

The Instrument Barn
Salisbury Wicomico Arts Council, Inc.

“Give children a gift of music, make a path for advantage and their lives will be tuned”

The Instrument Barn program seeks to facilitate the collection of unused instruments from Wicomico County residents and then re-distribute them to qualifying, low-income students. Every student should be entitled to music education despite his or her socio-economic status. Approximately 47% of all local public school attendees are below the poverty line standard. Therefore, almost half of our public school student demographic is unable to buy or rent an instrument and is not afforded the same level of accessibility and equality in their academic endeavors. According to Wicomico County’s Supervisor for the Arts, Mr. Gary Beauchamp, local instrumental music teachers work an average of 20 additional hours a week to fundraise for their respective programs. This constant pressure of fundraising outside of school is directly contributing to low teacher retention in the arts, as well as a significant strain in attracting talented and qualified teachers to the region.

Paramount to this project is the fact that student participation in the arts is not an issue of aesthetics, but rather of equality. Research shows that young people who participate in the arts for at least three days each week for one full year are: 4 times more likely to be recognized for academic achievement, 3 times more likely to be elected to class office, 4 times more likely to participate in a math or science fair, 3 times more likely to win an award for attendance, and 4 times more likely to win an award for writing an essay or poem. In addition, young arts participants as compared with their peers are likely to: read for pleasure nearly twice as often, participate in youth groups nearly four times as frequently, and perform community service twice as often.¹

The mission of the Salisbury Wicomico Arts Council is: “To enhance the quality of life in Wicomico County and the surrounding region by developing arts awareness through educational programs and community outreach, promoting artistic experiences for diverse ages and cultures, and facilitating communication among area artists and art organizations, thereby establishing our community as a vital cultural center.”

The Instrument Barn coalesces all three prongs of our mission statement into a singular project. To give an under-privileged child the gift of music will positively affect him or her in a way that will be of benefit to the entire community. This project will assist students of all races and ethnicities. At-risk students will be afforded the opportunity to participate in band/strings; an endeavor that requires practice, discipline and cooperation. This project may tangentially reduce Wicomico County’s achievement gap and reduce youth crime and gang activity by providing a positive, creative alternative in and outside of the classroom. As well, many of the students come from single-parent homes. Having a student participate in band may engage or further engage the single parent in their child’s life as they attend their son’s/daughter’s concerts and other band/string events. The social and behavioral impact of this project will be significant. Children aren’t seeking to be involved in gangs or drug addiction. What they are seeking is a sense of belonging. Participating in band gives a student that very opportunity in a safe, positive environment.

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¹ Dr. Shirley Heath for The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching

