



WHEN A PASSION FOR MUSIC AND CHILDREN RESULTS IN TREMENDOUS GROWTH

Jody Hanet, executive director of Kids' Orchestra, stands in front of her office in downtown Baton Rouge, La.

HOW KIDS' ORCHESTRA GREW TO BECOME THE LARGEST CHILDREN'S AFTERSCHOOL MUSIC PROGRAM IN THE COUNTRY

Jody Hanet always knew her passion and love for children's choir was special, but what she didn't know was that her passion would allow her to lead one

of the fastest growing and largest children's afterschool music programs in the country, Kids' Orchestra. Over 825 students from kindergarten to fifth grade across Baton Rouge, Louisiana,

are enrolled in the program where they study an instrument, perform in an ensemble, and/or sing in a choir.

The mission of Kids' Orchestra is to impact children's lives by creating a sense of community through afterschool musical training and enrichment programs. Since its founding in 2011, Kids' Orchestra has adopted the philosophy that music education can positively change the life trajectory of children to effectively spark social change in Baton Rouge. Children from public, private, and charter schools from all geographic corners of the city come together every week during the school year to participate in music lessons.



"I have always been drawn to inclusion and what attracted me to Kids' Orchestra was its values in opening this program to all kids, not just kids with a certain socioeconomic status," said Hanet. "Our program brings children together from all backgrounds and allows them to build a relationship over a common interest—music. That's the sort of community we want to build."

Hanet was born and raised in Baton Rouge and attended Louisiana State University for her undergraduate degree in music education. She then went to Bank Street College in New York City and received her master's in educational leadership. While there, she was part of a grassroots movement to start a nonprofit school in New Jersey where they accepted children with learning disabilities and included them in the same classes as children without. After being away for 25 years, Hanet and her family returned home to Baton Rouge and took over the children's choir at St. James Episcopal Church.

At one of the performances, the founder of Kids' Orchestra introduced herself and said, "You're the Pied Piper! I need you to come work for Kids' Orchestra." At first, Hanet wasn't familiar with the program, but she went to one concert and saw the potential. "I could already

envision a theatre with a stage full of children." She knew she had the experience, the passion, and the drive to raise the bar. Today, she still laughs about that first interaction with the founder, "I was literally hired between those two church pews!"

When she began as the executive director of the program in 2013, it had four schools and 50 children enrolled. Hanet hit the ground running and researched schools that did not have any afterschool programs. She called them and said, "We will come to your school, we will provide transportation, we will help your kids with homework, we will feed them, we will provide the instruments, and we will put on the concert." Hanet impressively recruited 500 children that summer. Today, there are 26 schools and about 825 children enrolled.

The program recently received \$1.2 million dollars from the 21st Century Communication Learning Center federal grant to be used over the course of three years for underserved students. Kids' Orchestra has about 300 students who are eligible to participate in the program

through this grant. However, donations are still needed to grow the program.

"We want to be able to provide this program to any child who wants to be a part of it," said Hanet. "Unfortunately, we are now at full capacity. We use the donations to bring more children into the program, but we were only able to accept one additional school this year, and that's because they agreed to fund the program themselves."

When Hanet started working at Kids' Orchestra, there were only three full-time staff. Now there are ten full-time staff members and about 135 contract employees that are music teachers, site coordinators, tutors, math liaisons, and assistants. With the incredible growth throughout the years and large employee group, Hanet relies on LUBA Workers' Comp to make sure they are properly insured.

"Kids' Orchestra has been insured by LUBA since the beginning in 2011," said Hanet "They have been very helpful and supportive with answering questions throughout our growth." She recalls a time that LUBA truly shined as a partner.



Kids' Orchestra students playing in an ensemble in Baton Rouge, La.

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“We have some schools where we provide students transportation to our sites. LUBA reviewed our vendors and let us know that the bus company I hired did not have workers’ compensation coverage. We were shocked. These were precious little children on these buses and it was our duty to make sure they were safe. LUBA went above and beyond to help us through that problem and I know they will always be there with a watchful eye.”

When asked what Kids’ Orchestra has taught Hanet throughout the years, she

said that it made her very aware of how important it is to give back and support the community in which you live and work. “Nonprofits are here to help build a better community. In order to make our city a better place, our program focuses on the smallest citizens with hopes that they will grow up to be big, great citizens.”

To learn more about Kids’ Orchestra and their upcoming concert, visit www.kidsorchestra.org. 🎺