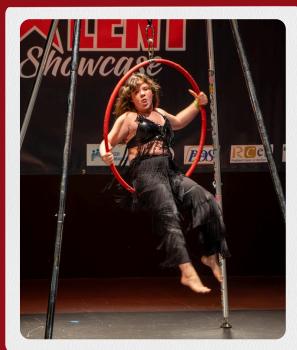
At the 2024 SNTS contest, I performed my original song, "**I AIN'T BACKING DOWN**." I wasn't sure if I would win, but I set a goal to earn the People's Choice Award because, to me, there's something deeply validating about getting the audience's support and belief in you. I felt this was my best chance to kick-start my career.

I always loved music, especially Hip Hop. While some people see it as a negative genre, I see it as music that provides others with confidence and encourages them to be determined and not give up. I started making instrumentals in 2010, and in 2022, I became serious and started writing my own originals, one of which is called "I AIN'T BACKING DOWN". I wrote it to inspire people, especially those with special needs, to not give up on their dreams regardless of what others say.

When the drumroll moment came for the SNTS winner announcement, I couldn't believe my ears! Not only did I win one award, but **THREE**: People's

Choice, one of the FINAL TOP 3 winners, and Best showmanship. I was SHOCKED, and even to this day. This SNTS competition has transformed me, boosting my confidence and helping me trust my decisions. I don't think I would have pursued this career path without the support I received, from my time at FCSN to following my passion and returning stronger than ever!

In many ways, I wanted to show FCSN how much I've grown and prove that the path I've chosen is the right one for me. Currently, I'm working on an album and plan to keep pushing forward to inspire everyone—young, old, abled, or disabled—to follow their dreams and "**I AIN'T BACKING DOWN**," just like my performance!



**O**ur daughter, Clarissa, 10-year-old, has a single passion—her love for aerial arts, dedicating three hours each day to practicing at home. Transitioning from practicing in our home to an external venue with other participants and judges was a huge step. FCSN made every part of that journey an incredible experience for her.

After participating in FCSN's SNTS, Clarissa has started attending full-time public school for the first time, taking daily classes, and performing weekly at different venues. Before this, she was homeschooled and had never taken outside

## SOARING TO NEW HEIGHTS

*by Parents of Clarissa Kowalski, SNTS Winner*

classes or performed publicly. Thanks to FCSN, Clarissa gained the confidence to compete, winning four trophies (previously she never competed), and tackle the challenges that a neurodivergent kid faces at public school. The only way any of this was possible was FCSN.

The support FCSN provided for her to participate, and get back into the world was miraculous. This was the first agency that made a difference in Clarissa's life, our lives have changed completely from FCSN. We will be forever indebted to the wonderful organization that has given our daughter a fresh start!

## FROM SHY BOY TO AWARD-WINNING MUSICIAN

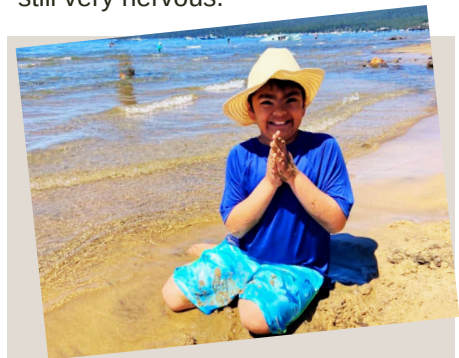
by Mom of Keerat Sharma, SNTS Winner



Showers of golden confetti, bright lights, loud applause, glistening golden trophies and multiple envelopes filled with prize money—that's Keerat's memory of winning the FCSN Special Needs Talent Showcase (SNTS) competition in the spring of 2024. It was by far the happiest moment of his young life (12 years old), one that may never be surpassed. A shy little boy who barely talks and prefers not to be seen, got on stage that day and dazzled the audience by playing his self-composed Piano Sonata.

The SNTS preliminary audition in January 2024 was the first time Keerat ever played the piano for an audience. Before that, he had only played for his teachers or his mom,

never even performing for family. On the day of the audition, by his own will, he gathered all his courage and stood in front of the judges to do what he loves most—play his music. Up until the audition, I wasn't sure if he would step up on stage and play or just feel too shy and leave. He walked out with a Certificate of Participation and he felt like a winner. Later that week, we learned that he made it to the Finals, he was ecstatic, though still very nervous.



“When Keerat is on stage, he isn't seen as “disabled”—he's seen as a MUSICIAN”

None of this would have been possible if he hadn't stepped on stage that cold January day at the FCSN SNTS preliminary audition. After winning as one of the TOP 3 WINNERS at the 2024 SNTS final competition, Keerat said to me, “**So many people have never come to me before to say I did a good job.**”



For two months, Keerat worked relentlessly with his teacher, editing his self-composed piece to fit the five-minute performance window. Once finalized his edition, he practiced and practiced for seemingly a million times until he mastered it. All by his own determination, he pushed himself very hard so he could win. He somehow knew this was his only way to shine and be seen. I saw a completely different side of him—one that could persevere and give his best where it truly mattered, a side I didn't even how

existed. A side that would make any mom proud.

Since his win at the SNTS final competition, Keerat has found his calling and is passionately pursuing it. He has since won 3rd prize in Composition at the Classical Music Awards, first prize and a career scholarship at the Tizziano Rossetti Academy in Switzerland, and this August, he performed as part of the Finalists at the American Virtuoso Competition at the Catholic University in Washington DC.