

# COMMUNITY STRING PROJECT

## WHERE PLAYING MEANS MAKING MUSIC

**D**id you ever want to learn to play the violin? Do you know a child who aches to play a string instrument? If you are fortunate enough to live in or near Rhode Island's Bristol-Warren school district, you may want to explore the Community String Project. Their mission is "to provide affordable and accessible string lessons, transforming lives through an innovative program."



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Community String Project (CSP) is a nonprofit organization founded in 2009 by Robert Arsenault, the then band director and chair of the Performing Arts department at Mt. Hope High School in Bristol. The high school had strong band and chorus programs but lacked comparable education in strings. Bethany Sousa, a former band member studying music education, offered to start a summer program giving

violin lessons. Thirty-three students responded. Over time, lessons in viola, cello, and bass followed, and the number of students enrolled grew to 100. CSP's founders wanted it to be as affordable and accessible as a public school program: any child from a lower income family who qualified for free and reduced lunch in the school district would receive free tuition, and they still do.

CSP celebrates its sixteenth anniversary in July. In those sixteen years, the program has expanded to take in adults who pay to learn an instrument. Their tuition helps to subsidize the children's lessons. CSP now offers three levels of string classes for adults, ensemble lessons, a youth orchestra program, and instruction in classical guitar. (Vicki Boyle, the Executive Director of CSP whom I interviewed for this article, is a classical guitarist.) The



organization maintains an inventory of instruments for students to rent. The instructors are accomplished musicians who range from retired educators to current college music majors. CSP is reaching out to surrounding towns, parochial and private schools, and home schooled children. They found that students who live within driving distance often lack the opportunity public school students have to take violin or other string instrument lessons.



I asked Vicki Boyle what she would like readers of this article to take away. Her response was, "that the program is available to all children." CSP continues to draw financial support from the community because the program has a proven rate of success. In addition to giving every child an opportunity to learn and play a string instrument and perform in an orchestra, CSP fosters a love of music, improved academic performance, and greater self-esteem. If you or a child you know would like more information on their programs or CSP's upcoming concerts in May, you can visit their website at [CommunityStringProject.org](http://CommunityStringProject.org).



Photos: courtesy of Community String Project