



LEWIS ELEMENTARY VIOLIN RESIDENCY PROGRAM EXPANSION PROJECT

Houston Symphony League Orchestra Size: Group 1 Metro Houston: 6.4 million
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Project Description:

Background: In 2018, the Houston Symphony League was provided a unique opportunity to participate in the initial development of the Houston Symphony's music education initiative – a Three-year String Instruction Program for Third, Fourth and Fifth grade students at an underserved HISD elementary school: Lewis Elementary. The Violin Residency was intended to develop as a model that could be replicated at other underserved elementary schools.

The Symphony's Community Embedded Musicians provided in-school violin instruction along with after-school violin classes. In addition, the Symphony League helped support the purchase of 40 violins, sheet music and related supplies for ongoing maintenance of the instruments. Not only was the program successful that year, but the After-School Program became oversubscribed to the point that additional violins and supplies were needed. What began with some 20 children expanded to 40+ by the end of the school year. The Symphony wanted to expand the After-School Program so that up to 80 students could participate.

Latest work: In the second year of the program (June 2019 – June 2020), the League not only continued but stepped up their passionate involvement with this program to add 40 more violins and contribute toward the Musicians' additional instruction costs.

Purpose and Goals: The driving purposes were to (i) bring music to an underserved community with great needs and who would not otherwise have this exposure; (ii) increase access to music; (iii) improve the quality of life and bring joy to Houston residents; and (iv) enable people to make connections with music and the Houston Symphony.

Motivation and Need:

Education is a long-standing, top priority and initiative for both the League and the Symphony. The need to create opportunities to provide consistent inroads and connections between music study, appreciation and understanding becomes greater each year with school budget cuts and less focus on the arts.

Expanding the number of violins would mean students could take a violin home to practice. The school developed a check-out procedure that the parent and the student signed committing to the care and return of the instrument.

Timeline:

Since this submission covers the second year of the program, the strategy and content had been conceived and created, which was done in collaboration with the Symphony organization. By this point, some of the bugs and details had been worked through and the League added fundraising, classroom observations and student/parent liaison to their participation. The project ran the entire 2019-'20 school year.

August: meetings with Symphony and League Education Departments; Classroom Observation format and other materials prepared for the current season.

September – Volunteers assisted students during a Mexican holiday after-school community event with other musical groups.

September – December: Classroom observations conducted by two League volunteers. Community Embedded Musicians (2) worked on repertoire and lesson plans.

Fundraising:

In the second year, 2019-20, the League was asked to purchase an additional 40 violins (@ \$300/ea = \$12,000) and support additional instruction time of the voluntary After-school Program (\$14,927 for 24 weeks or \$621.95/wk). The League had raised \$22,314 by the time of the coronavirus shutdown.

Most of the donations were from (i) individuals after hearing about the program; (ii) A “Conversation with a Musician” pop-up fundraiser and dinner held for 12 attendees @ \$150/ea, raising \$1,800; and (iii) the re-selling of 4 tickets at a salon concert/dinner at \$300/ea = \$1,200. There were 2-3 mini-fundraisers on the drawing board for the Spring that got cancelled due to the shutdown.

Impact on the Community:

In addition to playing music, the growth in self-confidence, leadership, self-concept, cooperation, social and emotional growth of the kids led the Houston Symphony and League to understand the correlation of music and its profound effect on an underserved community.

Also, through this introduction to the violin and the Houston Symphony, parents brought their kids to the Symphony's Saturday morning Family Concerts and started becoming engaged in a world previously unknown to them and a world that aids their kids in confidence as they learn. One of the areas that they especially grew in confidence was math, which also led to success in overall academics.

The school saw the benefits realized and hired a second music teacher to aid in the growing number of students.

Olivia, 5th grade student: "At first I was a little nervous [to perform] but when you actually have a passion for the violin and you start playing, you feel the nerves go away and then at the end you feel proud of yourself. With playing the violin, you have to work hard to be able to play it. When I'm done playing the violin I go back to the class and work hard there too."