



"These are all tertiary interventions, and somebody has to do them," explains Martin, herself a battered teenage mother who single-handedly raised three children and didn't get a chance to attend college before she was 33. "But programs of primary prevention that embrace and nurture our most vulnerable children from an early age provide the greatest rewards."

Why else would dozens of families drive their kids to the Hollywood United Methodist Church on Highland and Franklin every Saturday morning for music lessons? (One family drives four siblings from distant Hesperia, a four-hour round trip.) Clearly not just because the Harmony Project produces musicians — it develops character as well. An astounding 92 percent of the program's scholars report improved school performance and 96 percent report improved personal behavior, says Martin, adding: "Families say they are much closer and involved in their children's lives."

The study, practice and performance of music teach children personal discipline, time management and incremental skills-building, not to mention the value of working individu-

ally and collectively. But above all, Martin has discovered that music teaches kids about diversity — because they learn about the beauty of different instruments and sounds.

"Kids from any racial group in this city kill each other," she says. "In our program, they make music together."

Part of the Harmony Project's mission is to develop "ambassadors of peace, hope and understanding among people of diverse cultures, backgrounds and beliefs." In a place like Los Angeles, this means empowering children in impoverished communities because, says Martin, "our problems won't be solved by someone who has lived on the Westside all their lives." Harmony scholars receive borrowed musical instruments and 100 hours of group and private lessons collectively every week. To qualify for the program, a student's family income must be below the federal poverty level — the income of a family of four, for example, must be below \$38,200.

Each student is selected after a rigorous interview process in which "we emphasize this program may not be for you because it requires a lot of hard work," says Martin,

adding: "The eagerness and interest have to come from the child — not the parents." What's more, parents must sign a contract, pledging to provide a space at home where their child can play music without any distractions such as television.

Martin closely monitors students' progress. "See that boy climbing the stairs?" she said one Saturday, in a break during music lessons at the Hollywood church. "He was a troublemaker. There were three such boys. I told them, 'I'll take your instruments back.' One boy left. The other two have been here six years and are thriving."

One of those kids, a seventh-grader named Bryan Garcia, is a violinist in the Harmony Project Orchestra. He has resolved to keep practicing because, he says, he "always wanted to play something for fun in my life [and] the violin feels almost like a half-guitar." Bryan wants to be a scientist, an inspiration he derives from another fiddler — Albert Einstein.

Martin's dream is to replicate the Harmony Project in inner cities around the world. Her vision isn't all that far-fetched, at least not financially.

"It takes \$10,000 to arraign and \$30,000 to incarcerate one juvenile in this country," she says. "With \$40,000, you could give private lessons to 40 kids for a year or class lessons to 80 kids. Do the math." — Ajay Singh

Margaret Martin



The Playing's the Thing

Find out more about the Harmony Project and its amazing work with music. Log on to www.harmony-project.org, where you can learn about the power of music through a seven-minute video that will introduce you to the Project's executive director and some of its remarkable students.

