

Louisville Public Media

INSTRUMENTAL PARTNERS

Putting musical instruments into the hands of our youth

At Lassiter Middle School we found Donald Moore, an affable 8th grader who no longer makes frequent trips to the hospital for his asthma. Taking up the clarinet in 5th grade brought about radical change: His breathing improved, asthma attacks lessened, and a new world of music opened before him. With the help of Louisville Public Media's Instrumental Partners Donald was given a clarinet he could call his own.

"It's fun," he explains. **"It lets me breathe."** He even volunteers the fact that, **"It helps me with math and reading."** His grades have improved. But the overriding sense that you get from Donald is his love of the clarinet, playing in band, and making music.

His mother, Lakita Muex, uses words like "ecstatic" to describe how she feels about the program and what it has done for her son. She sees how much he enjoys the clarinet but also how the experience has taught him discipline, maturity, and independence. "I really am truly grateful," she says. "When he's supposed to come home and practice, he does. It's rewarding for him."

Music also transforms their home life. "We sing our own little tunes to his playing." She adds, "There's less need of his inhaler. That is amazing." The doctor, she notes, advises, "Whatever he's doing, keep doing it."



Donald Moore with his mother and brother

When asked what it meant to have people donate instruments to the program, Donald didn't pause for a moment:

"When people donate to you, it makes you a much better person. When they give you stuff, you want to give back and do the best with what they give you."

Instruments in the hands of young people and under the direction of a knowledgeable teacher --

- **improve school morale**
- **bring happiness**
- **foster discipline**
- **build character and independence from peer pressure**
- **teach responsibility**
- **improve grades**
- **create a sense of fun and belonging**
- **and even reduce visits to the hospital!**

Even those who are predisposed to understanding the impact that music has on children and their environment are likely to be impressed by the broader implications.

HOW THE PROGRAM WORKS

Instrumental Partners collects used musical instruments (375 to date) for the benefit of our public school students and has raised \$6,193 from listeners and supporters to cover the cost of repairs. We are especially grateful to **PNC Wealth Management** for their ongoing financial support. Getting an instrument in the hands of a young person can mean the difference between a life brightly lived and talents left untapped.

This program exists because many of our schools do not have enough instruments to go around, and too often students can't afford to rent or buy them. Louisville Public Media works primarily in conjunction with Jefferson County Public Schools in Kentucky and occasionally with the New Albany-Floyd County Public Schools in Southern Indiana.

On behalf of these children, their

INSIGHTFUL DIRECTOR AT THE HELM



Steven Barton, Band Director, Lassiter Middle School

Four years ago Steven Barton had only 11 students in his new band program at Lassiter Middle School. But in the first year that number quickly grew to 75. The reason for the growth of the program is clear to anyone observing Mr. Barton directing his students. His ear for intonation and rhythm is matched by his sensitivity and insight into the young people in his band. He pulls a special harmony from them – as musicians and young adults.

Mr. Barton says Instrumental Partners made it possible for the band program to grow quickly. It helped him meet the extraordinary demand for instruments. In fact, the program made it possible for students not only to have their own instrument, but to have their instrument of choice. With 118 students of the 125-member band on free or reduced lunches, few would have been able to afford to rent or buy an instrument on their own.

Mr. Barton shared many examples of what happens when instruments are placed in the hands of our youth; the positive impact on their lives, the quality of life at the school, and an enriched home life.

“Most of the 8th graders started in the 6th grade on the instruments donated to us.” Steven Barton acknowledges, “The instruments gave them their start.”

- “I’ve noticed a change in attitude, discipline and work ethic in the kids.” He adds, “It’s teaching them to work.”
- Teachers at Lassiter Middle School, he notes, have seen improvement in children with behavioral problems. “Band gives them something to look forward to.” Band is also something that can be used as an incentive. When grades drop in other classes, Mr. Barton explains, students face being pulled out of band for several weeks of “course recovery.” They know that once they’ve missed a prolonged period of band, it’s difficult to return. “That motivates them to try to do better in their classes.”
- Having an instrument outside of school means more than an opportunity to practice. “I’ve had a lot of kids,” Mr. Barton explains, “who have said they don’t have anything. Some of them don’t have electricity at home. So, the fun thing they can do at least is play music and make up their own songs at home.” He describes how “they make up songs just to keep busy at night” and then “bring them in and play them for me.”

Ayanna's first instrument came from Instrumental Partners.

In sixth grade Ayanna moved to Louisville and started at Lassiter Middle School. She was "looking for a way to have fun at school," so she joined the band. "I thought it would be a new start."

Through music she says she's learned about responsibility and determination.



Ayanna Coates, 8th grader at Lassiter Middle School

She understands the joy of making music in band, but also the importance of individual practice and caring for the instrument. "It's been more about responsibility than anything." Playing the clarinet also has helped her with math. "I'm doing better with fractions now. I'm learning my quarter notes and half notes."

All of the additional benefits aside, for Ayanna, the gift of making music and her love of the clarinet are enough.

We asked Ayanna, what she would say to the people who donate their instruments and resources to this program. Without taking a breath she replied:

"I'd say thank you so much. Because we really need it here. It's one of the best things at Lassiter Middle School -- to be in the band. The band is something different that you don't see in a lot of schools. It makes you feel special -- really different. It's not something that's nerdy -- it's something that's cool."

Louisville Public Media expresses sincere appreciation to Steven Barton, the members of his 8th grade band, and Lassiter Middle School for allowing us a glimpse into their world. We are also thankful to the teachers and administrators of Jefferson County Public Schools, particularly the special efforts of Music Specialist Pamela Fleitz, for helping to facilitate this program.

"I feel happy. I'm with my friends playing music. I'm learning something new."

Help enrich the lives of our youth. For more information about supporting Instrumental Partners, please call 502.814.6500.