

NONPROFITS ASSISTANCE FUND

Helping Nonprofits Thrive

When Joe Sullivan was growing up in St. Paul, he would grab a few dollars, walk a few blocks to St. Pascal's, and get a guitar lesson from one of the nuns. Musical lessons were cheap and almost everyone was able to learn music. Twenty years later, he returned to the area only to find that the only options for musical lessons were expensive private lessons that many neighborhood families simply could not afford. Thus began East Metro Music Academy (EMMA).

EMMA first began in Sullivan's basement with a group guitar class and voice lessons. His goal was to provide quality music lessons that fit into the budgets of area families by creating a scholarship program to defray costs. Over time the organization grew and moved to a church and eventually into the Landmark Center in St. Paul.

EMMA is different from other music schools. Focus is given to group lessons rather than individual lessons. This not only helps keep tuition costs down, it also enhances the learning experience. Sullivan believes income barriers should not prevent children from experiencing and learning about music. EMMA works with eleven partnership locations to bring lessons to the community. A program called Instrument Investigators brings instruments and music lessons to low income areas such as Section 8 housing and mobile home parks. EMMA also seeks out worn but useable instruments that families can use for practice at home for little to no additional fee.

EMMA continued to grow. Soon Sullivan began to realize that while the lessons were inexpensive, the parking was not. Parents would drop off their child and drive around the building until the lesson was completed. In 2002 EMMA found a larger location with plenty of free parking. However, the space needed a lot of renovation to make it an effective music school.

Profile of Success EMMA

Sullivan approached his bank for funding. His banker knew that at a nonprofit EMMA faced unique challenges. He directed Sullivan to Kate Barr at Nonprofits Assistance Fund. Barr was able to work with Sullivan and his banker to provide a loan to cover the cost of renovation.

"Kate Barr was great about explaining the whole world of financing to me," states Sullivan. "It was great to work with the bank and with Barr. They were able to work and talk back and forth and really understood our financial limits. The support that Barr provided was phenomenal."



The loan allowed EMMA to grow and provide lessons to even more students. The larger size meant a larger operating budget and access to more grant opportunities. However, the lag time in grant disbursements was creating problems for EMMA's cash flow. Again, Sullivan turned to Nonprofits Assistance Fund for support and received a line of credit to cover the expenses while waiting for grant funding. He often consults with Barr on financial concerns.

"I'm able to pick up the phone and call Kate to talk about issues. I felt comfortable calling Kate and asking for help. We'd be really hurting in the nonprofit world if we didn't have a group like

Nonprofits Assistance Fund."

East Metro Music Academy now has thirty-six teachers providing lessons to over three-hundred students on a sliding scale. Students can learn to play instruments piano, clarinet, guitar, and even harp. As to the future of the organization, Sullivan says "We are quickly already outgrowing this space. If we decide to expand or move, Nonprofits Assistance Fund will be the first people we at EMMA talk to."