MY VOICE MUSIC

Overview & Methodologies
What’s Behind the Music

DRAFT COPY

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1. INTRODUCTION

This document is intended to provide a context for what My Voice Music does, and how and why we do it. It describes the underlying philosophies, beliefs and aspirations of the organization and how those impact our work with young people and communities directly. The intention of this document is twofold.

First, to provide a research based qualification of the work we do, which we already understand intuitively to be impactful. To provide both anecdotal and research based context as to the efficacy and need of programs like MVM in communities and within the systems of mental health treatment and juvenile justice. Our hope is to raise awareness and make a case for significant investment in the types of work that My Voice Music does as part of an overall care, intervention, and rehabilitation model. To help the youth care systems to acknowledge not only the problems or challenges that individuals experience, but also, most importantly, to provide authentic opportunities that engage people in ways that highlight their strengths and reveal their own intrinsic power to heal and grow.

Second, to expand this type of work and provide resources and language to facilitate that growth. Whether your goal is to start a chess club, after-school program, or soccer team, significant groundwork has already been accomplished by researchers, leading organizations and individuals. We want to share the successes we have experienced and acknowledge the breadth of knowledge that already exists within organizations around the world, research teams and individuals working towards similar goals. We want leverage this broad base of knowledge and share how we fit into the broader field so that people seeking to implement similar programs do not have to reinvent the wheel — so to speak.

This information provides language and context by which to understand and speak about a particular philosophy of youth engagement. Any work with any person should start with that person and you — the relationship. Not any preconceived method of engagement — even that which is described in the following pages. This document means absolutely nothing if it is used to support a system, program or otherwise that is not willing to meet people where they are at. That is not willing to be responsive, throw out rules, create new ones, be authentic, vulnerable, and always finding ways to grow and learn from the people we work with.
2. ORGANIZATIONAL SUMMARY

My Voice Music is a nonprofit organization based in Portland, Oregon. Our mission is to amplify the voices of young people and ignite self-discovery through the artistic process of writing, recording and releasing music.

We believe that music provides an opportunity to find and share our voice; revealing our common humanity to one another; building relationship through story; fostering connection and transformation; helping us become more whole, more resilient, and more equipped to continue on life’s journey with the skills and community to create a fulfilled life.

We are anchored on a belief in the power of music, relationship, and story, we are guided by thoughtful resource stewardship, a focus on equity, and a deep commitment to education through experience.

My Voice Music (MVM) programs are open to all young people, regardless of their background, based on their shared passion for music. All programs are offered on a sliding scale fee structure so that no one is turned away for financial reasons.

MVM Provides Two Distinct Programs:

Outreach Programs:

- provide responsive, on-site, music-based classes and workshops to youth ages 8-17 living in residential treatment centers, including mental health treatment programs, juvenile justice facilities, and migrant detention centers.

MVM Studios:

- year round programs offer transitional support to youth exiting residential programs as well as young people in foster care, from low income and well-resourced families from the general public. 80% of youth attend on full scholarship (2019).
2.1. BRIEF HISTORY

My Voice Music was founded in 2008 based on MVM Executive Director Ian Mouser’s work as a treatment counselor in a residential treatment facility. Ian, along with teachers, psychologists, and therapists, observed that when he brought in his guitar and facilitated music workshops with young people, specifically helping them to write and record songs, there was a significant reduction in explosive and violent behaviors and more space for youth to express themselves creatively succeed with treatment. MVM’s Community Outreach programs continue to prioritize working with young people who are in mental health residential facilities, crisis centers and juvenile detention centers.

Today, MVM reaches about 1,600 youth each year through outreach programs (held on-site at partner agencies), and at MVM Studios where we host rock camps, ensemble groups, individual lessons, advanced music mentorships with professional musicians, and youth leadership development opportunities. Youth learn from accomplished local musicians and annually share their songs in over 20 performances across Portland, through online publication, and on compilation CDs.

Since founding, MVM has partnered with 50 organizations and served over 12,000 young people in the process. MVM’s “impactful”, “inspiring” programs have been recognized by awards from regional, and national sources including the inaugural 2020 Lewis Prize for Music, National Endowment for the Arts, the National Afterschool Association, the OregonASK Faces of Change award, and the City of Portland. 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.
2.2. PROGRAM PHILOSOPHY OVERVIEW

Sharing our voice through songwriting and performance provides opportunities to reveal to each other our common humanity and build relationship through story, fostering connection and transformation.

While founded using a Trauma Informed Approach\(^1\), My Voice Music focusses on writing great songs, learning music through hands-on experience, and recording and performing rather than “healing” explicitly. We believe the artistic process, in and of itself, is healing. It fosters, reflection, goal setting, hope, critical thinking, community engagement, and more. For young people who have been in therapy and treatment for a long time, simply having something “normal” like music to focus on can have significant positive impacts.\(^2\)

Music has, for millennia, been used by humans to cope and to heal and to celebrate. It has been used to facilitate ceremony, and bring people together. In today’s world, music has also become integrated into our popular culture. For youth experiencing crisis, music and songwriting can be a particularly effective tool in treatment, building coping skills and developing pro-social tools.\(^3\)

Songwriting and guided music groups help youth to share their voice and to be heard. Music, inspires hope, creates connection, and fosters new ambitions, creative expression, and skills and passion that may stick with them for the rest of their lives. It creates a safe place to be calm, angry, funny, excited, or sad. For countless young people (and all people for that matter), music is a refuge from the storm, it is a companion through life’s ups and downs.

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1 [MentalHealth.org](https://www.mentalhealth.org)
2 See “Therapeutic Value of Music” section of this document for research supporting this statement
3 See: “Normalized Interventions Within Hypertherapized Environments” section of this document for more information and research
“Severely traumatized people may get more out of simply helping to arrange chairs before a meeting or joining others in tapping out a musical rhythm on the chair seats than they would from sitting in those same chairs and discussing the failures (challenges) in their life.” Dr. Bessel Van Der Kolk, MD

3. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

3.1. MISSION

Amplifying young voices and igniting self-discovery through music.

3.2. VISION

Providing opportunities to reveal to each other our common humanity; building relationship through story that foster connection and transformation; sharing our voice through songwriting, recording and performance; becoming more whole, more resilient, and more equipped people to continue on life’s journey with the skills and community to create a fulfilled life; growing together and individually inspires the world around us to grow too.

3.3. VALUES

Community

We believe that being a part of a community is transformative and empowering.

We recognize that Portland has a history of racial and economic segregation that disrupts community and continues to harm citizens of color. We acknowledge the harm that institutional racism and systems of economic oppression inflict upon our community. We believe it is the responsibility of those with privilege to actively work against those systems.

We acknowledge that for survivors of trauma or individuals who are experiencing mental health challenges joining a new “community” can be overwhelming. We are responsive to the needs and feedback of our community.

4 "The Body Keeps the Score": Brain, Mind, and Body In the Healing of Trauma. Bessel Van Der Kolk, M.D.
Relationship

We believe that positive, long-term relationships provide guidance, break down feelings of isolation, and foster a sense of social accountability.

We understand that relationships are built by listening. We seek to actively listen to all voices, with particular attention to those that have been historically/are currently silenced, and incorporate those voices in guiding our programming and organizational decisions.

We understand that in order to establish and maintain a healthy relationship vulnerability is required. Our program model is designed to normalize the artistic process, which is intrinsically one of continued vulnerability. Through the “normalizing” of “failure” and “accountability” as part of the artistic process; modeling the process; walking with students through their process at their pace and in their own voice, we are setting the place for vulnerability and relationship to be established and possibly thrive.

Education

We believe that learning opportunities, paired with a desire for knowledge, empowers individuals and enriches the community at large.

We understand that our students have assets and skills that are often unrecognized. As such we use Student Centered, Strength Based, and Trauma Informed approaches in all aspects of our work; rejecting the deficit model of thinking. We also believe in the importance of learning from those whose experiences might differ from our own.

Youth at the margins are confronted with situations that force them to choose between what is socially “acceptable” or necessary for their survival, which may not be socially ” compliant.

MVM’s focus on experiential learning and relationship are a way for us to acknowledge each person’s goals, culture, responses to triggers and work with them and support them – to acknowledge their strengths even in the midst of a moment when the school system or otherwise may be in the midst of “punishing” them for similar behaviors at school.
Art

We believe in the ability of the arts to inspire and connect individuals, and that arts education has the power to equip all people with tools for lifelong learning.

Youth must see examples of artists that reflect the diversity of humans in race, gender, sexuality, socio-economic status, and mental health. People with all different life experiences contribute to art and music, leadership, and cultural progress. We must actively represent and learn from diverse perspectives, leaders, and artists to our students.

Trust

We believe successful relationships are built on a foundation of trust. We are committed to a level of professionalism, vulnerability, and transparency that fosters trust in all of our relationships.

Our programs intend to create long term mentoring relationships that foster resilience and celebrate youth strengths; providing opportunities for young people to progress from seeing themselves as capable of being recipients of programs, to being capable of facilitating change in their own lives, and providing and facilitating programs and services to their community.

We acknowledge that having a positive adult role model increases a child's level of resilience. As such, we meet each youth where they are at culturally, emotionally, and developmentally in order to foster long-term mentoring relationships.

Experience

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

We see young people as the change makers in their own life and their communities. MVM provides experiences that create the infrastructure for youth to find that voice that will guide their transformation.
3.4. DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION STATEMENT

We welcome all members of the community to participate, volunteer and support our young artists. We recognize that Portland has a history of racial and economic segregation that has and continues to harm citizens of color. We acknowledge the harm that institutional racism and systems of economic oppression inflict on our community. We believe it is the responsibility of those with privilege to actively work against those systems. We invite and ask our young artists (and their communities) to provide feedback in addition to provide youth with training to become teachers of our programs so that we can learn from their perspectives and use the perspectives to shape our programs and organization.

My Voice Music acknowledges and honors personal histories, cultural values, socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and, in general, the specific stories of every person in our community. We believe personal experiences and perspectives are an essential and integral part of the artistic journey.

MVM recognizes the importance of other perspectives and actively seeks to include and learn from individuals with diverse life experiences. We continually reflect on our existence within in a culture that has, and continues, to marginalize people. Our aspiration is to exist in a way that does not cause suffering, that liberates. In order to achieve this aspiration we are committed to working in collaboration with the communities we serve, hiring individuals from those communities as well as hiring youth who have come up through My Voice Music's classes.

We acknowledge that we exist in a system that affects different populations in very different ways.

We acknowledge that as an organization we will always have room to grow. We are committed to continually examining our role in both perpetuating and fighting against ideas, practices, policies, and systems that marginalize and isolate individuals and entire cultural groups. We commit to continually aligning our policies and practices to reflect new areas of learning and growth that will advance racial equity, inclusion, and freedom of expression.
4. THE WORLD MVM EXISTS WITHIN:

My Voice Music exists within an environment that reveals through the arts the extraordinary gifts that young people possess. However, there are significant barriers (financial, mental health and behavioral, trauma, systemic racism, etc.) that many individuals and communities experience which prohibit, in various degrees, opportunities for young people to find, reveal, and share their gifts (their voice); gifts that have the potential to not only propel personal growth, but to inspire their communities as well.

MVM recognizes all people do not have access to the same opportunities. While our programs serve young people from all backgrounds experiencing a wide array of life circumstances, the majority of our resources are engaged in providing access to young people who would not otherwise have access to these opportunities.*

MVM was founded to bring songwriting and recording opportunities to some of Portland’s most impacted young people: institutionalized young people who have experienced extreme trauma, who are suffering with mental health and behavioral challenges – almost always due to the trauma they have, and are, experiencing. They are likely diagnosed with a mental illness and given medication to manage their presenting symptoms, however, the treatment of trauma will likely be ignored. And this can have major consequences. As one of the world’s leading experts on trauma, the body, and healing says,

*Treating a diagnosis vs. helping people heal from trauma “allows us to avoid having to think about how many children are being abused in our society…”. Bessel Van Der Kolk, M.D.

Trauma strips people of their ability to be vulnerable enough to develop meaningful relationships. Institutionalization - without very intentional programs like My Voice Music – re-enforces feelings of powerlessness.

MVM’s programs provide moments of authentic human connection. We do not show up to fix anything. We simply provide space for a kid to be seen and heard, on their own terms,

* This document is weighted heavily on using music to counter the effects of trauma. Starting from this place lifts everyone up regardless of personal experiences. The principles are universal for all individuals.

5 "The Body Keeps the Score": Brain, Mind, and Body In the Healing of Trauma. Bessel Van Der Kolk, M.D.
and on their own timeline. This simple act is proven to counter the effects of institutional trauma, and re-establish the ability to trust, to be vulnerable, and to develop relationships in the future.6

Many of the young people we serve have faced challenges that most adults will never know. They have withstood traumatic events and learned to survive when the adults in their lives failed them. They have moved in and out of institutions—be it school, residential facilities, or juvenile detention. They are survivors and problem solvers. These are the young people who have the power to stop generational cycles of poverty, addiction and violence. When we treat them with kindness, as capable, and reflect their strengths and talents to them, we help build leaders that our communities sorely need.

Why MVM Exists in the World:

- There are kids living behind institutional walls who need opportunities that reveal their strengths while living within a system that reinforces, over and over their “powerlessness”.

- There are kids in the community who need programs that can be a second home; where relationships don’t have to end; where their voice can be found and heard in the midst of the overwhelming noise that surrounds all us.

- All youth regardless of their position in life need opportunities to: develop relationships; find a community they identify with and find belonging within; be challenged and supported as they work towards goals; have their strengths revealed; be given a chance to share their gifts with the world.

- That programs like My Voice Music7 lift everyone up.

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6 RETRAUMATIZATION CAUSED BY PSYCHIATRIC CARE INSTITUTIONS, Childhood Trauma Recovery. David Hosier MSc: https://childhoodtraumarecovery.com/2017/07/05/retraumatization-caused-psychiatric-care-institutions/

7 https://www.creativeyouthdevelopment.org/ - MVM acknowledges the cohort of organizations within the Creative Youth Development field that we that we both learn from and contribute.
General Population of Youth Served (2018):

- 915 young people in crisis, living in residential psychiatric treatment centers; recovering from trauma, such as, abuse, sex trafficking, loss of a loved one; seeking refugee status, fleeing violence in Latin America; in rehabilitation programs for drug addiction and gang affiliation

- 300 young people from the public attending MVM Studios (our recording studio and rehearsal space that is open to the public which hosts quarterly classes, week-long rock camps, long-term artistic mentorships, and more)

- 300 young people through in-school and other community partnerships (non-therapeutic outreach programs)

- 85% of students attended for free

- 63% of the young people were living in Foster Care or Residential Care (lock-down facilities for youth experiencing mental health and behavioral challenges)
4.1. Understanding Place: Systems Theory Approach:

When considering the ecosystem that we exist in MVM uses a Systems Theory Approach, acknowledging the impact of individual issues, families, organizations, societies, and other systems on individuals. My Voice Music is one part of a continuum of factors that impact individuals and communities.

**Individuals/Identity:** There are countless definitions and theories that explore the diverse influences that shape the individual, or “identity”. Renowned sociologist, author, and educator, Parker Palmer, puts it this way: “By identity I mean an evolving nexus where all the forces that constitute my life converge in the mystery of self: my genetic makeup, the nature of the man and woman who gave me life, the culture in which I was raised, people who have sustained me and people who have done me harm, the good and ill I have done to others, and to myself, the experience of love and suffering—and much, much more. In the midst of that complex field, identity is a moving intersection of the inner and outer forces that make me who I am, converging in the irreducible mystery of being human.”

**Family Systems:** The concept of family is one with which almost every individual can identify. For some, family means their family of origin; for others, it applies to the family they have biologically created; and for still others, it means the individuals with whom they have developed lasting bonds of intimacy through adoption, foster care, or other relationships.

“*The single most common factor for children who develop resilience is at least one stable and committed relationship with a supportive parent, caregiver, or other adult.*”

8 Definition: “Systems Theory explains human behavior as the intersection of the influences of multiple interrelated systems...individual issues, families, organizations, societies, and other systems are inherently involved and must be considered when attempting to understand and assist the individual.”: https://socialworklicensemap.com/theoretical-approaches-social-work-systems-theory/


10 Parker Palmer holds a PHD in Sociology and is an author, educator, and activist who focuses on issues in education, community, leadership, spirituality and social change. He is the founder and Senior Partner of the Center for Courage & Renewal.


12 “Resilience”, Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University: https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/resilience/
Community Systems\textsuperscript{13}: Community is not only the geographic place within which programs, organizations, and systems intersect but also the social norms, resources, relationships, and informal settings that dramatically inform human development—both directly and indirectly.

Programs\textsuperscript{14}: Programs are semi-structured processes, most often led by adults and designed to address specific goals and youth outcomes. A program can be considered a youth development program when it intentionally incorporates experiences and learnings to address and advance the positive development of children and youth. This category incorporates a range of programs from those that are highly structured, often in the form of curricula with step-by-step guidelines, to those that may have a looser structure but incorporate a clear focus on one or more youth development activities (e.g., service learning).

Organizations\textsuperscript{15}: Organizations provide youth development opportunities in which a wide variety of activities and relationships occur that are designed to improve the well-being of children and youth. Examples include school-based afterschool recreation and co-curricular activities, parks and recreation centers and leagues, community centers, amateur sports leagues, faith-based youth development opportunities, and the myriad places and opportunities developed by community-based and national youth organizations (e.g., Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, YMCA, YWCA). These kinds of settings can mobilize a wide range of formal and informal youth development inputs.

Socializing Systems\textsuperscript{16}: Socializing systems are an array of complex and omnipresent systems intended to enhance processes and outcomes consonant with youth development principles. These include schools, families, neighborhoods, religious institutions, museums, and libraries.

\textsuperscript{13} "Positive Youth Development; Model Programs Guide", Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention: https://www.ojjdp.gov/mpg/litreviews/PositiveYouthDevelopment.pdf
\textsuperscript{14} Id.
\textsuperscript{15} Id.
\textsuperscript{16} Id.
Other Influencing Factors:

Early Childhood Development, Epigenetics, Impacts of White Supremacy, Mental Health Stigma & Support

4.2. Collaboration & Responsiveness within Systems

We recognize the profound work that is being done by caring family members and guardians, organizations, communities, and the young people themselves to overcome these barriers. We work alongside these systems in order to help fill gaps, and provide opportunity.

The strengths of systems that influence individuals are too often overlooked by organizations trying to do “good work”. Being aware of and working collaboratively within community systems creates programs that are relevant and assures they are needed and wanted by the community they working within. It leverages the crucial work that is already happening. It uplifts the strengths of individuals and their communities. It prioritizes the cultural knowledge of the young people and their communities. It essential to creating any thriving and relevant program model.

This prioritization of individuals and their communities is critical. It allows narratives of resiliency, strength, innovation, etc., to reside where within the community’s hands and not the organization’s “good work”.

The following quote is an excerpt from a speech by Alan Watts. It's a wittier summation of the impact of we have when we ignore the systems we exist within while spreading our “good intentions”:

“The road to hell is paved with good intentions. Because, all the “do-gooders” in the world, whether they are doing good for others, or doing it for themselves are trouble makers. On the basis of “kindly let me help you, or you will drown,” said the monkey putting the fish safely up a tree.” — Alan Watts

5. PROGRAM MODEL OVERVIEW:

MVM’s programs were established while working with young people who had experienced acute trauma(s) and were receiving mental health and behavioral treatment. Our programs are built upon a trauma-informed approach. Not all the young people MVM currently works with have experienced extreme trauma and significant mental health and behavioral challenges. However, building programs and policies with the aim of supporting our most impacted young people establishes programs that lift everyone up regardless of their past or current experiences.

So while much of the language we use in describing our program model focusses on countering the effects of trauma, the implication is universal and impacts all individuals.

18 Alan Watts, “How to Get Out of Your Own Way”
5.1. Using Popular Music in Youth Development and Trauma Recovery

“Of all the things trauma takes away from us, the worst is our willingness, or even our ability, to be vulnerable – Brené Brown

To paraphrase: trauma = The loss of the ability to be vulnerable.

Using this definition of trauma easily illustrates how MVM’s programs counter the effect of trauma (the loss of vulnerability). We do this in four primary ways:

My Voice Music Works Against the Impact of Trauma

My Voice Music believes that all people, regardless of whether they identify with it or not, experience trauma in their life to some degree.

Recognizing that one of the most significant impacts of trauma is the inability to be vulnerable and that a lack of vulnerability can have on individuals, My Voice Music’s songwriting, recording and performance based programs focus on 5 primary interventions to counter the effect of trauma: Modeling vulnerability; Strengths Based Approach; Normalizing failure as necessary part of the creative process; long-term mentorship; empowerment through voice and choice.

Modeling Vulnerability:

Our teachers are songwriters and musicians. They understand the vulnerability it takes to show up daily as an artist. They model this process as they work alongside students. They don’t simply encourage young people to be vulnerable, they take the first risks and inspire others to follow in that journey.

https://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_on_vulnerability
Strength-based approach:

As young people try on vulnerability, be it through trying a new instrument, singing in front of a group, recording, performing their music, or simply coming into a group environment and sitting on the couch and observing, this gives us an opportunity to identify real strengths they reveal.

A strength based approach begins with the acknowledgement of each person’s unique gifts and potentials. It asks for consent before beginning a relationship that is established on setting and pursuing goals and providing support throughout the process. Key elements include:

- goal-setting;
- establishing agreements of communication and interacting with one another;
- holding individuals capable and able to accomplish their goals and providing support;
- Facilitating conversations that help individuals reflect on the impacts of decision making;
- Remaining flexible to adjust goals, provide additional support.

Acknowledging strengths goes beyond statements like “you are so great”, “your so talented”, etc. Instead we focus on tangible strengths that show up as young people “try on” vulnerability.

We try to acknowledge three elements of impact if possible and when appropriate:

- What did you see;
- What was the impact you witnessed on the group, or the individual when they did the thing you witnessed;
- If they continue to exercise that type of behavior or share that part of themselves with others what kind of impact could that have on the broader community.

20 Mindset: The new psychology of success, Carol S. Dweck, Ph.D
21 Adequate support is responsive, not prescribed in advance. It could be: free access to lessons; additional mentorship hours; providing bus passes; providing paid job and job training opportunities; sponsoring additional third-party trainings as needed; working alongside family and guardians; connecting youth with social workers, etc.
A very simple example of recognizing a strength, naming it, and then sharing it’s impact (and future potential impact on community) might look like this:

“John, the patience you just had in our jam session while Jacob learned the part over and over was remarkable. That kind of collaborative attitude and willingness to support others is what makes this group so special. We get some great music written in hear! I’m sure that patient and supportive part of you must show up outside of My Voice Music. To the extent that it does, you are having the same impact in your community. – we need more people like you in this world!”

This reflects the real impact a person has had - on us as individuals/facilitators and on the group we are a part of…sometimes (as in the example above), it’s helpful if we help visualize what the impact of that type behavior could be if it were internalized by the young person and/or if it were shared with world at large (what if everyone acted like you in that situation? Imagine what the world could look like then?).

- Another way to facilitate this type of reflection is asking questions that help people create their own reflections on their individual impacts individually and in the world. People learn best and remember the most when they make their own connections to information vs. having it told to them.

Strengths Based work does not end with affirmations and it is not necessarily “warm and fuzzy” feel-good work. It requires authentic conversations that acknowledge the impact of decisions that may work against an individual’s goals too. It requires the facilitator and young person to be willing to engage in bold conversation and “collaboratively problem solve” with them. This approach holds every person capable and able. It requires that we have fearless conversations (as Brene Brown would say) to help facilitate growth when young people may be “off-track”.

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23 “Limitless Mind: Learn, lead and live without barriers”, Jo Boaler
Normalize challenges, taking risks; “failure as part of creative process”.

“It’s not the note you play that’s the wrong note – it’s the note you play afterwards that makes it right or wrong.” Myles Davis

The pursuit of art requires risk taking and “failure”. Navigating life requires these things too. Music and songwriting in a safe environment is a way to try and fail, and try again. Ultimately normalizing “failure” as a part of the creative process. If we can learn to not worry about the note we hit, but how to hit the next note, we are beginning to develop resiliency – in music and life. We are literally rewiring the neural pathways in our brain to become less stimulated by what is ultimately, the shame of failure and more capable of seeing the potential of trial and error so-to-speak.24

Long-term Artistic Mentorship

Through the arts, through vulnerability we are revealing our common humanity to each other. As we share this process with the young people we serve relationship is built. Trust is established. This allows My Voice Music to walk alongside young people providing support to them whether it is their darkest hour, or it is sharing excitement with them during significant triumphs (and all the stuff in-between).25

Empowerment through choice and voice.

MVM students shape our organization on a daily basis in the form of check-ins before and after lessons. At the beginning students share how they feeling, as well as state their goals for the day and if they need any help from the group/facilitator. At the end of each session students report on the progress made, barriers to the process, and what they would like from the next session. At the close of each quarter, evaluation forms are filled out by students anonymously and reviewed by program staff.

24 “The Body Keeps the Score”: Brain, Mind, and Body In the Healing of Trauma. Bessel Van Der Kolk, M.D.
25 “See Create Long-Term Mentoring Relationships”
Responsive Programming

Every program we run out of MVM Studios was inspired by a student’s expressed interest. The entire concept of MVM Studios (a place for students to come to year-after-year regardless of institutional affiliation or school affiliation) was the result of a call from a parent who wanted to keep her daughter engaged with MVM after discharging from the hospital where she had come into contact with our program.

Investment in Future Leadership

MVM students are members of our Transitions program committee helping to shape this new program and our Diversity, Equity & Inclusion committee. They become the teachers at our rock camps. Some get hired to work year-round as instructors alongside more experienced teachers and lead their own programs. For the past four years our Summer Camp Directors have been previous participants of our programs.

In 2019, 10% of MVM’s annual budget was spent on the leadership development of youth interns through wages and stipends for teaching, video and music production and performances, and sending them to intensive facilitation trainings.

Don’t Overthink It: “It’s Only Rock n Roll”

The above “interventions” occur through the simple pursuit of Rock n Roll, Hip Hop, Songwriting, Production and the Creative Journey. The musicians journey, in and of itself, creates these opportunities. It’s simple. 26

26 Developing Resilience; Overcoming and Growing From Setbacks, Mindtools.com:: https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/resilience.htm
5.2. MVM PROGRAM MODEL

MY VOICE MUSIC PROGRAM MODEL

Write. Record. Release.

Therapeutic Music Programs
Accredited Songwriting & Recording Classes
Specialized Groups Designed for Partners

Community Outreach

Classes & Drop-In Music Center Open to the Public
Classes offered on sliding scale, no one is ever turned away due to financial reasons. 85% of students receive full scholarships to attend. Program goals are developed in collaboration with students who help to guide the direction of each class while ultimately focusing on writing, recording, and performing songs. Rock Camps are provided for free to youth in foster care.

MVM Studios
A professional recording studio and performance space for songwriters, bands and musicians up to 24 years old located in East Portland. Aspiring artists can record their music, attend publishing & licensing workshops, release their music digitally and have their music promoted on MVM Studios website.

Music as Therapy
Music & Songwriting programs help youth to cope and heal who are facing: mental health crisis; recovering from abuse; sex trafficking; living in foster care, and jail; seeking refugee status; among other situations. These programs serve over 1,000 young people each year.

Artist Mentorship Program (AMP)
Long-term, multi-year mentorship through the arts. Any aspiring student attending MVM programs can join AMP. Many AMP students perform at major venues, collaborate with prominent Portland musicians, speak publically about their music and story; using art for social change. They can become paid interns teaching at MVM classes; gaining leadership and job training and experience.

Sharing our voice through songwriting and performance, providing opportunities to reveal to each other our common humanity, building relationship through story, fostering connection and transformation.

27 View a larger version at My Voice Music’s website: http://myvoicemusic.org/history/
5.3. THEORY OF CHANGE

YOUNG PEOPLE have a desire to express themselves creatively; unknown and untapped potential; a need for community, guidance, creative outlets, access, and opportunity

They ATTEND MVM PROGRAMS: music programs; mentorship; performance opportunities; a place to find community, share their voice and be heard

Where they DEVELOP SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SKILLS: Youth collaborate as they: develop new musical and expressive skills; write, record, and perform songs; set and accomplish goals

And GAIN COMMUNITY AND SELF ESTEEM: Youth gain skills that help to: create healthy relationships; develop perseverance; express themselves creatively; overcome challenges; increase resiliency; make positive change

Which RESULTS IN SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION: The opportunities and relationships found at MVM help youth enter adulthood able to develop and maintain healthy relationships, overcome obstacles, and have the tools to create a fulfilled life.
6. PROGRAM METHODOLOGIES & INFORMED PRACTICES

My Voice Music’s Programs are like an iceberg. Music programming represents the part of the iceberg that can be seen above water. Resting beneath the water unseen is My Voice Music’s guiding principles, program methodologies, and a significant amount of research. Providing young people with opportunities that promote creative expression through the arts, and that foster long-term mentoring relationships with adults promotes personal growth and changes lives.

6.1. THE MY VOICE MUSIC ASSUMPTION:

Our model is based on the assumption that youth thrive when they have the opportunity to be seen for their best and not simply for their challenges, and that;

- Music is able to connect with people in a unique and universal manner.

- Music helps people access and express emotions, as well as create community.

- Music experiences can be used to help youth develop social and emotional skills - essential life-skills used to create positive relationships, cope with difficult circumstances, and develop resiliency.

- Goal setting and working toward goals helps individuals take pride in themselves and their work.

- Once someone learns to play music, they have a positive way to develop friendships and express emotions no matter where they go. (very significant to youth in foster care, residential treatment, experiencing homelessness and other transient situations)
6.2. FOCUSS ON PRIMARY AND SECONDARY IMPACTS OF ARTS EDUCATION:

Growth Mindset

The term Growth Mindset – was coined by the psychologist, Dr. Carol S. Dweck in her seminal book, “Mindset, The New Psychology of Success” based on her research of students’ responses to failure.

The Growth Mindset is often mis-interpreted as a “bootstrap” philosophy where a person just has to work harder and believe in themselves more in order to reach achievement. It is not that. So I want to start with what the Growth Mindset isn’t. According to Dr. Kendra Coates, Director of Mindset and Social and Emotional Learning, Growth Mindset is not:

- Analogous to our own strengths and growth mindsets
- Praising effort (this can reinforce growth mindset, but it is not)
- Saying, “you can do anything”.
- Exclusively “Growth” or “Fixed” mindset
- “Bootstrap” mentality
- Positive Thinking
- High expectations,
- Good intentions and being inclusive
- “Effort Based”: praise as a consolation prize when learning is not happening

Growth Mindset is:

“qualities, abilities, skills, talents, etc., can be developed.”

Growth Mindset looks like:

“honesty, learning, goal oriented”

28 Mindset: The new psychology of success, Carol S. Dweck, Ph.D
29 https://blog.mindsetworks.com/blogger/coatesk
Recent advances in neuroscience reinforce Dweck’s initial research. “Research on brain plasticity has shown how connectivity between neurons can change with experience. With practice, neural networks grow new connections, strengthen existing ones, and build insulation that speeds transmission of impulses. These neuroscientific discoveries have shown us that we can increase our neural growth by the actions we take, such as using good strategies, asking questions, practicing, and following good nutrition and sleep habits.”

**Key Points of Growth Mindset:**

- intelligence and talents can be developed
- mistakes are an essential part of learning
- failures are learning opportunities, not fixed personal traits
- embraces challenges
- struggle as ability to learn
- seeks and welcomes feedback from others in order to learn
- mistakes + failures = opportunities to learn and grow

### 6.3. TRAUMA INFORMED + GROWTH MINDSET = MVM PHILOSOPHY

My Voice Music’s programs are rooted in the combination of two philosophies: a Trauma Informed Approach and Growth Mindset.

Briefly, these two core philosophies mean that we acknowledge every person is showing up to MVM at a different place in their life. We share in the joy of a finished album with the same intention as when we sit silently with a young person who is in pain. We are seeking ways to share authentic moments that reveal our common humanity to one another. And as we begin to authentically engage with young people, we can begin to reflect the brilliance, the strength, the resilience, the patience, the bravery that they may reveal to us.

Even more succinctly: We are seeking moments through music to acknowledge our shared humanity that are separate from any future goal. While simultaneously sharing the profound strengths that exist within each one of us that have the capacity to be transformative if we want them to be. And choosing to walk alongside one another regardless of intentions.

“Don’t walk behind me: I may not lead. Don’t walk in front of me: I may not follow. Just walk beside me and be my friend.” – Albert Camus

Story: “Finding the Beginning of Healing.”

Here is a short story that illustrates what the impact of both of a Trauma Informed Approach and the Growth Mindset can look like at My Voice Music – in a very short amount of time. From MVM Founder/Director, Ian:

“Year’s ago, when MVM was just getting started, for reasons that would take too long to explain, I found myself sitting in the corner of a hallway within a facility where a teenager, larger than myself, was pacing back and forth, screaming at everyone and no one at the same time, while he pounded on walls and begged for staff come out and fight him. Every night since arriving in the institution had been like this.

And there I sat in the corner…playing my guitar softly with him on the other side of the hallway. After a while he noticed me. As he walked over to me, his shoulders dropped a little and his body didn’t seem quite as rigid. We began talking about music and we decided to write a song together. That night, together, we wrote and recorded a song called, “Fuck You”.

It was directed at most, if not, everyone around him. It summed up the situation he was in. It was real. As we wrote the song together, me on guitar and vocals, him writing lyrics and guiding the direction of the song, he shared parts of his story with me. But mostly, we talked music, favorite bands, and laughed as we wrote music together. It was a powerful experience for me: being able to reflect his story back to him in song form without pretense or assumption. Just writing a pop tune from personal experience…as Bono, the singer of U2, says “All I got is a red guitar, three chords and the truth”. I thanked him for sharing that time to write music with me.

When I returned a week later this young man had not been violent since our songwriting session. He had written countless poems himself, and was running poetry workshops for the young kids on his unit.

It took one opportunity for this young man to find something inside himself that transformed him. A moment where he was not being “treated” or “fixed”. In fact, as
we worked on this song of resistance together called, “Fuck You” (in case you forgot the title) we laughed most of the time as we thought of what the myriad of staff would think of the song - the treatment counselors and therapists, the nurses and doctors. All the while I challenged him to keep thinking and coming up with lyrics as quickly as he could. A natural and unanticipated “challenge” to work through based on the fact I would have to leave soon.

Coincidently, I ran into him six months later. He approached me with a big smile on his face. He told me he was still writing poetry and songs. He had been discharged from the mental health facility and was living in a foster care home.

It took one moment of being heard and seen, for that young man to find the beginning of healing.”

Reflection: Where does a Trauma Informed Approach Show Up?

- I did not assume that the young man should not be upset – or that being upset was the problem.
- I didn’t ask him what was wrong or how I could “help” upon entering the hallway.
- Almost immediately, I sat down against a wall so that I appeared smaller than him, not wanting to appear threatening or confrontational.
- While I was playing guitar, I was playing at an almost imperceptible volume at first because I felt the hallway was his space at that moment – I believe it was the only place he had a feeling of control over anything at that moment.
- I didn’t worry about other care workers thinking I was weird, or acting in an unprofessional manner.
- I sat without engaging him until he began to calm down… and it didn’t take too long. I believe the novelty of random person showing up out of nowhere playing guitar in the midst of an emotional crisis was an opportunity for a “reset” to occur.
  - This “out of the blue” type of experience in the midst of crisis can be helpful in naturally helping people reset their emotional regulation. An extreme example of this took place in my twenties, while working with youth inside treatment centers. On more than one occasion, I intentionally tripped fell to the ground as a young person was escalating – prior to crisis. The complete and utterly ridiculous turn of events would frequently disrupt the perseverative cycle that leads toward uncontrollable emotional regulation and, frequently in that
environment, violent and dangerous situations. The natural shift of energy provides an non-typical opportunity for the individual reset their emotional regulation.

Reflection: Where does Growth Mindset show up in the story?

Even though the entire experience was no more than two hours this young man and I were able to embark on a rapid journey with some major challenges to overcome. Some of these may seem trivial but they aren’t.

- Once he had calmed down and we decided to write a song together, we had to leave the hallway we sat in and find a private room to write and play music in. We also needed an extra staff person to come with us because I was not allowed to be one on one with him. Him and I had to sit in the hallway for nearly a half an hour as a room was found and an extra staff person was made available. Our first challenge. His first opportunity to show that he was invested in writing a song and was willing to sacrifice (time) in order to do it.
- We had to actually write a song together from scratch.
- He had to write lyrics quickly – he didn't have time to get stuck on re-write after re-write
- He had to communicate his ideas to me
- He asked for my feedback and was excited both when I was encouraging and when I lightly suggested another direction for an idea.
- He accepted my recommendations to tweak the way certain things were said in order fit them into the rhythm of the song
- We didn’t have any recording gear so we had to create a recording device out of a Walkman cassette player – using it’s headphones as a microphone. – another opportunity to think creatively together as we experienced a setback.
- While recording the song we had to do it in one take. We practiced over and over, sharing feedback, critically looking at challenging parts, changing them if they were slowing us down too much, and ultimately recording the entire song in one pass.

Compare these bullet points with the ones describing Growth Mindset. They line up completely. In my experience stories like this are rare. However, they are frequent when considering how remarkable they are. Simple moments that hold a person’s place, their story, above their behaviors, combined with writing music together have the potential to be
transformative - in a second. Not a cure-all, but beginning of a journey that is guided by glimpses of hope which over time become more and more visible. Perhaps never fully visible and certainly not visible all the time, but hopefully visible enough to re-enforce our bodies own healing power when we need it.

**Skills Learned at MVM Programs Translate Into the “Real World”**

My Voice Music uses creativity to help youth reframe negative self-image, quantify real gifts, and guide youth when they get off track. We hope these concepts translate to other areas of youth’s lives...indeed we have witnessed the transformation that occurs when these concepts are adopted by our students. And while My Voice Music’s groups are not for every young person, nor is music is a “cure-all” for youth facing challenges, for some this process is transformative.

**Creative Expression In A Safe, Supportive Peer Environment:**

Research shows that creative expression—in a supportive setting—nurtures qualities like empathy, teamwork, and problem solving, while also fostering joy, hope, and the desire for a meaningful life.31

When young people have a place where caring relationships are provided and relationship skills can be honed, they build a strong foundation of safety and trust. Studies show that “increased feelings of safety and trust result in more cooperation, less conflict, and fewer verbal ‘put-downs’ in classroom settings.”32 Young people are more sensitive to the needs of others, and empathy increases when surrounded by a safe supportive environment.

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Essential Skills Learned Through Experiential Learning In The Arts;

All MVM programs center around writing, recording and performing music. This program focus is intentional, requiring the activation of critical skills that correspond with “skills seen as important in academic and life success”. According to research published by the Washington Post by Lisa Phillips PhD, “Top 10 Skills Children Learn from the Arts”, youth learn:

- Creativity
- Confidence
- Problem Solving
- Perseverance
- Focus
- Non-Verbal Communication
- Receiving Constructive Feedback
- Collaboration
- Dedication
- Accountability

Just learning to play an instrument takes all of these skills to be successful. And it is not difficult to imagine how writing a song, jamming with a band, producing beats, writing bars and performing takes creativity, confidence, problem solving, etc., down the entire list.

What is critical to MVM’s program model, that makes it so impactful, is the process. It takes creativity and confidence (bravery) to bring an idea into existence and then share with others. However, it is not enough to share an idea, students are asked to actually create their idea in a collaborative process with their peers. Then, after they have created the initial draft of their song, they get constructive feedback on it, and they refine it if need be. Ultimately, once it is ready, they are asked to share their work with an audience.

This process of bringing an idea into reality through study, perseverance, refinement, collaboration, and problem solving, then working with peers to refine it and receive constructive feedback, then showcasing the creation to an audience in a final

representation of accountability and dedication to the process is a microcosm of what it takes to thrive in the world social/academically, professionally, socially and otherwise.

Create Long-Term Mentoring Relationships

According to the Center For Abuse Prevention: “resilient youth who transition from risk-filled backgrounds…are consistently distinguished by the presence of a caring adult in their life.”

MVM places provides long-term artistic mentorships that facilitate strong relationships over time to any young person who shows a desire to attend classes, lessons, and/or recording sessions on a regular basis regardless of their musical proficiency.

Long-term trusting relationships allow MVM to provide significant guidance and connect our young people to important resources. Whether it is connecting young people to mental health service providers, educational tutors, or helping them create their artistic bio and artist website so they can get performance opportunities (often, all of the above apply), MVM’s mentorships provide an opportunity to highlight and reflect back to young artists the gifts that they reveal to the us and the world all the time. Likewise, we sit with them as they may be struggling and we acknowledge our shared humanity together on this journey.

Home doesn’t feel like home. And it definitely didn’t where I was raised... This program has affected me a lot. I feel way more open with people. I’ve never really had a friend, so coming here was really nice. Definitely an accomplishment was the Mississippi Studios [showcase that happens every December]. It was the first time that I had sung a song that I wrote, called “The Way that you Left Me” and it was a very emotional song! It was definitely really, really hard, but I did it. I got through it. My Voice Music is very loving to me. I hadn’t experienced that a lot. Here was definitely the best place for me. —Mack, Transition Age Student (18-20 years old), with MVM for 5 years

35 Policy Brief: Strengthening Mentoring Opportunities for At-Risk Youth, Portland State University, School of Social Work, pg. 1: https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=1079&context=socwork_fac
Why Mentorship?

“Powerful evidence in psychology and neuroscience shows that human connection is tied to our ability to thrive and succeed, yet the nation is increasingly disconnected from family, friends, neighbors, and democratic structures — with consequences to individuals, communities, and society.

Children, in particular, can suffer the effects of this isolation, including by the impacts of “toxic stress” created by poverty especially when they do not have a relationship with an adult who can help them feel safe and emotionally connected.

Mentoring can provide powerful connections to decrease these stressors, and improve connections.” - The Mentoring Effect

Responsive Programming; Young Voices Inform Organizational Change

MVM students shape our organization on a daily basis in the form of check-ins before and after programs. At the beginning of each program students share how they are feeling, as well as state their goals for the day. At the end of each session students report on the progress made, barriers to the process, and what they would like from the next session. At the close of each quarter evaluation forms are filled out by students anonymously and reviewed by program staff.

Every program we run out of MVM Studios was inspired by a student’s expressed need and/or desire. The entire concept of MVM Studios (a place for students to come to year-after-year regardless of institutional or school affiliation) was the result of a call from a parent who wanted to keep her daughter engaged with MVM after discharging from the hospital where she originally experienced MVM programs.

In fact this new drop-in program was inspired by and designed, in part, based on our response to student requests for more time in the studio and a less-structured format where they can work collaboratively with peers and have access to MVM teaching artists as needed during after school hours.

In addition to MVM students helping to guide and structure programs, students earn stipends as participants in our Diversity, Equity & Inclusion group (described earlier). Input from the students we serve is integral to MVM’s impact. We honor and seek their voice to guide programs.
6.4. THERAPEUTIC VALUES OF MUSIC

Fostering Physiological Effects and Behavioral Coping Mechanisms To Deal With Trauma;

The use of music in therapeutic settings facilitates:

- Non-verbal outlets for emotions associated with traumatic experiences
- Anxiety and stress reduction
- Positive changes in mood and emotional states
- Active and positive participant involvement in treatment
- Enhanced feelings of control, confidence, and empowerment
- Positive physiological changes, such as lower blood pressure, reduced heart rate, and relaxed muscle tension"38

"The performance of music elevates pain threshold and positive affect by releasing endorphins."39

Simply listening to music releases dopamine and serotonin, neurotransmitters in the brain that are associated with feelings of pleasure and alertness, euphoria and contentment.40

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38 American Music Therapy Association, Inc. MUSIC THERAPY IN RESPONSE TO CRISIS AND TRAUMA, Pg.1: https://www.musictherapy.org/assets/1/7/MT_Crisis_2006.pdf
40 Slate Magazine, "Ode to Joy: Join a choir. Science shows it'll make you feel better", Stacy Horn: http://www.slate.com/articles/life/culturebox/2013/07/singing_in_a_choir_research_shows_it_increases_happiness.html
Normalized Interventions Within Hyper-Therapized Environments

The use of music, and popular music in particular, in hyper-therapized environments creates relevant opportunities for young people to engage with peers and adults and express themselves, in a “normalized” manner. In fact, providing normalized activities in institutions such as psychiatric facilities, frequently enhances therapeutic outcomes and actively works against re-traumatization; primarily through creating opportunities for personal connection that is not centered on how a person has been “labeled” by one’s diagnosis, and by providing agency over how, if and when personal stories are shared.

“During My Voice Music classes I, and other psychologists, educators, and professionals witnessed astonishing things happen: the students were getting along, the residential units they lived in saw a reduction in number of physical restraints, a surge in students creativity and flexibility, and the development of new, reality-tested and sustainable coping skills… My Voice Music’s programs tap into therapeutic approaches such as Dialectical Behavior Therapy and Cognitive Behavioral Strategies, by coaching youth to use all of their senses to perceive their environment and make sound decisions based on well thought out opinions and decisions.” – Kelly Blixhaven, Licensed professional counselor; Manager, Albertina Kerr Centers, Day Treatment Program

By simply focusing on writing, recording and releasing music with hurting young people, we give them a chance to not be seen for their challenges, but to be seen as individuals: individuals with powerful gifts; with meaningful stories; with great humor; with unbelievable resiliency and strength; with the ability to create change, first in their own life, and then their communities.

41 See “PROVIDING NORMALCY FOR MARGINILIZED YOUTH” section within this document
42 American Counseling Association, Reach Depressed Youth Through Music Therapy, Peter Guerra
43 RETRAUMATIZATION CAUSED BY PSYCHIATRIC CARE INSTITUTIONS, Childhood Traum Recovery, David Hosier MSc: https://childhoodtraumarecovery.com/2017/07/05/retraumatization-caused-psychiatric-care-institutions/
Music Connects People. Physiologically and Emotionally

Interestingly, when choirs sing, their heart rates become synchronized, literally creating a communal experience.44

Comparative Study On The Methodology Used In MVM Therapeutic Music Programs

In a comparative study to determine the effects of focused group discussions, listening sessions and ultimately, the writing of popular music as a group (in a rock band setting) to support therapeutic interventions administered by Texas Tech University, the addition of music to therapeutic environment had significant impacts. The individuals assigned to the therapeutic group with music as part of the program dramatically improved self-concept and lowered depression. Outside factors such as grades, and school attendance also improved. A year later, the positive effects were still present, and researchers found that many members of the music group still got together after school.45

Additional take-a-ways from the study were that: “music closes the communication gap between the group facilitator and the adolescent group members. The researchers said that by getting the adolescents to talk about their favorite piece of music on a group level, they were able to bridge the gap between the adolescent's emotions and the expression of their grief.

And finally, the facilitator, Brett Hendricks, provided the following anecdote which reinforces a simple intention that MVM facilitators bring to therapeutic programs: to provide a positive moment during what could be one of the darkest periods of a young person's life. "The song was great….It made the youths contribute something tangible directly to the healing process that they were undergoing. It was something they could look back on and think 'that was a happy time.”46

45 American Counseling Association, Reach Depressed Youth Through Music Therapy, Peter Guerra
46 See id. 7
6.5. CLOSING THE OPPORTUNITY GAP

MVM provides full scholarships to all programs so no one is ever turned away due to financial reasons. Each year, approximately 85% of the young people who attend MVM programs do so on full scholarship.

MVM Partners with mental health treatment centers, juvenile detention centers, foster care providers, schools and other youth service organizations in order to identify and provide opportunities to young people who would have no other way to receive them and are desperately in need of support.

Programs are available to any aspiring young artist from the public at large as well. This provides a diverse set of life experiences to draw from at My Voice Music’s programs, and builds a community where everyone’s voice can be shared, heard, and celebrated.

In addition to providing one-time rock camps and songwriting workshops MVM’s Program Model is designed to develop long-term relationships with young people, walking with them, as they develop community, proficiency, and confidence and begin to see themselves not just as the recipients of services, but as being capable of providing service and value to others, and then giving them opportunities to become leaders in their communities.

What this looks like is a myriad of classes, workshops, studio recording sessions, outreach programs and summer camps that intend to foster the creative passion and direction of young people. Through the relationships built with young people in these programs over time, and as they develop, we provide major performance opportunities at some of Portland’s best venues with some of Portland’s most well-known musicians, speaking opportunities, leadership and job training, paid internships, and in some cases employment at MVM as Teaching Artists year-round and Summer Camp Band Leaders and Directors.
6.6. PROVIDING NORMALCY FOR MARGINILIZED YOUTH

“Normalcy” for youth means being able to do what is considered “routine” for many teenagers: participation in sports, teams, and clubs; attending choir and dance classes; volunteering; and spending time with friends…” 47

My Voice Music’s songwriting, recording and performance programs provide a “normalized” activity for young people; providing a safe place to creatively express themselves, take risks, create friendships, and develop “social capital” 48

These opportunities are especially critical for underserved populations of young people unable to participate in “normal” pursuits due to low socio-economic status, mental health and behavioral challenges, institutionalization, living in foster care, etc. “Normalizing the activities and opportunities of youth greatly expands the web of support youth can draw on. Correspondingly, prioritizing the development of connections for youth in care can improve their resilience and competency in many areas.” 49

“Because of the isolation from family, friends, and the home community that results when children are placed in residential facilities, many residents may attend only to the negative aspect of the constant supervision, continuous treatment, and feelings of failure or hopelessness for leading a “normal life”. The importance of increasing opportunities for enjoyable leisure activities (like music and songwriting) should be emphasized as part of the group curriculum given it’s potential for facilitating motivation, feelings of self-efficacy, a sense of normalcy, and hope…” 50

48 Social capital is the “value that is created by investing in relationships with others through processes of trust and reciprocity. Providing youth the opportunity to develop healthy and supportive relationships through community and other activities improves foster youths’ chances for permanency”
50 Handbook of Cognitive-Behavior Group Therapy with Children and Adolescents, pg. 171, Christner, Stewart & Freeman.
6.7. PROGRAMS OFFERED BY MVM:

Community Outreach Programs

We are not a therapeutic organization, but our Community Outreach programs bring music and songwriting as a way to cope, heal and thrive to 1,000’s of youth facing crisis, who are struggling, who desperately need to find hope, feel heard, be seen, to have something to live for.

In the twelve years since we started, MVM has worked in over 50 mental health treatment facilities, and juvenile and migrant detention centers. Our aim is to flip the script for young people in these facilities. While most adults they interact with see them as, or having, “problems” to be ‘fixed’ we see them as people with powerful stories to be told and gifts to be shared.

By simply focusing on writing, recording and releasing music with hurting young people, we give them a chance to not be seen for their challenges, but to be seen as individuals: individuals with powerful gifts; with meaningful stories; with great humor; with unbelievable resiliency and strength; with the ability to create change, first in their own life, and then their communities. This switch in perspective, and emphasis on strengths, helps counter the effects of trauma.

"The human soul doesn’t want to be advised or fixed or saved. It simply wants to be witnessed — to be seen, heard and companioned exactly as it is. When we make that kind of deep bow to the soul of a suffering person, our respect reinforces the soul’s healing resources, the only resources that can help the sufferer make it through." - Parker Palmer, PHD in Sociology, author, educator, activist, Founder of the Center for Courage
Community Outreach Partners:

My Voice Music staff and volunteers travel to organizations serving youth, and provide all the instruments and instruction needed in order to run experiential music groups. Drum circles and sing-along groups foster community and celebrate the intrinsic therapeutic aspects of music. More intensive rock band and hip hop camps teach youth to work together as they learn to play an instrument, write their own song, record it and perform it. We offer a variety of programs for a diverse set of program partners.

Many of our partners are listed below along with descriptions of what role they play in the youth care and juvenile justice system. This is not a comprehensive list and is meant to bring to life what are partnerships look like and who they serve.

Albertina Kerr:

SubAcute, Crisis Psychiatric Care: “The program serves children ages six to 18. The goals of the program are to stabilize children in crisis, provide effective mental health treatment and ultimately return the child to their home or a less intense level of care.”

Foster Care Agency: “Foster Care programs that serve children living with mental health and behavior challenges, fostering nurturing homes and community support.”

Intensive Based Community Care: “Intensive Community-Based Treatment serves children ages 3 to 17 who are at risk of being unable to stay in their home or in school due to a mental health condition. We look for ways the family can build connections within the community to develop long-term stability. The services include home-based individual and family therapy, skills training…”

Group Homes: “around-the-clock support and life skills training for youth ages 7 to 18 with developmental disabilities and mental health challenges that require specialized care and treatment.”

Morrison Child And Family:
Refugee Resettlement: "...provides a safe and appropriate environment for undocumented/unaccompanied children and youth...mostly from Mexico, Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala fleeing poverty and regional violence... from the time they are placed in custody until their reunification with family members or sponsors in the U.S. or until they are returned to their home country by immigration officials."51 Youth are detained at Donald E. Long Juvenile Detention Center in Secure Residential Facilities, and in foster homes...more than 57,000 youth were detained (nationally) since between Jan. 1, 2014 & July 7, 2014 (when the article was published)52

Downtown Shelter (Spanish Speaking, secure facility): Young people who are undocumented/unaccompanied living in Secure Residential Facilities seeking refugee status. We run programs inside the facility, and invite interested youth to our studio to record.

Paso (Spanish Speaking, locked facility): Young People who are undocumented/unaccompanied, who have previously been adjudicated in a juvenile court. These young people are held inside Donald. E. Long Juvenile Detention Center. They are males between 13 – 17 years old.

Sage (secure facility): "provides long-term stabilization for survivors of commercial sexual exploitation (CSEC). Both during their exploitation and prior to it, many of these youth have experienced multiple environmental, social, and biological traumas. This may include sexual abuse, parental neglect and/or abuse, alcohol/drug dependency or abuse, school failure, and high levels of emotional vulnerability. Our SAGE program serves vulnerable youth in the CSEC population by providing a safe and secure setting in which they can experience Support, Achieve their goals, Grow, and become Empowered."

Counterpoint (Specialized Foster Care): “Counterpoint Day Treatment program provides intensive, comprehensive treatment services for boys who have experienced trauma and abuse and who have sexually acted out… Services are provided year-round and youth attend a full day of programming within a therapeutic milieu at an on-site accredited school… We use foster homes, specialized in treating each boy’s specific needs…”

Breakthrough (Specialized Foster Care): “Program combines alcohol and drug abuse treatment, mental health treatment, skill development, education, and mentoring in therapeutic foster home for adolescents who have histories of trauma and drug and/or alcohol abuse. In many cases, the youth also have a history of truancy and gang associations, that resulted in serious trauma. We use foster homes, specialized in treating each boy’s specific needs…”

Trillium Family Services (18 – 24 month Residential program, “State Hospital”): “Secure Inpatient care is designed for children and adolescents who need longer term support and intense therapy services. Trillium is the only provider of Secure Inpatient treatment for children and adolescents in Oregon. This service is considered to be a state hospital level of care and therefore all referrals must come through the state’s Health Systems Division.”

Friends of the Children: We provide a salaried, professional mentor, called a Friend, for their entire childhood, from kindergarten through graduation… We select children facing the highest risks (60% have parents who did not graduate high school. 50% of our youth have parents who were incarcerated. 85% of our youth were born to a teen parent)…

Winter Haven K-8: A Public School on SE 14th and Bush (S. of Powell 10 blocks) where the majority of our middle school students who’s families can afford full tuition attend. We have run on-site programs for their elementary and middle school elective classes, as well as their drama dept. We view this partnership both as a way to bring songwriting & recording opportunities to young students in schools, and as marketing and recruitment tool to drive more students, and in large part, earned revenue to MVM Studios programs.
The Dougy Center: The Dougy Center provides support in a safe place where children, teens, young adults, and their families grieving a death can share their experiences. Through our Pathways Program we provide a safe place for families facing an advanced serious illness. – We provide songwriting & recording groups for their “Recording Resilience” movie-making project to help them create a sound track to the movies.

Pickathon: 3-day eco/kid-friendly music festival at Pendarvis Farm. We run music workshops in the kids music tent all weekend.

Pdxpopnow!: We run an annual, one day “music in the schools” experiential class on collaborative music creation. Also, our students have been able to perform at the pdxpopnow! festival.

Oregon DHS, Foster Care Division: “Foster care is a temporary living arrangement for children who need a safe place to live when their parents or guardians cannot safely take care of them. Most children are in foster care because of a history of abuse or neglect.”

Multnomah County, Department of Human Justice: A treatment Program for Youth on Probation

Camp Erin: “Camp Erin is the largest network of free bereavement camps in the country designed for children and teens ages 6-17 who have experienced the death of someone close to them… Camp Erin provides a unique opportunity for peer bonding between children and teens facing a similar life circumstance. Camp Erin is offered free to all families.”
MVM Studios; Providing Pathways to Artistic Mentorship:

At MVM Studios, is a music center and recording studio open to the youth ages 9 – 24 from the public on a sliding scale basis so that no one is turned away for financial reasons.

My Voice Music brings together a diverse group of young people from various cultural, ethnic, socio-economic backgrounds, who have, and are, experiencing very different life experiences. One example of the diversity of experiences our students arrive with shows up as a result of our recruitment practices. My Voice Music works with foster care providers and group homes to bring young people into MVM Studios classes for free. My Voice Music also works with local schools to recruit students from families who can afford to pay for classes, and in turn, fund our scholarships as part of MVM’s “Play It Forward” scholarship system.

Programs offered out of MVM Studios are designed to provide opportunities to connect with young people as fellow artists, collaborators, and capable individuals. All programs, whether an hour-long recording session, a week-long camp, or a 3 month class are provided with the aspiration of creating transformational moments through music and establishing long-term mentoring relationships with young people.

53 "MVM is committed to providing all youth with opportunities in music. The Play It Forward model is our way of making sure that happens. Our Play It Forward scholarship system means that when you pay for a lesson, you help someone else get a lesson. Or if you can’t afford classes or studio fees, call us anyway: http://myvoicemusic.org/play-it-forward/"
My Voice Music offers the below programs out of MVM Studios:

**Camps:** Our 5-day camps during school breaks introduce youth to MVM’s method. Camp participants write and record their own songs, in a style they like, and perform with a band of peers in a concert at the end of each camp. Camps are open to the public, but we place special emphasis on offering them to youth in foster care.

**Classes/Workshops:** Classes focus on specific skill building such as learning to play the guitar, studio engineering, or on a specific genre. Classes and workshops are always offered in response to students’ interests. For example, our emphasis is currently on studio recording, engineering and producing; in the genres of folk, rock, and hip hop. As students learn these skills, they begin to run aspects of our studio, record their own songs and those of their peers.

**Classes** teams groups of 4-6 youth with professional musicians for quarterly, weekly advanced musical study. They develop positive long-term artistic relationships with adults and peers. Students in these programs students have access to additional hours in the recording studio each month.

**One-on-One Lessons:** Some of the youth who are drawn to MVM are in need of more personal attention before they can handle the social and emotional dynamics of working with a group of peers. In keeping with our interest to serve youth who are facing emotional and behavioral crises, we offer these youth one-on-one attention as needed, as a step toward our group classes and mentorships.

In 2016, My Voice Music established a partnership with Berklee College of Music’s City Music Network. Berklee is a prominent music performance and production school in Boston that has created a network of 46 music programs throughout the United States committed to providing high caliber music instruction for at-risk youth. This partnership provides MVM instructions to Berklee’s on-line curriculum and provides students with the opportunity to earn scholarships to both Berklee’s 5 week intensive summer camps, and potentially, a full ride scholarship to the college.
Youth Leadership, Student Internship, Paid Job Experience: Leadership training offers our most dedicated teen students a chance to be role models for their younger peers and gain paid work experience during our Camps. They complete leadership training and receive a stipend to instruct their younger peers in our camps and classes. For many, this will be the first time an adult has told them that not only are they capable, they are needed in order to inspire the lives of other youth and create healthy, positive change through music. Youth Leaders are MVM’s ambassadors, They lead tours of MVM Studios, and speak and perform at regular public events.

Artist Mentorships Program (AMP): All of the above programs are points of engagement that we hope will light a spark in the life of a young person creating lasting passion for music, and/or provide significant opportunities for them to pursue an already established passion in order to foster relationship and long-term mentoring relationships.
7. ON THE HORIZON: 2020 -2023

In January, 2020, My Voice Music and our Founder and Executive Director, Ian Mouser, became one of three recipients of The Lewis Prize for Music Accelerator Award which includes a $500,000 contribution to the organization.

The Accelerator Award provides multi-year support to enable leaders and organizations to make sustained progress toward ambitious community change initiatives that align with The Lewis Prize for Music’s values and vision.

The Lewis Prize believes that music in the lives of young people is a catalytic force to drive positive change in our society and is committed in investing in leaders who are advancing positive change for young people through music.

With the Prize comes a $500,000 seed investment in My Voice Music. The Lewis Prize for Music, along with the continued support of foundations, businesses and individuals, will allow My Voice Music to embark on three major initiatives.

WHAT | MVM will build a new state-of-the-art Recording Studio and Music Center in East Portland.

WHY | East Portland has the most kids, from the most diverse backgrounds, with the least amount of resources provided in the city. MVM will move existing programs to East Portland and collaborate with community leaders and organizations to provide songwriting, recording, and performance groups, mentorship, and job opportunities to youth ages 8 – 24.

WHAT | MVM will pilot and support programs at mental health treatment facilities, juvenile justice facilities, migrant detention centers, and residential programs for survivors of trauma throughout the state.

WHY | MVM has designed programs that help youth in residential treatment programs to find and share their voice through songwriting and recording. Over the next three years we will expand this program across the state of Oregon. This initiative stands to have a critical impact on Oregon’s youth in crisis.

WHAT | The Lewis Prize will allow MVM to edit, design and publish a "Manualfesto" which will be available to teaching artists and organizations statewide, and eventually nationally and internationally.

WHY | Over the past ten years, we have developed, evaluated and refined a model for our Outreach Program. Publication and distribution of our "Manualfesto" has the potential to exponentially increase our impact over time.
Join with the Lewis Prize for Music and invest in MVM at this critical and exciting moment.

MAKE A DONATION AT MYVOICEMUSIC.ORG

Or contact us to learn how you, your business or your foundation can help make our big idea a reality. For more information, visit myvoicemusic.org/lewis-prize