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Metropolitan Youth Orchestra Benefits Students after Just One Year, Impact Study Finds

(February 24, 2020) — Today, the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra (ISO) publicly unveils the findings of an impact study on the Metropolitan Youth Orchestra presented by Roche (MYO), the ISO's long-standing youth and family development program. With financial support from the Glick Fund and the expertise of the researchers at Community Solutions, the ISO sought to answer the question, "is the Metropolitan Youth Orchestra program creating the impact we intend?" Now, the ISO is releasing their findings on the areas of greatest impact and opportunities for the future.

Founded in 1995 by Artistic Director Emeritus Betty Perry, MYO became a program of the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra in 2008. MYO currently serves 220 students and their families – developing not only musical skills, but life skills to support success after high school. The program is unique in the family development aspect, as a parent/guardian learns a string instrument alongside their student for the first several years. From community meals served at rehearsals to social events, volunteer opportunities, and more, MYO cultivates a culture of support for students and families who participate.

Community Solutions, an Indianapolis-based development and evaluation consulting firm, gathered insight on MYO through surveys, focus groups, and program data. Current and former MYO students and parents were surveyed, and focus groups were held for MYO staff, current students, and current parents. These surveys and focus groups allowed the team to collect information on the four main areas of focus in this study: retention, family impact, relationship to music, and post-MYO life.

Key findings in these areas include:

- Retention
 - Benefits of participation in the program are apparent after one year and grow over time, especially with long-term participation.
 - Student benefits include musical progression, making friends, learning valuable life skills, and a greater appreciation of music.
 - The two primary challenges to student retention are balancing MYO and other extracurriculars/responsibilities and a student's lack of confidence in their musical skill.
- Family Impact
 - MYO is a partner to parents in developing life skills: social, communication, self-confidence, and discipline.
 - MYO is welcoming and establishes a culturally responsive learning environment.
 - Families, regardless of background or financial means, feel supported and that they can access the benefits of MYO.
- Relationship to Music
 - MYO participants attend musical events more frequently.
 - Many participants and alumni continued or plan to continue playing music after leaving MYO.
- Post-MYO Life
 - MYO affords key opportunities that lead to interest in and access to post-secondary success.
 - As a result of their participation in MYO, students learn to develop important skills including discipline and perseverance, which can be applied to other areas of their lives and boost success after high school.

“We’ve always been able to observe the positive, supportive community that is built among MYO students, teachers and families,” said Beth Perdue Outland, ISO Vice President, Community Engagement & Strategic Innovation. “The study enabled by the Glick Fund helps us to achieve clarity on the impact of the elements that make our program unique. While we are particularly proud that the positive impact indicators are consistent across all of the demographic categories and are evident even after one year of participation, the study also helps us understand the barriers and challenges that still exist, so we can focus our energies effectively.”

The impact study also provided the ISO valuable perspective on areas of growth opportunity to focus on in the years to come. These include:

- Facilitating carpool or transportation support for families.
- Providing additional support and encouragement for students who are in middle school or elementary school and/or those who lack confidence in their musical skill, which are key points of vulnerability for students quitting MYO.
- Finding flexibility, when possible, with scheduling and attendance requirements to better support students and families as they try to balance MYO participation with other commitments.
- Working with students to help them figure out the best ways to balance MYO with other activities to ensure they stay engaged with MYO while still feeding their other interests.
- Exploring additional strategies to support whole-family participation in MYO or peer/mentor support when family participation is not possible.

This study immediately kindled a more deliberate approach to specific areas of engagement. Faculty and staff are identifying opportunities to support students in areas of vulnerability identified in the study. Parents have also stepped forward, finding avenues to encourage other parents in areas of challenge and continuing to build the MYO village of support.

“We are grateful to the Glick Fund which has allowed us to collect this valuable data that shows program impact,” said MYO Director Krystle Ford. “As we look to the future, this information will help us develop new opportunities for MYO students—expanding on their leadership and communication skills with the potential to have a greater voice within the program. This data will also allow us to launch new initiatives to identify current students who want to become future MYO teachers, and create professional development opportunities for other musicians in order to fully embody the values and philosophy of the program.”

For additional information on MYO, visit www.indianapolissymphony.org/education/myo. The full results of the impact study may be found [here](#).

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About the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra:

Under the leadership of Music Director Krzysztof Urbanski and Principal Pops Conductor Jack Everly, the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra has become a leading orchestra in the nation with its commitment to artistic excellence, diverse and creative programming inside and outside its historic Hilbert Circle Theatre home, its engagement with communities throughout the state of Indiana and its ambitious approaches to music education, performance and collaboration. In the decades since its founding in 1930, the ISO has presented a range of classical, pops, family and holiday programming to hundreds of thousands of people each year; received national and international acclaim with its radio broadcasts, tours and recordings; and became the first major orchestra with a resident ensemble.

The ISO continues to engage new audiences through innovative programming including the Fifth Third Bank Lunch Break Series of casual 45-minute performances each summer, the holiday traditions of the IPL Yuletide Celebration, the Stella Artois Happy Hour at the Symphony Series, and the popular Bank of America Film Series.