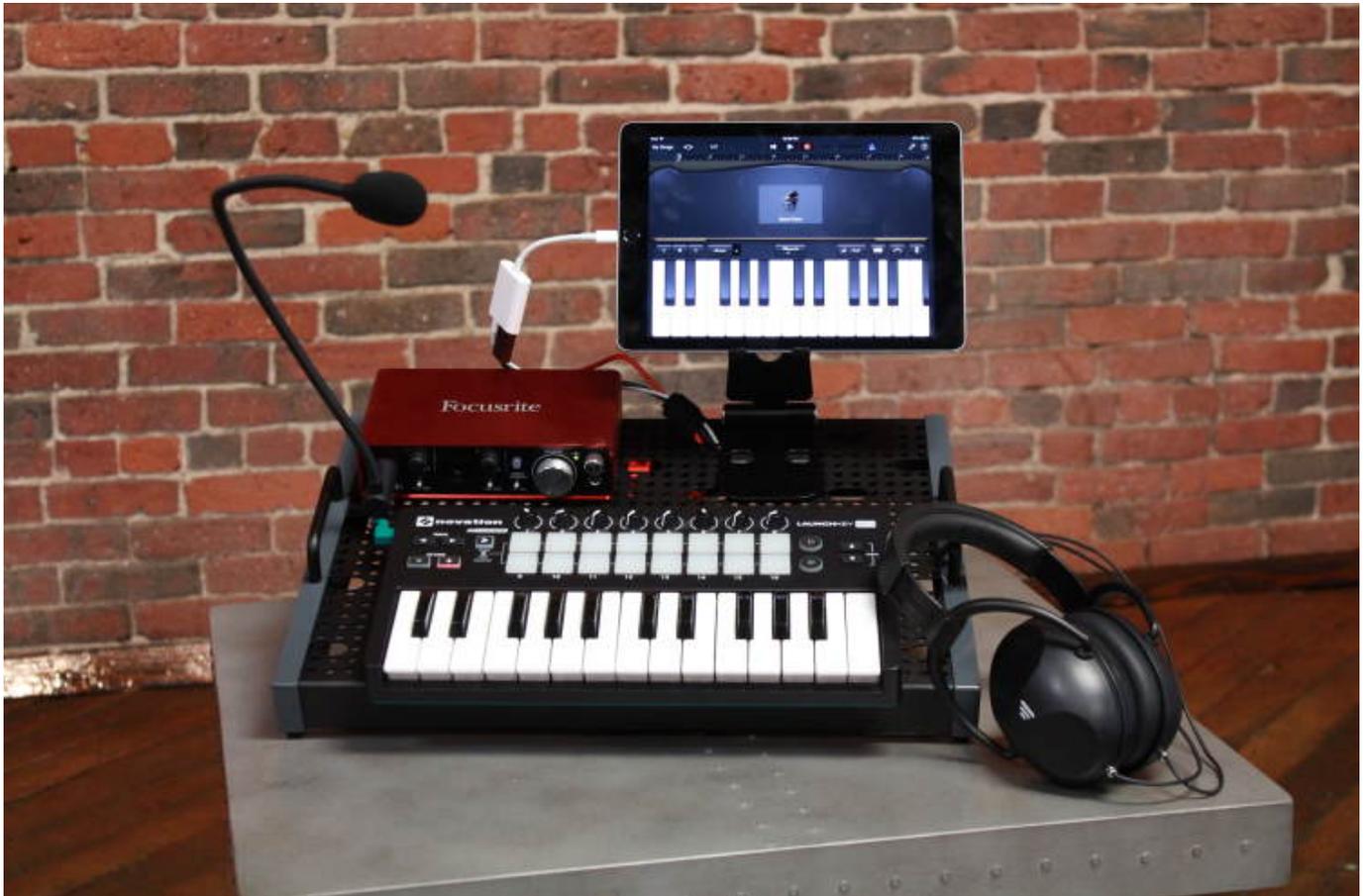


## Music & Youth Initiative Outfits Remote Studio Setups with Focusrite and Novation Gear to Serve Its Distance Learning Programs During the Current Health Crisis



Music & Youth Initiative is a Boston-based nonprofit offering resources to afterschool programs (including Boys & Girls Clubs and others) to outfit their spaces with music facilities and curricula, with the goal of using music as a vehicle for youth development. Recording studio setups are the centerpiece of these initiatives, and they have taken the form of in-facility workstations, mobile rigs, and most recently at-home setups for the students to keep the music-making going during the health crisis. And key to these configurations are creative tools from Focusrite (Scarlett audio interfaces) and Novation (Launchpad and Launchkey MIDI controllers). Currently a total of 20 programs are served by Music & Youth Initiative – mostly in Boston, with satellite programs in metro Atlanta and Ft. Worth.

David Bickel, Associate Executive Director at Music & Youth, remarks, “Our initiative was co-founded by Gary and Joan Eichhorn, and I eventually joined them as their full-time program manager. The programs we work with – Boys & Girls Clubs, YMCAs and others – are in underserved inner-city areas. For many of these students, our Music Clubhouse programs are like a second home, and organizers do their best to provide these young people positive role models and constructive activities to do in their free time, because these communities can have fewer opportunities than other neighborhoods. Music can be a big part of that, and the programs

Thursday, 13 August 2020 09:02

---

we serve have really taken to it. And importantly, it's all free for the participants – or if there's a fee, it's a nominal yearly membership to the facility itself, but not an extra fee for the music program. And basically what we do is we work with the management, kind of like a franchisor-franchisee relationship – we give them the model, and we train them on how to run it, and they take it from there with our support.”

Music & Youth Initiative works with each program to advise them on the right solution to suit their needs and resources – factoring in available space, size of the program, and other considerations. As a result, there are a number of different models to suit the needs of a particular program: “We have the Music Clubhouse model, which generally has a 1000-square-foot footprint on-site with a full-time Music Clubhouse Director, Assistant Director and several part-time instructors,” notes Bickel. “Then we have the Studio Clubhouse model, which is smaller at 650 square feet and with a smaller dedicated staff. Then we have the Mobile Studio model, which serves programs that don't have their own facility – for instance, those that take place at schools themselves. And then we have the Home Instrument Program (HIP), which gets equipment – acoustic guitars, digital pianos, drum pads and sticks, beat-making tools and Focusrite Recording Bundles (featuring a Focusrite Scarlett 2i2 interface, condenser microphone and professional closed-back headphones) – to the students who are really thriving, for continued learning at home. This last approach was expanded with a number of home studio setups during the COVID-19 quarantine, when obviously the on-site programs have gone on hiatus.”

Focusrite and Novation are a key component of all versions of the setup. Bickel recalls, “In 2016, we started with the first iteration of this kind of solution – we called it the iPad Workstation, and it involved a Focusrite product called the iTrack Dock, where we could use an iPad as the interface and keep the unit charged, plugged in and secure. So that was our starting point for diving in with Focusrite and Novation gear. We worked with David Joyner [U.S. Sales Specialist] at Focusrite to update the setup eventually, and we upgraded to Focusrite Scarlett 2i2 interfaces across the board, and from there we decided to take it on the road with the Mobile Recording Studio model. The Novation tools are a big part of that too.”

The setups are designed with the students' interests in mind: “Because the Music Clubhouse is a free program in an amazing facility where they have video games, sports, gyms, pools and academics, they can choose whatever they want to do,” notes Bickel. “If learning music is not fun and engaging, they're going to walk out and go do something else. So it's our job to help these programs keep the music aspects as engaging as possible. The students tend to listen to today's pop, hip-hop and R&B music, so we encourage them to pursue those styles. So they might not have a lot of interest in playing an acoustic guitar, but they want to learn how to make beats, layer textures, and record sung and rapped vocals. So these interface setups, based around touchscreens, are really perfect for that approach.”

Thursday, 13 August 2020 09:02

---



The coronavirus crisis presented an opportunity to expand the at-home aspects of the program. Bickel remarks, “We were all set to scale up our Mobile Studio initiative across the board, but COVID hit and we decided to go in a different direction. Our HIP model has been really successful, and we thought hard about how that approach could be adapted to the current moment. Even if we wanted to encourage virtual at-home lessons, they’d basically need a recording setup anyway, so we decided to create studio bundles for the kids who are really thriving in their work here and need them the most. To date, we’ve been able to help outfit over 50 students with these at-home studio bundles. The programs have been getting creative with how to engage the students at home. At first there was a lot of ‘one-way-street’ programming, like directing the students to a YouTube video to give them a specific assignment. But it grew from there, and it’s much more interactive now. We’re talking virtual lessons through Zoom,

Thursday, 13 August 2020 09:02

---

beat-makin

g sessions, two-way screen-sharing and more. Despite social distancing, the music from these students has continued without an issue, and that's something we're really proud of."

Bickel sums it up: "At the end of the day, we don't measure our success on how many kids learn notes on a page, or know their scales or can play chords in such a way. It's more about how music is having an impact on their entire life, how they're interacting with their peers, how they're interacting with adults and how their academics are going. So, the Music Clubhouse staff become big brothers and big sisters to these young men and women. And it's just as much, if not more, about those life skills that they're learning through music than it is the music itself."

Eventually, the crisis will pass and these programs will be able to get back to business as usual. "Once facilities reopen, we'll shift our approach back to expanding our Music Clubhouse, Studio Clubhouse and Mobile Studio models to serve even more kids," Bickel notes. In the meantime, with the help of Music & Youth's partners (including Focusrite and Novation), they've curated a list of helpful resources for music educators, particularly those working in an after-school setting. These resources are free for anyone to access/download and are available on Music & Youth's Music Impact Network website [here](#).

Bickel thanks Focusrite for their continued support: "All of this would not have been possible without Focusrite's commitment to what we do and the youth we serve. We're deeply appreciative of Focusrite's support as we all work together to help create accessible, sustainable, high quality music programs so every young person can experience the magic of music. We look forward to sharing the amazing songs that our Music Clubhouse participants create using the Focusrite Scarlett Solo Studio Recording Bundles."

[www.focusrite.com](http://www.focusrite.com)

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