FOSTERING EXCELLENCE IN THE ARTS FOR ALL
The Salvation Army, an international movement, is an evangelical part of the universal Christian church. Its message is based on the Bible. Its ministry is motivated by the love of God. Its mission is to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to meet human needs in His name without discrimination.

**Organization Overview**

The Salvation Army originated from the Methodist faith in 1865 when William Booth, a London minister, was inspired to leave the confines of the pulpit to take his message into the streets reaching the poor, the homeless, the hungry and the destitute. He and his wife Catherine originally intended to send Christian converts to the established churches of the day. However, Victorian society did not warmly welcome the poor, shabbily dressed and unwashed people who came to worship. The rejection of the disenfranchised by social structures is what prompted the Booths to establish The Salvation Army to provide both spiritual and material service to all people, especially those in dire need.

Now, over 150 years later, The Salvation Army operates in 128 countries throughout the world, providing relief to those who need it the most. The Salvation Army’s Western Pennsylvania Division covers 28 counties including Beaver, with Worship & Service Centers in Aliquippa, Rochester and Beaver Falls. These centers offer comprehensive social services such as emergency food and shelter resources and utility and rent/mortgage payment assistance, and developmental, social and recreational and life skills programs for children & youth, seniors and adults.

**Music as a Means of Soul-Saving**

By the late 1800’s, The Salvation Army’s Founder William Booth knew he needed a novel way to help the people of London suffering from the woes of poverty, addiction and social inequity. He was so troubled by the fate of much of the working class -- who still went hungry and without basic needs, while in their desperation also turned to self-destructive behaviors like alcoholism -- Booth decided to literally “trumpet” the message of salvation.

Brass bands formed by blue-collar coal miners began the long and rich history of musical tradition and practice within The Salvation Army. Rehearsals with the band became more popular than revelry in the bars. Families with limited resources and little chance of experiencing the arts were provided with an instrument and a skill to hone for the glory of God.
Iyonna was introduced to the Beaver County Music School when her family was seeking assistance at Christmastime. Along with many of the traditional holiday meal trimmings and gifts, The Salvation Army offered her lessons on the horn to herald in the season.

The BCMS often serves as a point of initial contact to members of the community, bridging them to other Salvation Army programs, so needs are met holistically. That instrument and the experience of playing in the band connected Iyonna to the congregation, inspiring her to become a member.

The BCMS offers over 200 private/group lessons in brass, percussion, drama, piano, guitar, voice and choir each week to approximately 80 students from Beaver County.
The Beaver County area served by The Salvation Army shares so many striking similarities with the industrial roots of the music movement that originated in London so many years ago. Dotted with former steel mill riverfront communities, Beaver County has experienced the ongoing economic downturns, depopulation and lack of viable opportunities commonplace throughout the “rust belt.”

The struggles have been especially apparent in one of Beaver County’s main towns – Aliquippa. The town was so iconic and emblematic of boom-gone-bust, it was even exclusively spotlighted in a two-part photo journalism story in The Washington Post (November 2015) titled “The life and slow death of a former Pennsylvania steel town.”

This is Where The BCMS Was Born

The Salvation Army Aliquippa Worship & Service Center founded the Aliquippa School of Music and the Arts in 2010, through the inspiration and vision of Salvation Army Majors Daniel and Karen Alverio. The vision for the program was time-tested and simple enough: The Salvation Army in Aliquippa sought to develop a school of music promoting excellence in the arts, fostering community, and meeting human needs. With just a handful of children and a few “well-loved” instruments, the Majors began teaching beginning brass and music theory. In 2011, a generous donor stepped forward to provide new band instruments, dance wear, and funding to establish a dance program. By the summer of 2013, the program had grown to more than 60 students in the music program. In 2014, the School of Music was able to hire a full time director to expand the program further and take the school into the future.

The Aliquippa School of Music and Arts was open to students ages six to eighteen attending schools in and around Aliquippa, as well as the Rochester area. In addition to the musical and artistic training received by students, and the program’s commitment to meet the basic human needs of their students and families, the program has also always focused on leadership and personal development.

In 2015 the Aliquippa School of Music and the Arts implemented the Youth Leadership Development Program, which aims to develop leader and mentorship qualities in older students, preparing them for life after graduation from the program. As these students have matured in their musical and leadership abilities, they have transitioned into the role of teaching the beginning music classes. In this way, the students become committed stakeholders in the program. The presence of these additional volunteer teachers has also allowed the director to take on more students for private lessons. Students involved in the leadership program are not only leaders at The Salvation Army, but also in their communities, regularly receiving student honor awards and other community recognitions.

In 2016 the music program responded to the call of the local community and officially expanded into the Beaver Falls area. With this expansion the program was rebranded as The Beaver County Music School (BCMS) in order to better reflect all Beaver County communities served. In the fall of 2017, the program grew into the New Castle area, and the Western Region Youth Band and Chorus was formed. Just this year, the Regional Youth Band won first place at The Salvation Army Star Search competition, advancing to Hershey, PA, for the territorial competition. These select ensembles are open to any students in the service area and regularly perform at Salvation Army and community functions, local competitions and parades.
Jenaia has been a devoted baritone player with the Beaver County Music School for the past four years. She is a prime example of how determination can really pay off.

Two years ago, Jenaia auditioned and was accepted into a local performing arts middle school - propelling her from a student of one of the academically lowest ranked schools to enrollment in one of the very best in the area.

This opportunity has transformed her life - and brightened her future - in remarkable ways.

New BCMS students have consistently shown marked letter-grade improvements in math and reading, with some reaching honor roll status. Graduates of the program have gone on to enlist in the armed forces, enroll in college, and even pursue professional careers in the arts.
In Beaver County towns like Aliquippa, Beaver Falls and Rochester, where money is tight and opportunity is scare, exposure to the arts is often viewed as a luxury, not a vital part of youth education. And yet, it’s this demographic of disadvantaged youth from low-income families that stands to benefit the most from music and arts education. Researched benefits of arts education, specifically for children of low economic status, include:

- **Better Academic Outcomes**: Students with access to the arts in high school were three times more likely than students who lacked those experiences to earn a bachelor’s degree.

- **Higher Career Goals**: 50% of young adults of low socioeconomic status who had ample arts education anticipated work in a professional career, versus just 21% of their low-socioeconomic peers with little arts education.

- **More Civic Engagement**: Low-socioeconomic students with high exposure to the arts were shown to be 47% more likely to volunteer and 45% more likely to participate in political elections compared to their peers experiencing limited arts exposure.¹

The Salvation Army Beaver County Music School is filling the widening arts gap present in mainstream public education. For example, despite the fact that Aliquippa embraces high school football, the accompanying school district band section has remained relatively small. Whereas the school district band program begins at the fifth grade level and meets just once a week, The Salvation Army program invites children to begin learning an instrument as early as the second grade, providing lessons up to three times per week. BCMS students enjoy multiple opportunities to rehearse, perform, and compete in Salvation Army music retreats like Star Search, Musicamp at Camp Allegheny in nearby Ellwood City, and Star Lake Music Camp in New Jersey.

BCMS students are not just acquiring a new talent in a vacuum – they’re building a repertoire of empathy and emotional intelligence that’s essential to every life situation. According to a study published in the Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, young people who play an instrument have increased capacity in attention skill, anxiety management and emotional control.² For kids of low-income families and rough neighborhoods, these skills can make the difference between becoming a statistic and becoming a success story.

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Tavan & Tesan

Twin brothers with a doubly bright future, thanks in part to their dedication to music education at BCMS. While not ones to “toot their own horns,” they have excelled in the cornet and euphonium to the extent that they are now teaching brass and percussion to the next generation of young musicians.
The Future is Full of Potential

The BCMS is facing a time of transition, uncertainty and hopefully – with your help – reinvigoration.

The three-year major gift funding pledge that propelled the small music and arts program in Aliquippa into the institution now known as the Beaver County Music School has come to a close. The highly skilled Music Director is pursuing his Ph.D and has been promoted within The Salvation Army to Western Pennsylvania Divisional Music Director, leaving a vacancy that needs to be funded and filled quickly.

With proposed federal funding cuts looming for arts education, there is no guarantee students will access music instruction in public schools. Programs like the BCMS are vital to ensuring that all young people can learn and benefit from the arts. The annual cost for this program is $150,000.

Our Vision Remains Strong

The Beaver County Music School fosters excellence in the arts for disadvantaged children by providing a safe place to exercise creativity, while offering the opportunity to develop social, spiritual, academic and life skills free of charge. Exposure to the theory and practical use of musical instruments, dance and drama has the potential to enhance individual character traits such as self-awareness and self-discipline, which then become core values. The level of relationship and team building promoted among students of the Beaver County Music School prepares them for future leader and mentorship roles as ambassadors within the program and beyond. Collaborations and community partnerships will further strengthen and support students of The Beaver County Music School, engaging them as dedicated young citizens ready to offer their talents for the greater good.

Goals

• Hire a highly skilled and competent replacement director so that music and arts lessons can continue at their current high quality level of instruction

• Fund new instruments/repairs and performance uniforms

• Continue to offer holistic care for students, including offering a meal during program hours

Objectives

• The continued development of musical curriculum in alignment with local, state and national arts education standards through individual, group and ensemble instruction

• A long term commitment to increasing community awareness, outreach and participation in BCMS

• Increased performances in front of community audiences including festivals, recitals and the drumline

• Diversification and specialization in musical genres offered, such as gospel choir study