

Spring 5-5-2016

Measuring the Impact: An Evaluation of Communities in Harmony

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MEASURING THE IMPACT: AN EVALUATION OF COMMUNITIES IN HARMONY

By

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for
Graduation with Honors from the
South Carolina Honors College

May 2016

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Table of Contents

1. Thesis Summary – 3
2. Abstract – 5
3. Introduction – 5
4. Methodology – 10
 - a. Program Evaluation – 10
 - b. Clarification of Terms – 11
 - c. Student Interview Protocol – 12
 - d. Staff Interview Protocol – 12
 - e. Volunteer Interview Protocol – 12
 - f. Coding – 12
 - g. Positionality of the Researcher – 13
5. Results – 13
 - a. Biographic Trends – 13
 - b. Staff Themes – 14
 - c. Student Themes – 16
 - d. Volunteer Themes – 17
 - e. Global Themes – 17
6. Discussion and Recommendations – 19
 - a. Stability – 19
 - b. Exposure to Different Musical Genres – 20
 - c. Increased Member Numbers – 21
 - d. Importance of Music – 21
 - e. Communities in Harmony as an After-School Program – 24
 - f. Areas of Improvement and Suggestions – 25
7. Conclusions – 28
8. Acknowledgements – 29
9. Works Cited – 31
10. Appendix A – Study Materials – 34
11. Appendix B – Formal Codebook – 42
12. Appendix C – Personal Narratives – 46
13. Appendix D – Sample Curriculum – 51
14. Appendix E – Organizational and Study Summary – 55

Thesis Summary

Over the past four years of my undergraduate education, I've been lucky enough to be a part of Communities in Harmony. Communities in Harmony is a music-based student service organization at USC, and my work as a volunteer and leader of this organization is, more than anything else I've accomplished, my proudest achievement. I undertook this thesis to ensure that Communities in Harmony would continue to thrive for generations of future volunteers.

To conduct this study, I interviewed a number of the students who our organization works with, staff members at our partner sites, and our volunteers to evaluate the areas in which the organization was thriving and areas in which we could stand to improve. I recorded the interviews and analyzed them for any major themes (a process called coding) and reviewed the literature regarding each theme. In addition to this, I proposed feasible solutions for the areas in which our organization can improve.

Communities in Harmony's greatest achievement is that each week, we provide a safe and stable environment in which our students can feel comfortable expressing themselves through music. During these sessions, our volunteers introduce students to instruments and musical genres that they might not have been otherwise been exposed to, but more importantly, we give the students an hour to distract themselves from whatever problems they many have in their lives. For our volunteers, we provide an outlet for their musical creativity that doesn't require the time commitment of a more traditional performing ensemble.

To improve as an organization, this study has shown that our partners would like us to add more structure to our sessions each week, with tighter transitions between

activities and specific learning outcomes for each activity. In addition, staff members would like to see our volunteers better educated about the conditions faced by children who are homeless. Beyond that, our organization needs to increase our recruitment efforts, focusing on retaining members throughout each semester and increasing the diversity of our pool of volunteers. To achieve these improvements, I recommend that Communities in Harmony seek partnerships around the University. To learn how to conduct our sessions with more order, we should partner with a specialist in elementary education. To better educate ourselves about the conditions of homelessness, we should partner with a specialist in homelessness. And lastly, to improve the diversity of Communities in Harmony, we should partner with an organization whose mission is to increase the diversity of the University, or more generally an African-American student organization. By implementing these changes and continuing to do what we do best, our organization can continue to thrive for years to come.

Abstract

In the study reported below, a program evaluation was performed for the student organization Communities in Harmony, a music-based community service organization at the University of South Carolina that works with homeless and socioeconomically disadvantaged children and young adults. This organization is about to enter its fifth year and is in the process of transitioning between leadership teams at the time of publication. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the organization so that it can continue to grow and effectively serve its target populations. This study has found that the organization excels at providing a unique after-school experience in a safe environment, but the organization's partners and volunteers call for increased structure of each volunteering session and more effective member retention.

Introduction

According to the January 1st, 2015 Homelessness Point in Time count, there are 564,708 individuals who are homeless in America, or 17.7 individuals per every 10,000 Americans. When broken down by subpopulation, the report shows that there are 206,286 people in families that are homeless (a 4.6% decrease from the previous year), 83,170 people who are chronically homeless (a 1.0% decrease) with 13,105 of those being family members who are chronically homeless (a 6.4% increase), 36,907 unaccompanied minors who are homeless (an increase of 6.5%), and that 69.3% of America's homeless population is sheltered in emergency or transitional housing. Overall, these data represents a continuation of a downward trend in homeless in America since the Great Recession of 2007 [The State of Homelessness, 2016].

Despite this 2.0% decrease in nationwide homelessness, the state of the South Carolina saw an increase in their homeless population of 5.9%, according to the report. When broken down by subpopulation, these data paint an even grimmer picture. Family homelessness saw an increase of 14.1%, a 235.5% increase in chronic homelessness (with a 7.3% increase in chronically homeless family members), and a 3.6% increase in unaccompanied homeless minors [The State of Homelessness, 2016]. According to the 2013 South Carolina Point in Time report, the great portion of homeless individuals resided in Richland County (1518, significantly higher than the next highest county at 896). Richland County and its surrounding counties in the middle of South Carolina are collectively known as the Midlands, and is more generally known as the area surrounding the state capital of Columbia. Homelessness in the Midlands is a rampant problem, with much of it centered on the city of Columbia and its suburbs [Floyd, 2013].

Of the many problems faced by the Midlands in regards to its large homelessness problem, one of the most striking is the issue of child homelessness. According to a 2013 report by the National Center for Family Homelessness, South Carolina ranks among the 15 worst states for child homelessness (a metric taking into account four statistics: extent of child homelessness, child well-being, risk of child homelessness, and state policy towards homelessness) [Bassuk et al., 2013]. For homeless children and their families, the lack of educational resources available to the children put the child at a significant disadvantage when compared to his/her peers. According to a 2011 study in *The Journal of Negro Education*, utilization of after-school programs is correlated with parental financial insecurity (i.e. as parents become poorer, they utilize fewer after-school programs for their child less frequently) [Hynes, 2011].

While, at first, this may seem trivial when compared to the myriad other problems faced by homeless children, after-school program utilization has shown to impart numerous benefits onto students. In one review, Ronald Dietel of UCLA reports that, at the proper dose, after-school programs correlate with increased test scores and better teacher-reported behavior when in school. Dietel points out, however, that students must be actively participating in the after-school program to gain these benefits, rather than passively observing them. At the end of the review, Dietel breaks after-school involvement into three categories: intensity (number of hours children spend in the program), duration (number of years spent in the program), and breadth (the variety of programs attended). It is the last category, breadth, which is often a challenge for after-school programs to provide [Dietel, 2009].

In another study in the journal *Child Development*, the authors report that children engaged in formal after-school programs are less-likely to be anti-social than their peers who are not engaged in formal programs after-school. In addition, this study found that parents in urban, low-income areas are less likely to engage their children in formal after-school programs. More specifically, the study points out that children in urban, low-income areas are less likely to engage in arts education after-school programs (music, dance, etc.). This speaks to the problems that after-school programs face in offering their students a wide breadth of experiences. Compounded with the loss of benefits from not engaging in after-school activities, this last point illustrates that low-income (and by extension, homeless) children are missing out on the benefits of arts education generally, and more specifically on the substantial benefits accrued by childhood music education [Posner and Vandell, 1994].

According to a 2009 study by the DANA Foundation, access to arts education remained constant between 1997 and 2008, showing no increase in more than ten years. The study also found that school arts budgets were often the first budget line item to be cut. When broken down, the study reports that access is significantly lower in socioeconomically depressed areas than in more privileged areas. This contrast is exacerbated by the lack of after-school utilization by low-income families, and by the fact that this study was conducted just as the Great Recession was beginning, meaning that these trends would mostly likely show a much sharper decline for the years following 2008 [Mehta, 2009]. This seeming disregard for arts education stands in stark contrast to the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act, which listed the arts as one of the “Core Academic Subjects” and the fact that, according to the chairwoman for the National Endowment for the Arts, “arts education promotes critical thinking and problem solving and is key to a successful 21st century work force” [H.R., 2001][Mehta, 2009].

By not receiving music education during childhood, children lose out on the numerous benefits that can be gained from music education. In an effort to prevent the loss of these benefits for the homeless children of the Midlands, students at the University of South Carolina (the largest university in the Midlands) formed an organization in 2012 in partnership with the South Carolina Honors College to bring music education to these children. Known as Communities in Harmony (CiH), this organization has grown over the past four years and now includes between 20 and 30 student volunteers. As a founding member of this organization, I have been present for this process. Our organization is open to students of all majors, years, and musical abilities, and our organization is primarily composed of non-music majors. To achieve

our mission of enriching the lives of the socioeconomically disadvantaged youth of the Midlands with music, we hold hour-long music sessions each week at several different sites.

Currently, CiH serves three sites in the community each week: Family Shelter of the Midlands (a family emergency shelter), St. Lawrence Place (a family transitional shelter), and J.P. Thomas Elementary School (an elementary school in an impoverished community). In addition to these regular sites, we hold a concert each semester for the residents of the Palmetto Place shelter (a shelter for unaccompanied minors and abused and neglected children), and we volunteer once a month (as of 2016) with the patients at Palmetto Health Children's Hospital. Over our four years of existence, CiH has received the 2014 Student Organization of the Year Award from the USC Leadership and Service Center and was awarded a \$3,000 grant from the Hootie and the Blowfish Foundation to purchase instruments to bring to our sessions. CiH enjoys a fruitful partnership with the South Carolina Honors College and with several other service organizations on campus, such as the Waverly After-School Program, Project VIDA, and Carolina Homelessness Outreach.

As the organization finishes its fourth full year, the time has come to evaluate the effectiveness of CiH in achieving our mission and the impact we have had on our served populations. The study described herein has three major goals: 1) to evaluate the effectiveness of our organization through qualitative methods, 2) to identify areas of improvements so that we may better perform our service, and 3) to allow future generation of club leadership to ensure the continued growth and success of the organization. This study comes at a critical juncture for the organization, as we have been

in existence just long enough to allow for meaningful data collection at this time, and as the first generation of CiH members is graduating this year (i.e. with few exceptions, none of next year's members will have been present at the founding of the organization). It is my hope that this study will guide the next generation of leadership through this transition from the "Old Guard" to the new.

To conduct this study, interviews were conducted with three major groups of individuals. First, a sample of students at St. Lawrence Place (our largest and most diverse site) were interviewed to assess their feelings about our activities. Next, staff members of St. Lawrence Place were interviewed to better understand their feelings about the organization and to find any areas of improvement. Lastly, a sample of our student volunteers were interviewed in a focus-group style to assess how our volunteers feel about the organization. Following the interviews, the responses were analyzed for trends and coded so that trends and major themes could be identified. The study was guided by the following questions: 1) What are the strengths of the organization's service? 2) In what areas can the organization improve the services it provides? 3) How can the organization ensure continued fruitful relationships with our community partners? and 4) How can the organization improve the experience for our volunteers?

Methodology

Program Evaluation

In Program Evaluation: Alternative Approaches and Practical Guidelines, Fitzpatrick et al. state that the use of a qualitative research method "depends on the nature of the data and the conceptual framework employed in the analysis" [Fitzpatrick et al.

445, 2011]. In the qualitative methods for program evaluation, interviews are conducted and the interviews are analyzed for major themes and trends, as opposed quantitative methods, which rely on surveys and statistics. For our organization, qualitative methods make the most sense due to both issues of feasibility and the nature of CiH. From a feasibility standpoint, it is a more obtainable goal to obtain informed parental consent to interview minors than it is to draft a quantitative survey, obtain consent to administer the survey, and to administer the survey during instructional time in a public school. Due to the turnaround time demanded by a study of this nature, and a desire to understand the students' experiences with the organization, qualitative methods were selected.

That is not to say, however, that qualitative methods are less data-rich and meaningful than quantitative methods. The leadership of CiH has carefully fostered a storytelling culture within the organization: each meeting begins with the volunteers going sharing a story of their time volunteering with CiH. We feel that this is the best way to engage our volunteers and to quickly speak volumes about the impact of our work. To this end, it makes logical sense that an academic study of CiH would follow this storytelling culture, and qualitative methods provides just such an opportunity.

Clarification of Terms

Throughout this study, the following terms will be used consistently to describe the following groups:

Staff – Adult employees/volunteers connected to the volunteering sites, in charge of the daily operations of each site.

Student – Minors who reside or attend after-school services at the volunteer sites.

Volunteers – College students who are members of CiH.

Student Interview Protocol

Students at St. Lawrence Place were given interview consent forms (Figure 1) to deliver to their parents, along with an explanatory letter of the study (Figure 2). The students were asked to return the signed forms (if the parents consented) to the St. Lawrence Place staff, from whom the interviewer collected the forms. The interviews were conducted using the questions in Table 1 in Appendix A, with responses being manually recorded by the interviewer.

Staff Interview Protocol

Before the interview began, staff members (all of whom were above eighteen) were given a consent form (Figure 3) to sign if they wished to be interviewed. Responses were recorded via audio recorder and transcribed afterwards. Staff interview questions can be found in Table 2 in Appendix A.

Volunteer Interview Protocol

Volunteers were interviewed as part of a focus group at the end of an organizational meeting. Responses were recorded via audio recorder and transcribed afterwards. Volunteer interview questions can be found in Table 3 in Appendix A.

Coding

After transcription, the responses were analyzed for trends and major themes. Codes were assigned to each response and these codes were matched to the research questions and study purposes stated above. Coding was performed using Microsoft Excel. Appendix B includes the formal codebook, listing all the codes used during the analysis, with themes present across more than one interview group listed under “group-wide themes” and individual codes listed under their respective group (Student, Staff, or

Volunteer). A breakdown of each theme and its significance to the study can be found in the Discussion section below.

Positionality of the Researcher

I am a founding member of Communities in Harmony, having joined at the first organizational meeting during my freshman year at the University of South Carolina. I have watched the organization grow from a small Honors College initiative to a full student organization open to all USC students. In addition, I have served as the organization's second and longest-serving Vice-President, from January 2014 to the present. Though I have invested numerous hours into this organization, both as a volunteer and as a leader, I conducted this study so that I could get a better appreciation for what CiH's strengths and weaknesses are, and so that I could communicate those strengths and weaknesses to my successors as I prepare to graduate. In addition, this study was conducted in fulfillment with the Senior Thesis requirements to graduate with Honors from the South Carolina Honors College.

Results

Biographic Trends

On average, the students served by CiH were 7.6 years old according to the interviews, placing them between a 2nd and 3rd grade academic level. Though this average is from a representative sample, observations by volunteers in the past has shown that, often, the sites skew heavily towards the older elementary school years (4th and 5th grade) and the younger ones (1st and 2nd), causing the average to meet in the middle. All students interviewed were identified as African-American by the interviewer, and this trend is one

that has been seen consistently across sites and years of service. These students attend schools in both Richland School Districts 1 and 2, and these schools are predominantly African-American.

Our volunteers have, on average, been with the organization 3 years and are primarily upperclassmen (juniors and seniors). Primarily, our members are identified as White by the interviewer, with few exceptions. The majority of them (all but one in the focus group) were members of the South Carolina Honors College. When asked how they heard of the organization, the vast majority of focus group volunteers stated that they had been brought into the group by a friend or by some other form of word of mouth recruiting.

At an average session during the Spring 2016 semester, each session was attended by approximately 13 (12.45) students and 4 (3.59) volunteers, resulting in a student-to-volunteer ratio of 3.25:1. Though this represents the mathematical average, there were often times during the Spring 2016 semester where the individual ratio varied widely, falling below 1:1 at certain sites and rising to 10:1 at others.

Staff Themes

When interviewed, staff members' primary concern for their students was stability. Frequently, staff members pointed out that "they [the students] come from backgrounds where there is not stability" and that "[University] students [can] bring a lot of stability" through being there for the students each week. This stability was a key factor staff members identified in the success of our organization, pointing out that the consistency of having a weekly music sessions gave the students something to look forward to each week. Also to this end, staff members mentioned the need for more

stability with in each session, calling for more ordered activities and transitions, asking that we better “[prepare] them for what’s next.” This being said, however, staff members were quick to point out the positive influences they felt that our presence had on the students, with one staff member praising the organization for the way it “treats the students with kindness.”

A second theme of the staff interviews was the scope of services offered both by our organization and by other organizations to the site. St. Lawrence Place has, over the years, been served by several organization, both inside the University (CiH, Project VIDA, Waverly After-School Program) and outside it (Carolina Reading Consortium, DHEC, etc.). This wide variety of organizations helps to mitigate any lack of resources that the site may have or that the students may have at home or in their schools and. Through partnerships with organizations such as the ones listed above, these sites have been able to expose their students to a wide variety of subjects that they may not otherwise have been exposed to as regularly. In addition, by partnering with University organizations, sites are able to expose their students to the prospect of attending college. As role models for these students, our volunteers are both tacitly and expressly encouraging students to attend college when the finish high school.

One final point unique to the staff members was a brief call for more traditional music education. Though the actual teaching of music is almost a secondary goal for our organization, staff members note that the students “remember what they’ve been taught” and expressed the desire to see that the students have “taken something from it.” While the staff members were always hesitant to say that our organization needed a proper curriculum, they did ask for more stability and order with each session. To achieve this,

the staff members pointed out the importance of group activities. “In music, you’re always part of a group,” points out one staff member. This staff member noted that activities that emphasizing this sense of group collaboration can both help students’ social skills and better engage students in the music.

Student Themes

Through the student interviews, a distinction between the role of music within the students’ family lives and school lives can be seen. With the family, music was often a powerful social force and family dynamic for these students. Students reported that, often, their parents played music around the house (typically modern pop, rap, classic R&B, or gospel), sang and danced with their children, and encouraged their children’s older siblings to pursue music. One student in particular recalled a memory of her entire family coming together during a power outage, lighting candles, and singing together until the power came back on. At school, students reported between 30 and 45 minutes of formal music class each week. While for some students this included choral and dance performances, others had less involved school music experiences. As a music-based organization, CiH is poised to create a more involved music experience for all of our students due to our favorable student-to-volunteer ratio, filling any gaps left by a lack of school or site resources.

Another benefit that our organization can bring to these students is exposure to a wider variety of music. Students reported that they primarily listened to modern pop and rap music, with notable exceptions being 1980’s R&B and gospel. While this music is, of course, a valuable form of musical expression, we would be remiss if we did not show the students the breadth of musical genres available to them. As an organization of primarily

classically trained musicians, our volunteers bring with them a knowledge and appreciation for classical, instrumental, alternative, and various other genres of music.

Volunteer Themes

When asked why they chose to join the organization, the majority of our volunteers stated that they no longer had the time for a formal music ensemble since entering college. A majority of our volunteers were in a performing ensemble in high school, and it could, imaginably, be difficult for them to have to give up music performance as they pursue their careers in college. CiH offers our volunteers the opportunity to continue expressing themselves musically while letting them share their love of music with children.

When asked how they would improve the organization, the major trend in responses was a call for more members. Our organization starts each semester strong, with a number of new members coming to our first meetings and a substantial portion of those signing up for the first few weeks of volunteering. Our problem, however, lies in member retention. CiH is fueled by a small contingent of members whose dedication to the organization is staggering, with many members volunteering twice a week as the semester gets tougher and the numbers get smaller. To prevent burnout amongst these volunteers, our organization needs to focus more on recruiting and retaining members throughout the semester.

Global Themes

Across the board, all interviewed persons spoke at length about the importance of music in their lives. Staff members frequently reported that music had been important to them while growing up, and they continue to value music to this day. Students, when

asked if they felt music class was important, uniformly answered “yes,” citing reasons such as exposure to different kinds of music and the potential for escapism through music. Volunteers, likewise, all told stories about how music was a significant factor in their lives growing up, both academically, socially, and personally. As a sidebar to the points raised about music being important, many interviewees saw the escapist qualities of music. Beyond the stated goal of bringing music to the students, the true primary goal of CiH is to give the students an hour each week of distraction from the problems that they may face in their lives. This goal was recognized by both staff and volunteers, as shown in the quote below from one volunteer:

"One of the things that I kind of struggled with, especially at the time where there were less volunteers, and it was like me and one other person, was trying to make the kids focus on the music. Sometimes, the importance of the club isn't just the music part of it. I think that the time you spend interacting with the kids is valuable in and of itself, especially how you talk to the kids. You're there to be a friend and provide support to people who may not feel that all the time."

As a further addition to this point, staff members often cited how crucial it was that students feel ownership over the proceedings, to the extent that staff reported the crafting activities (those involving the creation of a “junk instrument” from household objects) to be their favorite, because it provided something that the students could take ownership of and pride in. The importance of such ownership is outlined in the following quote from one staff member:

“Many of our kids don’t have their own, so providing them with something that they can have on their own, that they can take and show it to their mom and say ‘look what I did.’ Our kids are told ‘they won’t make it’ and all that, and so to have something to share that is theirs is important. “They can hear what they have made, and see it come to fruition. And it’s not a failure to them, you know a lot of times their mom’s in a desperate situation, and a lot of times that’s put back on the child, and the child they feel like ‘I’m not worthy, I’m always failing’, but that gives them a sense of encouragement.”

Discussion and Recommendations

Stability

From the staff interviews, the most salient theme was the need for stability in the lives of the students. As one staff member put it “[College] students bring a long of stability” and “they [the site’s students] don’t have a lot of stability in their lives.” By becoming a regular fixture in the lives of these students, CiH achieves not only our stated objective of music education, but an additional, more important goal, of providing friendship and support to these students. As one staff member put it, we could be there for them “not only musically, but emotionally.” Staff members often reported positive responses to our arrival each week by the students, and this supports the idea that our organization is having some kind of positive impact on these students.

Though our organization provides a form of stability by our regular presence at the sites, staff members also called for increased stability and organization while conducting our sessions. Staff would like to see sessions that are more structured, with

more discreet goals and activities planned out beforehand. Each session is organized beforehand with a plan for the day, but volunteers are often willing to let this plan fall by the wayside if the students are not responding to it. While the staff members were very much in favor of letting each session “naturally decay” into unstructured fun time, acknowledging that “with children, you never know” how successful a certain activity will be, they expressed a desire to see more traditional educational activities take place for longer before allowing free time.

Exposure to Different Musical Genres

As many of our members are, on some level, classically trained musicians, we have an appreciation for the vast variety of musical instruments and genres available to the average listener. With the advent of free, ad-supported streaming technology, and the ubiquity of data-enabled smart phones and Wi-Fi, access to all these different genres is greater than it has ever been. Most children, however, only consider the genres and artists played on Top 40 radio and those that their parents play around their home. According to the interviews, most children’s musical preferences skew heavily towards artists such as Beyoncé, Rihanna, Nicki Minaj, Drake, Michael Jackson, and gospel artists. These artists provide not only entertainment for the children, but also positive role models, as they are powerful people of color who are famous and successful for doing what they love. When asked whether she thought music was important for children her age to learn, one little girl pointed out that music can (in some instances) lead to fame. As discussed previously, music has a great potential for both self-expression and escapism, and children realize this from an early age. By exposing children to a wide variety of music, we can show

them that every type of music has self-expressive potential and that liking Beyoncé and Beethoven are not mutually exclusive.

Increased Member Numbers

When asked what improvements they would suggest for our organization, the most common response was to increase the size of our organization and to increase semester-long member retention. When looked at from a purely statistical viewpoint, the ratio of students to volunteers seems like a manageable 3.25:1. Drilling down into these numbers, however, presents a less favorable picture. As the semester goes on, the number of members at each site dwindles from the early semester peak. This leaves the bulk of the volunteering to a small core of highly dedicated volunteers who often have to attend sessions twice a week to maintain the sites. Volunteers spoke at length of being burned out by the end of the semester and many of them would like to see the contingent of volunteers grow to and maintain such a size that volunteers would not need to attend more than once a week unless they simply wanted to do so. While this system would still lend itself to a dedicated core of volunteers as the heart of the organization, there would be a rotation of other members who do not volunteer with the same regularity as the more dedicated members, allowing these “part-time” members to relieve the burden felt by the more “full-time” volunteers.

Importance of Music

The most global theme across all three interview groups was a recognition of the importance of music. Numerous studies have linked the study of music to benefits such as improved test scores [College Board, 2010], increased creativity [Craft, 2001], reduced anxiety while attending college [Chesky and Hipple, 1997], several advantages while in

high school such as increased math and English performance, decreased drop-out rate and in-class boredom, increased reading proficiency [Catterall, 1998], and increased brain function and fine motor skills [Neville et al., 2008]. Beyond these benefits, however, all interviewees mentioned a number of other factors that made music important in their lives.

For some staff members, music provided a form of escape that was rarely matched by other activities.

"It was a way of escape, I didn't grow up in the best environment [...] music provided an outlet [...] to be a part of something"

"The arts really provided something to look forward to"

Other staff members also pointed out the expressive power of music as a much-needed source of stress relief.

"It's relaxing, you unwind, you kind of forget about what's going on"

"It releases all of that anger, that tension."

Needless to say, children who live in homeless shelters or in economically disadvantaged areas often have difficult lives outside of the classroom. Our greatest service to these students is to show them that music is a constructive way to express themselves, enabling them to deal with life's problems constructively and in an empowering way.

In addition to staff members, the importance of music was not lost on the students. When asked whether they felt that music class was an important class for kids their age to have, every student responded with some form of positive answer. Touching on the theme of escapism, one student mentioned that she felt music was important because it could enable her to possibly become famous one day. When asked to recount a favorite memory from their time with the organization, one volunteer reported how an older student quickly took to playing the violin. When asked about it, the student responded with “The violin is awesome! No, wait...I’m awesome!” This heightened sense of self-worth that comes with mastery of a musical instrument is just one of the many benefits of music that our organization is capable of bringing to these students.

Beyond this, students had a very practical appreciation for music in their lives. Almost all of them were exposed to some form of music while at home, with some students reporting that their parents would constantly be playing music around the home. By working with our organization, the love of music instilled in these students by their families will only grow as they continue to grow and mature.

Lastly, our volunteers have experienced the power of music throughout their lives. When asked why they choose to join the organization, almost every person stated that they wanted a way to continue expressing themselves musically without having to devote themselves to a formal ensemble.

"I have been playing the cello for 7 years and I didn't have time to play in the orchestra, so I wanted to try to spread my knowledge and love of music"

"Music has always been a really big part of my life, and I love to share that with other people, while hopefully impacting their lives at the same time"

As classically-trained amateur musicians, our volunteers are in a unique position to share their love of music with students. Through their years with music, they clearly appreciate the power and positive influence of music in their lives, while their current removal from music pedagogy allows them to share their love of music without being bound by any kind of rigidly structured regimen of practicing, exercises, and formal education. Having been removed from the "nitty-gritty" of music education, our volunteers can focus on showing students the power of music firsthand.

Communities in Harmony as an After-School Program

According to the previously mentioned study in *The Journal of Negro Education*, parents listed perceived program safety as one of the most important factors when selecting an after-school program [Hynes, 2011]. To this end, CiH is committed to creating a safe environment when we enter a site. Each volunteer is required to wear an organization shirt (which is provided for them by the Honors College). Volunteers are always expected to arrive to sites on-time (if not slightly early, to ensure that any set up can take place before the session starts) and to conduct themselves in ways that reflects positively on the organization and on the University as a whole. By creating this safe environment, our hope is that parents and staff members feel comfortable leaving their children with us, and that children themselves will feel comfortable expressing themselves in front of us.

According to one study, a typical after-program meeting five days a week cost approximately \$4,000 in 1999 at the time of publication [Halpern, 1999]. When adjusted for inflation, this cost in 2016 is \$5,717.45, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. To help mitigate this cost, the author calls for “diverse provider types” for after-school programs, specifically mentioning that an effective strategy for reducing costs was to partner with local universities. Thanks to the generous support we receive from the South Carolina Honors College and from our grant from the Hootie and the Blowfish Foundation, CiH is able to provide resources to our partner sites such as instruments and crafting materials, helping us to create a partnership that is mutually beneficial for the sites, students, and volunteers.

Areas of Improvement and Suggestions

When asked how our organization could most improve our service, staff members reported that they would like to see a more structured environment during our sessions, with more ordered progression from activity to activity. While organization takes time at each meeting to teach our volunteers how to perform activities, we have not focused heavily in the past on transitioning between these activities, leaving the moment-by-moment planning of sessions to the volunteers. To provide a more structured experience, time will be devoted at future meetings to teaching our volunteers how to better maintain order during sessions and how to transition between activities. To better convey these ideas, it is recommended that the future leadership of CiH reach out to specialists in elementary education at the University.

A second point on which staff members felt CiH could improve was our lack of focus on teenage students. Primarily, our organization works with elementary students,

but, on occasion, teenage students are present at each site. While we, by no means, ignore these older students, our activities are rarely geared towards them. Experience has shown that the best way to engage older students is to either give them authority during the activities (i.e. let them control the music during musical chairs, have them help the younger students learn an activity, etc.) or to have one member work with them separately to give them a more traditional music lesson. In the future, our members will be informed of these strategies at meetings so that they can better implement them.

Lastly, staff members wished to see our volunteers better educated about the conditions of homelessness. While they did not feel that our volunteers were insensitive towards the students' conditions, they felt that more education could only help our volunteers better relate to the students. The most effective way to accomplish this is for our organization to capitalize on the faculty at the University. To better educate our volunteers and to foster partnerships amongst CiH and the other organizations, it is recommended that CiH host a lecture for all the homelessness outreach organizations at the University at which faculty specializing in homelessness will educate the attending volunteers about homelessness.

When the students were asked what new activities or instruments they would like to see us do, the most frequent call was for more instruments, specifically for trumpets and guitars. Through better recruitment and member retention, our organization will be able to attract a wider variety of volunteers with more instruments. Students also reported that their favorite activities were those allowed them to be hands on with the instruments. To this end, volunteers will be instructed to prioritize these activities in the future.

All of these improvements, however, require a strong body of volunteers who regularly attend both the sessions and the organizational meetings. Our volunteers identified low membership and meeting attendance as their key area for improvement. To fix this problem, several steps must be taken. Firstly, recruitment efforts must capitalize on the strength of word-of-mouth. Members will be asked share the organization with their friends and peers, in the hopes that they can swell the organization's ranks. Secondly, organization leadership should make great efforts to connect with as many volunteers as possible. This will bring the members of the organization closer together, meaning that they will have additional incentives to attend meetings regularly. Lastly, our organization should seek partnerships with several other student organizations. In addition to working with other student organizations aimed at homelessness outreach, CiH should form a partnership with a student organization focused on increasing diversity at the University. The CiH volunteers are primarily white, while the students we serve are primarily African-American. In a study in *The Journal of Research in Music Education*, the authors point out that an estimated 70% of African-American students have better academic performance when they have an African-American teacher and that African-American teachers supply students supply an important role-model for students [Hamann and Walker, 1993]. Our organization severely lacks diversity, and partnering with an African-American student organization would address current concerns around diversity and member numbers.

Conclusions

For four years, Communities in Harmony has served the homeless and socioeconomically disadvantaged children and young adults of the Midlands. Using this study as a framework, it is my hope that the organization will continue to grow and improve as a new generation of volunteers rises to lead it. As an organization, this study has shown that we excel at providing a unique musical experience to the students we serve, exposing them to a variety of new forms of music and giving them an hour's reprieve each week from the numerous stresses associated with a life of homelessness or socioeconomic hardship. In addition to this, we have formed several fruitful partnerships with other organizations in our community, joining with them to better enrich the lives of their students. For the future, this study has shown that our organization should focus our efforts on educating our volunteers about the nature of homelessness, increasing diversity in our organization, creating more order and stability within each session, and increasing our efforts to engage older students in our activities. By implementing these changes, CiH can ensure that our relationships with our partners not only last for years to come, but strengthen as the organization matures. Lastly, this study has identified low member turnout and retention as the greatest challenge facing this organization. To remedy this, CiH should redouble our recruitment efforts, partner with other student organizations, and specifically partner with organizations whose mission is to increase diversity at the University, thus taking a step towards fixing our lack of diversity and our low numbers. To evaluate how well these changes have been implemented and to assess the overall health of the organization, it is my recommendation that a study of this nature be conducted regularly over the continued course of the future of Communities in Harmony.

Future studies should, if feasible, used mixed quantitative and qualitative methods. For instance, surveys could be drafted to evaluate how students of CiH compare to their peers in the areas typically associated with the benefits of music education.

Acknowledgements

I would like to recognize the following individuals for the unceasing support of both myself and Communities in Harmony:

- Dr. Ashlee Lewis – USC College of Education, Thesis Director
- Dr. Susan Alexander – South Carolina Honors College and Faculty Advisor, Communities in Harmony
- Gerald Davis – Hannah House
- Stephanie Jefferson – St. Lawrence Place
- Jeanette M. House – St. Lawrence Place
- Nick Washington – Family Shelter of the Midlands
- Antoinette Mursier – J.P. Thomas Elementary School
- Sandra Greene – AmericaCorps* VISTA, Second Reader
- Rachel Price – AmericaCorps* VISTA
- Daniel Binette – AmericaCorps* VISTA
- Craig Hawley – AmericaCorps* VISTA
- Samantha Crandall – President, Communities in Harmony
- Jonathan Pizarro – Treasurer, Communities in Harmony
- JulieAnne Bennett – Secretary and President Elect, Communities in Harmony

- Justin Sindoni – Special Events Coordinator and Vice-President Elect, Communities in Harmony
- Klara Milojkovic – Public Relations Director and Secretary Elect, Communities in Harmony
- Rachel Botbyl – Special Events Coordinator, Communities in Harmony
- Jasmine Ranjit – Public Relations Director, Communities in Harmony
- Rebekah Crandall – Treasurer Elect, Communities in Harmony
- Ari Lindenbaum – Former President, Communities in Harmony
- Kaitlyn Myers – Former Special Events Coordinator, Communities in Harmony
- Savannah Strom – Former Co-President, Communities in Harmony
- Michael Hood – Former Co-President, Communities in Harmony
- All the students who were interviewed and their parents
- All the volunteers who so kindly agreed to serve as my focus group

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Appendix A – Study Materials

Interview Questions, Explanatory Letter, and Consent Forms

Table 1 – Student Interview Questions

#	Question	Reason
1	What is your name?	Biographic Information
2	How old are you?	Biographic Information
3	What grade are you in?	Biographic Information
4	Where do you go to school?	Biographic Information
5	Do you have music class in your school? How often/how long?	If students aren't getting enough music education at school, our organization could serve as a supplement.
6	When we come every week, do you enjoy playing with us? What is your favorite part? If you could change something, what would that be?	We wish to continue doing what they do better and to remove any activities that the children aren't enjoying.
7	Do you plan any instruments/sing/dance? Would you like to learn?	To find any correlation between our organization and interest in music.
8	Does anyone in your family play any instruments/sing/dance?	To see if music is an important factor in the child's family environment.
9	What kind of music do you like? Favorite artists/bands/songs, etc?	Two-pronged: to expose children to different kinds of music and to incorporate their favorite songs into our activities.
10	Do you think it's important to have music class?	To find any correlation between our organization and recognizing the value of music.
11	Are there any instruments that you would like to see that we haven't brought?	To ensure that the students are being exposed to the kinds of instruments that want to see.

Table 2 – Staff Interview Questions

#	Question	Reason
1	Name and Position	Biographic Information
2	Are you a musician?	Two purposes: to “break the ice” and to better understand their answer to Question 11.
3	What is your favorite instrument?	See above.
4	How long have you been at this site/in the field of community service?	To assess the interviewee's experience working within this organization and in the field.
5	How did you get started at this site/in the field of community service?	To ascertain the type of expertise the interviewee brings to their site and to their opinions about CiH (education, social work, etc.).
6	How long have you worked with Communities in Harmony?	Staff members with more experience with our organization may have well-formed opinions while newer staff members might have "gut reactions" to CiH.
7	Can you describe how the student's react to Communities in Harmony's visits every week? Is it something they look forward to?	If the children are happy to see us each week and look forward to our visits, they are more likely to view us positively as mentors and to absorb our lessons.
8	What, in your opinion, is the most effective thing that Communities in Harmony does with your residents/students? Do you have any stories that stand out?	Narratives are the best way to quickly get across points about the organizations. Also, we aim to continue our most successful practices.
9	In what way(s) could Communities in Harmony improve our service to better serve your residents/students?	In order to sustain this organization through the future, it is important to identify our areas of weakness and to improve upon them.

10	Do you have any general comments or concerns about the organization? (Reiterate: Is there anything that, as an organization, we could do better?)	Three-pronged: Collect more stories, identify any big themes the staff member sees in our service, and to find any other areas for improvement.
11	Do you think that it's important for children to have some kind of music education?	If the staff member considers music education important, it indicates their continued support for our work.
12	Was music important to you growing up/is it important now?	Can show the positive effects of music, as the staff members are role models to the children.

Table 3 – Volunteer Interview Questions

#	Question	Reason
1	Names, years, and how long have you been in the club?	Biographic Information
2	Do you remember how you first heard about us?	To discover the most effective recruitment strategy of our organization.
3	Why did you choose to join?	To discover the motivation behind our volunteers.
4	What's your best memory from your time with us?	To collect their stories for the "Narratives" appendix.
5	What's your worst memory from your time with us?	To begin to discuss any faults volunteers may see in how we conduct our sessions.
6	Do you have any suggestions about ways we could improve?	To discuss any faults in our organizational structure.
7	Anything that I didn't mention that you'd like me to know?	To see if the volunteers have any general comments on the organization.

Figure 1 – Student Consent Form

Interview Consent/Opt-out Form

Please fill out this form and return it to St. Lawrence Place Staff at your nearest convenience.

Select **one** of the following and **list the names** of your child/children below:

I _____ **do** give permission for my child/children to be interviewed as part of Michael Owens' Senior Thesis for the South Carolina Honors College **and** for this interview to be recorded.

I _____ **do** give permission for my child/children to be interviewed as part of Michael Owens' Senior Thesis for the South Carolina Honors College **but I do not** give permission for this interview to be recorded.

I _____ **do not** give permission for my child/children to be interviewed.

Child/Children's Name(s):

Figure 2 – Explanatory Letter

Dear parents/legal guardians,

My name is Michael Owens, and I am the Vice-President of Communities in Harmony, a music-based community service organization at the University of South Carolina. It has been my sincere pleasure to provide your child with weekly music classes at St. Lawrence Place. As my senior thesis for the South Carolina Honors College, and in an effort to improve the service of Communities in Harmony for future members and students, I am conducting a study of the effectiveness of this organization. To do this, I would like to interview your child about his experiences working with us.

These interviews will take place individually and the audio will be recorded so that a transcript can be written out after the interview. These recordings will be deleted after the transcript has been written out and no back-up will be saved. All responses and personal information (age, grade level, ethnicity, etc.) will be stored under an identifying number. The document associating a child with his/her responses will be stored in a locked container only accessible by myself.

If you do not wish for your child to be interviewed or do not wish for your child's interview to be recorded, an opt-out form is attached to this letter. Please fill out and return the attached form to Stephanie Jefferson by September 29th, 2015 if you do not want your child to participate. If you wish for your child to participate and will allow the interview to be recorded, do not return the form below.

Thank you for your cooperation,

Michael Owens,

Vice-President, Communities in Harmony

University of South Carolina Honors College, Class of 2016

Figure 3 – Staff Consent Form

I, _____, consent to being interviewed for the South Carolina Honors College Senior Thesis of Michael Owens. I understand that this interview will be audio recorded, but that the recording will only be used to generate a transcript; no part of the audio itself will be presented as part of the thesis.

Signature

Date

Appendix B – Formal Codebook

Themes – Staff

Scope of services – When working with low income populations, research has shown that it's important to expose the children to a wide variety of services, both in number of programs and in the number of services each program delivers. This theme relates to our purposeful activities (music education, escapism, etc.), our unstated activities (exposure to the idea of college, mentorship, etc.), and how our services related to and compliment the other services the kids receive.

Stability – The residents of homeless shelters often live transient lives with little stability. With such little stability, it is important that any organizations present offer a continuity of service, including being punctual, being dressed appropriately, having an ordered curriculum to follow (at least for a portion of each session), and becoming a fixture in the workings of the site.

Group activity – Music provides unique opportunities for students to work together and develop teamwork skills. By having our students work together, we can encourage teamwork and make the activities more fun for them.

Lack of resources – Naturally, homeless or socioeconomically disadvantaged children and the programs that serve them can often lack resources that other children have at their disposal. By bringing in outside organizations, programs can effectively increase the number of resources available to the children and ensure that they don't miss out on the opportunities their peers may have.

Education – Though an almost secondary purpose, our organization does have the potential to actually teach musical concepts to the children we work with. In addition, making our sessions more educational would provide extra stability and structure to each session.

Themes – Students

Average Age/School Type – To better tailor our services, it is important to know the average age of the children we work and where they go to school (elementary/middle/high). Our average age seems to skew towards the third grade, with

clumping on both ends. Most elementary schools mentioned are public and low-to-moderate income. If this trend holds for the future, our organization should seek partnerships with these schools.

Music in the school – The recommended amount of music education per week for children of this age group is between 60 to 90 minutes a week. The interviews seem to indicate that this need is not being met, thus our organization can be said to provide some kind of supplemental music education that the students' schools might not be able to provide due to academic restrictions and lack of resources.

Exposure to a variety of music – Regardless of demographic or income level, children are not often exposed to musical genres and instruments beyond what their parents play around the home. By exposing children to a greater variety of music, we might foster in them an appreciation for the breadth of musical styles and the scope of music's self-expressive ability.

Music in the home – A 2001 study in the British Journal of Music Education showed that listening to music in the home was linked with the child's emotional mood and the health of their social relationships. By learning what role music plays in the home lives of the children we work with, we can better assess a child's attitude towards music and, perhaps, give the child a desire to bring music back to his or her family.

Themes – Volunteers

Recruitment by Word of Mouth – Upon investigation, our most successful recruitment strategy is through word of mouth (i.e. members bring their friends with them to the organizations). It would be prudent to capitalize on this strategy for future recruitment efforts through (possibly) asking each volunteer to bring one friend to a meeting at the beginning of each semester, or by sending members to classes and meetings to spread the word about CiH.

Desire for an Organized Experience – Many of our members were in band, orchestra, or chorus in high school. While their college schedules do not afford them the time to be in similar ensembles in college, CiH affords them the opportunity to continue expressing themselves musically while sharing that expression with children.

Increased Member Numbers – Each semester, the organization goes through a period of member decay, meaning that while early meetings and sessions are full to the brim with members new and old, these numbers dwindle significantly as the semester goes on.

While some of this is to be expected, due to increased course load and other involvements, our organization could always use a larger, more stable crop of members to pull from.

Themes – Global

Improvements – The goal of this study is to find areas on which to improve.

Escapism – The main goal of the organization, besides its stated goal, is to provide the children we work with “an hour of escape from whatever happens to be going on in their lives.” Clearly, many of these children are in difficult situations, and even being given an hour to put aside their problems and express themselves musically can be hugely beneficial.

Importance of music – Several sources list the benefits of music education, such as increased creativity, teaching soft social skills, and in mental processing. This theme relates to both benefits that the students receive and benefits that the staff members have received or at least recognize. Through this recognition, we can show that we have the support of the staff for our activities.

Possession – Being homeless or socioeconomically disadvantaged, these children do not possess much. Our services can provide them with a sense of ownership over our activities. We do this by teaching them skills that they can keep with them for years, crafting instruments or other such activities that result in a physical product that the child can be proud of, and giving the child some agency in the goings-on of each session.

Appendix C – Personal Narratives

My First Session

I started with Communities in Harmony at our first session in September 2012. In all, we had four volunteers and one instrument, a keyboard. I was hesitant about bringing my saxophone, not out of any fear of it breaking, but rather because I hadn't had the time to "prepare" anything to perform. At the interest meeting, before the organization had really found itself, no one was quite sure what our sessions would be like and the pitch involved having pieces ready to perform every week. So there we were, four college students dressed in button-downs and khaki slacks (a well-intentioned, but poorly thought-out plan to appear "professional") trying to lead the children of Family Shelter through several renditions of "Happy Birthday," all while they were still eating dinner and begging their mothers for another slice of cake. To describe the experience as awkward would be an understatement, and it was pretty clear that the sessions needed some rethinking.

After we'd finished, we engaged in what would become the grand CiH tradition of free time. Immediately, kids came up to the piano and started banging on the keys, scrolling through all the preset sounds to see what noises they could get out of it. Watching them, I saw something that made the day's over-dressed stuffiness seem like it didn't matter: unfiltered, pure childish wonder. Every noise made them giggle with glee, every time they wanted our piano player to play "Mary had a Little Lamb" over and over (and over) again made them smile and forced their eyes open wide. Here, I thought to myself, was the point. All our other problems could be fixed with time and effort. As long as we brought this back every week, the organization was going to do something great.

The Importance of Proper Shirt Sizing

As a fix to the issue of being overdressed at our first session, the Honors College bought the organization shirts. Coming in a fetching baby blue with both the front and back logos designed by Savannah, our future Co-President. Though a significant improvement to business casual, the shirts only came in two sizes: small and medium, of which I am neither. Each week, I would squeeze myself into a medium shirt and throw on a half-zipped hoodie to cover up how tight it was, giving myself a slightly puffy look.

As a special treat for the kids, we brought in some of the members of the music service fraternity Kappa Kappa Psi to perform at Family Shelter one week. As they warmed up, we brought all the kids over from the playground into the room where we usually had our sessions. As they were coming in, one little boy walked up to me and gave me a hug. I hugged the boy back and asked him how his day had been. Totally ignoring that, however, he put both his hands on my stomach, looked up at me, and queried “Is there a baby in there??” Just the slightest bit hurt by the question, I moved to lift his hands off me and make him sit down. As I started to do so, though, I saw the look on his face. Instead of the smirk of a boy who knows he’s being mischievous, his face had this wide-eyed curiosity plastered all over it, as if he had just asked his mom if Santa Claus is really coming down the chimney tonight. Dumbstruck by the boy’s sincerity (and completing a trip to the gym the next day), I could only stand there for a second until another volunteer picked him up and sat him down with the other children. Needless to say, proper shirt sizes came in the following semester.

Rudy

At the end every semester, a few members of the club put on a concert for the residents of Palmetto Place. Unlike our usual sessions, which are strictly T-shirt and jeans affairs, these concerts are more formal, complete with invitations sent to the kids the week before and a round of pre-dinner refreshments served afterwards. Normally, the children are thrilled to see us, as we come prepared to entertain them with carols and the latest pop songs. A good number haven't seen most of the instruments we bring and their curiosity and excitement is infectious. One semester, however, one young boy simply wasn't having any of it.

Throughout the entire half-hour concert, this boy (I'll call him Rudy, though I've changed it here to protect his privacy) sat sullenly on the couch, refusing to sing along to any of the tunes. While you may (justifiably) assume that a pre-teen boy taken from his family by the Department of Juvenile Justice so close to Christmas would be angry, he was the only person in the room not enjoying himself, including the staff.

After we had finished the last number, we made our way to the dining room where all the kids sat around their two long tables and the volunteers served cups of juice and dainty plates of cheese and apple slices. Not all of us could be up serving due to the size of the room, so myself and a few others took seats. I ended up across from Rudy, and despite my best efforts to coax any kind of speech out of him, all I could get were grunts and head shakes. At this point, I was about to let the kid alone as he clearly didn't want to be bothered. Thankfully, another of our members was suddenly overcome with the urge to dance (prompted, I imagine, by the conversation she was having with two fourteen-

year-olds) in such a way that the room stopped and began to mock her, albeit lightheartedly.

This, at last, made Rudy open his mouth. "Is she usually this weird?" he asked, hooking a thumb towards the girl. "Nah," I said, relieved that we finally had something to talk about, "she's usually much worse. Take pity on me, I live down the hall from her." At this, Rudy finally smiled, just a little, and I knew I had gotten through.

For the rest of the evening, Rudy wouldn't stop talking. He told me endless stories about his grandfather the musician who showed him how to, at least, get noise out of several instruments, about the new Bluetooth speaker he had just bought, about the music he listened to, and, lastly, about what had happened with his family.

Of the many rules of Palmetto Place, the most often cited is the prohibition against asking any of the residents how they ended up in the shelter. When Rudy started talking about just that, however, I knew I couldn't just stop him. I could physically see his posture change as the weight of having no one to share his struggles with was lifted. By his own account, his social worker had told him he could go home the week before, but his homecoming had to be delayed. What had been billed as a "temporary stay" was becoming aggravatingly longer with each passing day, and it was clearly taking its toll.

Finally freed from his burden, Rudy was now as excitable and happy as the other kids. When it was time for us to leave, I gave Rudy a hug and told him that I hoped he got to go home soon. During the car ride back, I felt the gravity of what had just happened. Don't get me wrong, I'm not pretending that I did anything extraordinary, but this was the first time that I had directly had such a positive impact on someone's life. This feeling of helping a child when he needed it the most has stuck with me ever since.

Appendix D – Sample Curriculum

Music Writing Activity

Materials

- Poster of a musical staff with note names labeled
- Music notes coloring sheets – should be big enough to fit on the staff but small enough to be cut out quickly
- Colored pencils or markers

This activity works best over multiple weeks. During the first week, have the students color the music notes with whatever patterns or colors they like. When they've finished, cut out the notes and collect them in a pile. Lay out the music staff poster on the floor and have the students sit around it. Start by taking eight notes and laying them on the staff, starting from low C going to middle C. Explain to the students the concept of the musical alphabet (notes are A through G, starting over after G) and have them name the notes going up from C. Repeat once or twice until most of the students properly recite the notes names. Have one volunteer play the C scale that you just laid out for the students. After this, have the students take the notes and compose their own pieces and have a volunteer perform them.

The next week, introduce the students to the concept of playing notes in unison and chords by laying out chords for the volunteers to play. Have the students build their own chords, working together in groups of three (each students placing one note) and play their compositions. For following weeks, the activity can be expanded to include accidentals, time signatures, and different note values. All of these offer opportunities for the students to color in their own sharps and flats, bar lines, etc., and the students should keep their notes and coloring sheets between weeks.

Boomwhackers

Materials

- Boomwhackers (eight note set with five note accidental expansion)

Hand each student (and possibly some volunteers) one Boomwhacker. Have the students hold them in both hands, with one hand over each end of the tube (this is to ensure they don't hit the tubes while receiving instruction). If there are not enough students and volunteers, remove the accidentals from the set and just work with the whole tones. Call for the student with the biggest Boomwhacker (the low C) and have them stand on one end of the room. Continue this process, calling for the next biggest Boomwhacker until all the players are in line. One volunteer should lead the group as the conductor. The conductor should next have all the players play their Boomwhackers (ensuring that the students do not hit each other with the tubes) one after another to illustrate how pitch goes up as the tubes get shorter. Call upon different players to illustrate different musical concepts (major scales, whole and half tones, chords, etc.). Have a piano on hand to illustrate the points with clearer pitches than the Boomwhackers.

Once the conductor feels that the students have grasped the concepts, the conductor should call upon one student at a time to come up and conduct the players. This new conductor should walk around the group of players and point at them when they want to hear their notes played, like they're conducting a band. Allow the students to compose their own songs in this manner for a few minutes each, allowing several students to conduct the players.

Crafting Shakers

Materials

- Cardboard paper towel tubes
- Lima beans
- Colored Paper
- Markers
- Tape
- To seal ends – either hot glue and cardboard or tape and construction paper

Cut paper towel tubes into thirds. Cut strips of colored paper as wide as the tubes.

Have the students decorate one side of the paper with the markers. Take one end of the tube and either hot glue the bottom to a piece of cardboard measured to fit the end of the tube, or simply cover the end with construction paper and tape. Cardboard and hot glue creates a tighter seal and better tone quality for the shaker, but the construction paper method is faster and means less potential for burns.

Have the students take a handful of lima beans and pour them into the shaker. Note that it is very important that only large objects are used to fill the shakers as spills will be easier to clean up. Seal the other end of the tube with and tape the student's artwork around the sides. This is a great activity for the learning the student's names, as they should be encouraged to write their names on the shakers.

Appendix E – Organizational and Study Summary



- Communities in Harmony is a music-based student service organization at the University of South Carolina.
- Since its inception in 2012, Communities in Harmony has:
 - Served over 300 children and young adults for over 1,000 hours of service
 - Received a \$3,000 grant from the Hootie and the Blowfish Foundation and the 2014 Student Organization of the Year Award (USC Leadership and Service Center)
 - Enjoyed the continued generous support of the South Carolina Honors College
- Communities in Harmony offers our partner organizations unique programming for their students, focusing our activities on empowering the students through music
- As an organization, Communities in Harmony excels at:
 - Providing the students of our partner organizations with a safe and stable environment in which they can explore the power of music
 - Exposing students to the breadth of musical genres and styles
 - Providing students with an emotional outlet to express themselves

- To improve our services, Communities in Harmony will implement the following in the near future:
 - Education for our volunteers regarding how to more smoothly conduct each session and regarding the nature of homelessness and the problems faced by homeless children and young adults
 - A redoubling of our recruitment efforts to increase our crop of volunteers, decreasing member burnout
 - A partnership with an African-American student organization to address issues of diversity within our organization.
- Quotes about the organization from our volunteers:
 - *"The importance of the club isn't just the music part of it. I think that the time you spend interacting with the kids is valuable in and of itself, especially how you talk to the kids. You're there to be a friend and provide support to people who may not feel that all the time."*
 - *"Music has always been a really big part of my life, and I love to share that with other people, while hopefully impacting their lives at the same time."*
 - *"I have been playing the cello for 7 years and I didn't have time to play in the orchestra, so I wanted to try to spread my knowledge and love of music."*
- Communities in Harmony would like to thank our community partners: Family Shelter of the Midlands, St. Lawrence Place, J.P. Thomas Elementary School, Palmetto Place Children's Shelter, and Palmetto Health Children's Hospital.
- For more information about the organization, please feel free to contact us at communitiesinharmony2@gmail.com.