

# It's <sup>all</sup> ~~None~~ of Your Business

## Think Outside The Home: Teaching Options And Opportunities Teaching In Students' Homes...

**Editor's Note:** This is the sixth installment in a series of columns exploring various teaching options.

### ...as a Transition Strategy

Early in my teaching career, I moved to a nearby town and sustained my studio by teaching former students in their homes. Parents loved this idea for its convenience and continuity. It was a bit of a drive to get to town, but once there, all homes were within 15 minutes of each other. This arrangement started as a financial necessity, but I discovered how enjoyable it could be too.

Financially, teaching in students' homes can be a lucrative position.

**Karen Thickstun, NCTM,** teaches piano pedagogy at Butler University, directs the Butler Community Arts School and maintains an independent studio in Nashville, Indiana. In addition to music degrees, she has degrees in economics and business. She is MTNA vice president for 2015–17.



In-home lessons are a convenience for the parent and, therefore, a premium service that commands a higher price. The higher tuition more than compensated me for the driving time between homes. Historically, I have known teachers who charge from 25–50 percent more for in-home lessons, compared to rates at the teacher's studio location.

### ...as a Temporary Position

Ed Moy is a successful independent teacher in Indiana. When his wife was admitted to a graduate school in California, they knew it would be a temporary move. Moy explored many options, including teaching in the home (not feasible—could barely afford rent!); teaching in an apartment (not allowed); and teaching at a for-profit academy (found only a few students for him). So Moy developed a full studio via teaching in students' homes, using several strategies:

- Location. Moy lived near a demographic of well-educated parents who wanted the best for their children.
- Credentials. Moy has a master's degree and experience teaching piano and violin.
- Mothers Club e-mail listserv yielded 20 students in two months.

- Craigslist yielded several students.
- After teaching a few months, word of mouth became a primary tool.

Now back in Indiana with his home studio, Moy shares that he misses his California students and loved his time with them. He offers this advice:

- Group students as close together as possible to minimize driving time.
- Build in breaks where you do not drive or teach.
- Be prepared with the right tools. (Moy kept a briefcase filled with teaching aids and music.)
- A studio policy is essential.

A studio policy for teaching in students' homes is as important as the one for studio teaching. Expectations need to be clearly stated and might include designating the lesson area as a quiet zone without nearby siblings or television and details for how to handle changes in schedule.

### ...as a Fulfilling Career

Irini Jennings built a successful independent studio solely by teaching students in their homes. When she reached capacity and still had a wait list, she started hiring teach-

ers and created Impromptu Music LLC (profiled in a previous column, August/September 2013). She recently changed the name to Legacy Music Lessons (www.legacymusiclessons.com). After seven years, the business remains strong, with teachers in piano/keyboard and more than 20 instruments, as well as audio recording and MIDI programming. Marketing is primarily online and word of mouth.



Christine, a piano teacher of five years, summarizes her experience: "Legacy is a company which has succeeded year after year.... I love being a part of this group of teachers. There is great accountability when working together to provide an essential learning experience.... Because I work through Legacy, I am able to fully focus on teaching while the company handles all the business matters."

Midwest School of Music (www.schoolofmusic.com) also hires teachers to give lessons in students' homes, as well as afterschool programs and camps. Founded in 1997 by Barb Chirgwin, MSM was profiled in a previous column (April/May 2008). MSM provides online advertising, student billing and collection services (with credit card processing on a secure website) and direct deposit. Chirgwin believes teachers benefit from her experience as a teacher. "I understand both sides of the equation and want to align both students and teachers with the best fit for them," she says. One of her teachers, Dasha, adds,



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Make a Joyful Noise Studio ([www.makeajoyfulnoisestudio.com](http://www.makeajoyfulnoisestudio.com)) was founded in 1999 by Rachel Donahue and thrives in a suburb of Indianapolis offering in-home lessons on multiple instruments. Word of mouth is its best marketing strategy; other tactics include advertising in the town calendar and offering a coupon for three trial lessons.

Donahue comments on the benefits of in-home lessons to the family:

Students typically are more relaxed at home. Teachers...get to know the instrument, which can help in understanding technical weaknesses. Teachers can also advise when a piano needs tuned.... The best aspect is we get to see the environment where practice takes place and learn a lot about the family dynamic. We see Mom, Dad and siblings weekly, and this allows an easy natural relationship to develop. Parents hear what we are working on and can reinforce the same ideas between lessons.... Being in their homes not only allows us to pursue our passion of teaching piano, but allows us to be a positive influence on an entire family.

## Pros And Cons Of Teaching In Students' Homes

### Pros

- In-depth knowledge of student's practice environment and instrument.
- Premium service = premium price.
- No investment in space or instrument.
- Close relationship with family.
- Comfort level for student.

### Cons

- Driving time is not (directly) compensated.
- Must maintain reliable transportation.
- Requires advance planning of lesson materials.
- Last-minute cancellations leave unproductive gaps in schedule.

Donahue also emphasizes the benefits for the teachers:

This setup creates a buffer between the teachers and parents. For example, we have a no make-up policy. If the parent has an issue with this, they can talk to me about it. In this way, I am able to protect the teachers from being taken advantage of and deal with the most difficult situations. At a recent meeting, the teachers discussed how they enjoyed the 5-10 minute drive between lessons (and appreciated the higher pay). It gives them a moment of

downtime to regroup between lessons.

These companies have minimum education requirements and provide employment for a variety of teachers. Whether a recent graduate seeking to establish a teaching career, or an international teacher unsure about setting up a studio, or simply a teacher who enjoys the traveling studio experience, the option of teaching in students' homes can yield financial success and a fulfilling career. ■

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