



# CHARITY SPOTLIGHT SERIES

**LYNX INVESTMENT ADVISORY**

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# *The importance of community is built into Lynx's DNA*

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## CHARITY SPOTLIGHT SERIES:

# PROJECT CREATE PROFILE

### *Enriching and Transforming the Lives of At-Risk Children through the Arts*

*Young people who are involved in making something beautiful today are less likely to turn to acts of violence and destruction tomorrow. The arts... provide opportunities for youth from all backgrounds to do something positive and creative with their talents and their time.*

– Janet Reno, former U.S. Attorney General

We know intuitively the transforming power that the arts can have on children. Parents sing lullabies to their babies to help them sleep; they dance with their toddlers and occupy children with crayons and paper.

There is a growing body of research showing that this extends even further, **helping to increase youth's academic achievement and improve attitudes about themselves and their future**. At the same time, cities are finding it to be a powerful crime prevention tool by offering safe, engaging and constructive environments for young people who lack adult supervision during non-school hours, a time they are most vulnerable to community violence and gang recruitment.

Nearly three decades ago, when Washington, D.C.'s public schools faced cutbacks in their arts budget, Rev. John Wimberly, Jr. took it upon himself to fill that gap, founding Project Create as an after-school arts program for students at Thaddus Stevens Elementary School. In 2002, in partnership with So Others Might Eat (SOME), the program was expanded to include homeless children.

From these humble beginnings, Project Create has grown to a **multi-roomed art center** offering a diversity of classes from visual arts and music to movement & dance, theater and mixed media — enriching and transforming the lives of thousands of at-risk and homeless children in Washington, D.C.

While many who have come through its doors have pursued an art career, the program's main focus is working with the whole person; providing them with life skills for whatever avenue they might follow.

The Washington, D.C. area has a rich history in the arts — from the Kennedy Center to award-winning regional theaters and a network of museums and private art galleries. Tapping into this talent, Project Create engages instructors with first-class experiences to lead its courses, augmenting the dedicated full-time staff of five.

Two years ago, Project Create was confronted with another challenge which required a different level of creativity. **How do you teach "hands-on" classes in an all-virtual world**, especially for those most in need?

To start, the team published about 70 classes on YouTube and delivered art bins to each student — including music keyboards and beat makers. Synchronous (live) classes were added beginning in Fall 2020. Now, they just needed to make certain their students had



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access to that programming. To that end, D.C. public schools ensured computers and hot spots were available for students in the public school system. For all others, Project Create provided computers and internet access. When the “art” itself was difficult to do virtually, classes focused on topics around business and software technology.

**Art-making goes far beyond just the piece of work itself.** It has the power to transform, inspire and motivate. It allows children to learn to trust their ideas, themselves and to explore what is possible. Project Create provides the space to do that for many youths in Washington, D.C.

When asked what was one of the key lessons she had learned working at Project Create, its Executive Director, Christie Walser, responded: “It is important not to make assumptions by where kids live. There’s a universality... kids-are-kids. Don’t look at what they don’t have or cannot do.... Focus on what they can do.”

You can find out more about Project Create and the work they do at:

[www.projectcreatedc.org](http://www.projectcreatedc.org)

Or, you can reach Executive Director Christie Walser directly at:

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