

# STARTING A YOUTH MUSIC PROGRAM

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BY MY VOICE MUSIC

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# MUSIC IS WHAT FEELINGS SOUND LIKE

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## WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Music is able to connect with youth in a unique and universal manner by providing a safe way to access and express emotions, feelings, and opinions. Through music, youth are able to develop social and emotional skills which are essential to creating positive relationships and coping with difficult circumstances. Becoming a musician requires a great amount of goal setting and hard work, which helps individuals take pride in themselves and their work. Having a new and positive way to express who a person is through music aids in developing relationships and participating in community. This is a significant benefit to youth in foster care, residential treatment, those experiencing homelessness, and other transient situations. Below are the main values that My Voice Music believes are essential to music education.

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### COMMUNITY

Being a part of, and contributing something positive to our community is transformative and empowering.

### RELATIONSHIP

Positive relationships are extremely important in the life of a child or young adult. They help them grow and gain the confidence and support they need to accomplish their dreams.

### EDUCATION

When education is paired with a desire for knowledge, it creates rich and fulfilled lives that positively affect individuals, as well as the community at large.

### ARTISTIC EXPRESSION

The arts inspire and connect individuals and gives them the ability to express themselves in a unique way.

### TRUST

Successful relationships are built on a foundation of trust. Maintaining a level of professionalism and transparency that fosters trust in all of our relationships is essential.

### EXPERIENCE

Experiences that are engaging, relevant, and challenging can connect with individuals in a unique way and teach them skills that can be used for a lifetime.

# ABOUT MVM

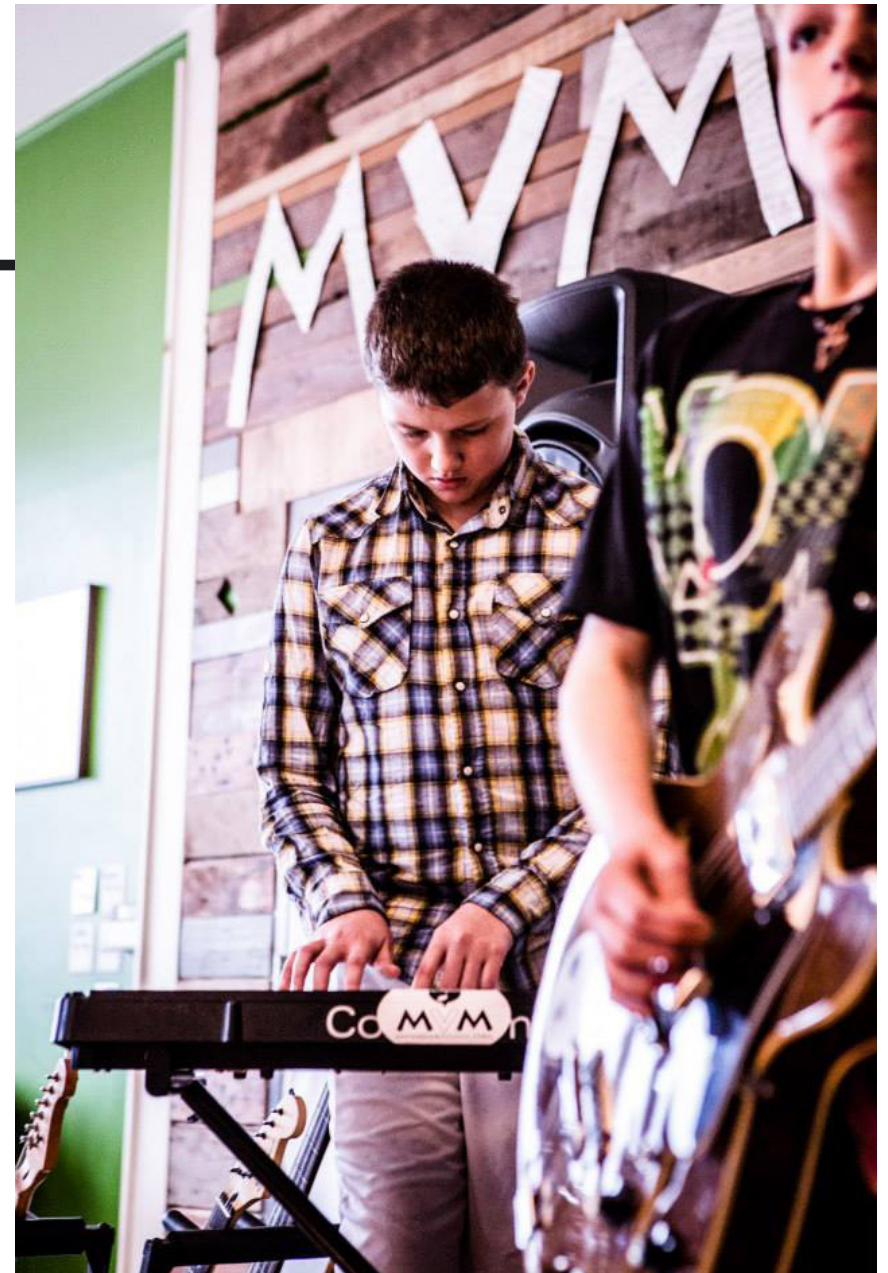
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## WHO ARE THEY?

My Voice Music is a nonprofit organization based in Portland Oregon that engages youth in music and performance in order to promote self-esteem, social skills and emotional expression. The goal of each MVM program is to help students to **cope, heal, and thrive** through musical exploration. MVM provides programs such as weekly “Music as Therapy” sessions, where youth participate in drum circles and sing-along groups that celebrate the therapeutic aspects of music. Multi-week songwriting workshops and rock band camps allow the youth to learn to play instruments, write songs and record them. MVM also provides multi-year ongoing artist mentorship where older students aid other younger students with their artistic development.

## WHO DO THEY SERVE?

MVM works with youth who would otherwise not have opportunities to learn music due to challenges such as living in the foster care system, experiencing mental health issues, exhibiting extreme behaviors, or coming from families with limited economic means. The organization engages approximately 1,600 youth each year, nearly 75 percent of whom are living in foster care or mental health treatment centers. MVM has partnered with multiple homes, treatment centers and schools around Portland in order to provide music education programs to these children. MVM is now hosting more programs and classes at their new studio in southeast Portland.





# MVM HISTORY

MVM has grown substantially in programming and community support since its founding in 2008, when the organization served 90 youth with \$6,000 worth of equipment and instruments, donated space and vehicles, and countless volunteer hours. Organizational income and student capacity has nearly doubled each year from 2009 to 2012. MVM now reaches over 1,000 youth with a budget of \$157,000, and involves over 100 volunteers as artists, instructors, and fundraisers.

MVM has been recognized by the City of Portland for having “greatly contributed to bringing music back into the lives of the next generation...fostering personal, social, creative and intellectual development...and transforming marginalized youth.” MVM’s Executive Director was honored with a 2011 Skidmore Prize by the Willamette Week, a recognition for excellent emerging non-profit leaders.

Other organization milestones include MVM youth performing on stage with Pink Floyd’s Roger Waters at the Rose Garden, and with Bibi McGill (Guitarist and Music Director for Beyoncé), recording over 700 original songs written and performed by MVM youth.

# THE RIGHT LEADER

A music outreach program begins with an inspired individual like you. My Voice Music has found success through it's staff of dedicated volunteers who have a passion for creating a welcoming environment for artistic expression, and building self-esteem in youth. Creating music is an extremely valuable experience. It is important for you as a leader to have an **outgoing, fun, and engaging personality**. You will need experience in some form of musical instrument, along with the desire to involve and engage youth in a series of songs and musical activities. You should also show an interest in creating a weekly schedule in order to promote a stable environment for youth to enjoy and explore musical freedoms.

## ARE YOU A MUSICIAN?

Use your strengths and passion for music to lead and teach the youth. Whether you are talented at music or not, even if you can play a few chords and drum a decent beat, they will think you're a rockstar!

## ARE YOU AN ORGANIZER?

Talk to your staff and find out who is musically talented and also good with youth. Be the one who gets people excited about a music program and get the ball rolling.

*“The worst thing you are going to do is bring in a guitar and expose kids to music,”*

-IAN MOUSER (MVM)



## A GOOD LEADER...

- Is self-motivated
- Inspires others
- Can improvise music
- Is patient in teaching
- Encourages self expression
- Sets their ego aside
- Makes learning fun
- Isn't afraid to embarrass themselves
- Engages the whole group
- Sees the best in youth



# WHAT YOU WILL NEED

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You might think starting a music program will cost a fortune and be extremely difficult to gather everything you need. The good news is, if you are willing to start with the basics it's actually very simple and easy to incorporate. This section will outline everything you need to start a successful music program from the ground up.

## FUNCTIONAL SPACE

- The space should be welcoming, safe, and large enough for each student to have space around them to feel independent and not crowded.
- The room should have decent isolation to avoid disturbing those around you and also eliminate distractions.
- It is preferable if the space is easily accessible.
- The space must be large enough to accommodate at least 4 - 8 students.
- For recording and songwriting purposes, you may want a smaller and more intimate space.

## INSTRUMENTS

**Five-Gallon Buckets:** Bucket drumming sessions are the easiest and cheapest way to teach a group of students to work together in sync, and also learn how to play a basic beat and rhythm. Classic drumsticks will work, and for a different sound, mallets also do the trick!

**Ukuleles:** Ukuleles are very easy to come by or purchase for a decent price. Their small size and light weight make for a friendly way for a student to learn a few chords and get used to holding an instrument. You can also store many of them in a smaller space.

**Guitars:** For the more advanced students, it's important to have a few acoustic guitars on hand. You will be amazed at how quickly the youth will learn to play the guitar when you take the time to teach them a few chords in a one-on-one format.

**Handheld Percussion:** Instruments such as tambourines, maracas, triangles, and other sorts of hand-held percussion instruments are excellent for involving more students in a jam session. They are small, simple to use, and easy to store.

**Keyboard:** Having at least one keyboard is important to teach a few students how to play piano. It also adds a whole other dimension in a jam session to hear piano chords or a simple melody.

**Where to look for instruments?** Look around for used equipment that is still in great shape at your local music store, on Craigslist, or Goodwill. You can usually find them for a great price or find someone willing to donate them for a good cause! See the additional resources for more suggestions.





## RECORDING EQUIPMENT

Recording is optional and should be only as complex as you are comfortable with. The key is not to focus on quality but focus on the process of wiring and recording songs. Consider using any of the following recording setups.

- **Digital Audio Recorder:** These are simple all-in-one devices with a built-in microphone and are available at office supply, electronics and music stores.
- **Smartphone with Recording App:** Use your smart phone with the internal microphone or use an external microphone such as the Zoom IQ6 or the Rode iXY-L. Apps can be as simple as the voice recording software that came with your phone, Garage Band or the app that come with the microphone you bought.
- **4-track Recorder:** Find an old or new Portastudio with a microphone or two. These recorders were a staple of small-scale recording for years and can be found on eBay, Craigslist and at music stores.
- **Laptop Recording Software & Microphones:** More experienced musicians will know these systems and will require some experience to use. Consider using Apple's Garage Band, Avid Pro Tools, Cubase, Logic, etc.

*Professional setups with numerous microphones are also fine if you are comfortable using them. Just remember to focus on the youth and the songwriting and not too much on the quality of production.*



# THE MAIN OBJECTIVES

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The main objective to creating a music program is to engage youth in a welcoming environment that allows freedom of expression and builds self-esteem. In order to accomplish this, the group leader should be responsible for designing a weekly schedule with consistent dates and times, as well as planning activities that are fun for the group. Creating music can also be a very vulnerable experience, so it is important that the group leader find ways to encourage and maintain a positive atmosphere for the youth.

## FIRST STEPS

1. Organize and notify: set a time and day of the week as well as a meeting place. Schedule regular sessions that happen at the same time and place each week.
2. Create flyers or discuss it with the youth in the group meetings and one-on-one sessions.
3. Sign up the youth and remind them that it is on a volunteer basis and that they are not required to participate.
4. Plan on including 4-8 students per session so that the group is intimate yet large enough to jam.
5. Start planning out the content. MVM sessions are composed mostly of bucket drumming and sing-alongs.





## BREAKDOWN OF A SESSION

- 1. ICE BREAKER:** 2-3 minutes where all the students get a chance to share their voice. Go around a circle and ask them a silly question or have them all sing a note.
- 2. SET THE EXPECTATIONS:** It's important for the group to know that participation is optional and that they are there to enjoy the time in whatever way suits them best. Establish the norms such as not playing instruments when someone is speaking and not disturbing their neighbor. They are here to jam but also need to respect the space, instruments, and each other.
- 3. BUCKET DRUMMING:** The goal is to play together in unison, as a team (*Note: Bucket drumming may not always work if there are youth who have been on new medications or drugs. Drumming may be the wrong stimulus for them.*)
- 4. SING ALONG:** Sing 3-5 songs as a group, 1-3 times each depending how into it they are. The best way for them to focus is singing along to a track or playing the guitar. Playing the sing-along songs yourself helps you engage the youth and provides more immersion. You can also control the environment more. See our recommended songs list in the resources section.
- 5. DEBRIEF:** Ask the students what they liked about the session, what they didn't like, and ask for suggestions for the following week. Give them encouragement and feedback as well and thank them for coming and participating.



## UKULELE/GUITAR SESSIONS

Following the main session, ask the group if there is anyone interested in a smaller group session where they can have a more personal lesson on the ukulele (or really any instrument). Depending on your number of staff available, a good size group is usually four at the max. Teach them how to play 2-3 simple chords and maybe even apply the chords to a simple song. This is where you can develop a closer bond with the students and where they have a great opportunity to learn and grow.



## SONG-WRITING & RECORDING

Writing songs and recording them gives a young person an incredible opportunity to express themselves in a real way. Give them the chance to write a song and then have the instructor play and sing the song or ask them to sing the song themselves. Recording and listening back to the song and even sharing it with their friends and family is incredibly valuable to them. Having their voice heard can change how they feel about the world.

1. Inform the group that you will stick around for an hour after the sessions if they would like to record their songs.
2. Limit your recording session groups to no more than three youth to give them a chance to really be heard.
3. Ask them to have their lyrics written ahead of time and ready to be recorded. They need to have put some thought into it before recording.
4. Give them support, they are showing amazing bravery and you get the chance to guide them through the process.
5. Remind them that the number one thing they did was show up, express themselves and be creative.



# NEXT STEPS

Music has a profound effect on the self-esteem of youth. Constructing an atmosphere that promotes creativity and positive reinforcement can reshape the life of a person. Remember that your program should evolve and grow with the needs of your youth.

Continue to build on the primary objectives discussed here with activities that encourage musical growth and interaction. Find ways to utilize music beyond the weekly sessions we discussed. Use the elements of this program to engage the young people when normal activities are not working. Consider having impromptu sing-a-longs or bucket drumming sessions. Encourage the youth to have jam sessions or write songs together, invite them to share with each other what is on their iPods. Also, organize structured monthly events, such as an open mic night.

My Voice Music encourages you to reach out to your local community and research what resources are at your disposal for creating a self-made music program.

# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

## WHAT MUSIC SHOULD I USE?

Music selections should be a mixture of familiar songs that engage children, and are easy to sing along with. Popular selections include classic rock, today's top hits, and music you would hear on the radio. This contributes to creating a welcoming environment for children. Leaders should also be aware of the desires of their groups. If an accessible song is in demand, try to find lyric and music sheets for future meetings. Below are some song suggestions for you to incorporate into group sessions:

- **Brown Eyed Girl** by *Van Morrison*
- **Imagine** by *The Beatles*
- **Stand By Me** by *Ben E. King*
- **Smooth Criminal** by *Michael Jackson*
- **Crazy Love** by *Beyonce*
- **Do You Believe in Magic?** by *The Lovin' Spoonful*
- **Free Fallin'** by *Tom Petty & the Heartbreakers*
- **Lean on Me** by *Bill Withers*
- **Waiting on the World to Change** by *John Mayer*
- **Let it Be** by *The Beatles*

## MUSIC SOURCES/EDUCATION

- **IMSLP** Petrucci Music Library  
This site is a library of copy written music protected under the Creative Commons License. There is a wide range of music to choose from and also features music from contemporary artists such as Chris Brown.  
<http://imslp.org/>
- **NAMM** National Association of Music Merchants  
NAMM allocates a half million dollars in grants to community and national music programs across the country.  
<http://www.namm.org/>
- **VH1 Save the Music**  
VH1 Save the Music offers recognition and exposure for music programs through various media and social venues.  
<http://www.vh1savethemusic.org/>
- **Mr. Holland's Opus Foundation**  
Distributes grants for low-income communities, and helps provide financial means for music equipment and programs. They have been known to be generous in donating instruments.  
<http://www.mhopus.org/>



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