

# **BUILDING BASES: SUPPORTING YOUNG CHILDREN EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS AT SCHOOL**

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# RESPONDING TO A CRITICAL NEED

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- In the United States, approx. 1 in 45 children are homeless.
- In Madison, 1 in 18 children under age 6 are homeless. In 2017, 1250 homeless students attended MMSD – 350 were enrolled in PK-1<sup>st</sup> grade. At that time, in Madison, 530 children under age 6 live in homeless shelters.
- There has been a 37% increase in the number of homeless students in PK-1<sup>st</sup> grade since 2011.
- The vast majority of resources are focused on the needs of adolescents experiencing homelessness.

# CONSEQUENCES OF HOMELESSNESS

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- Associated with risk across all major developmental tasks of childhood.
- 47% struggle with emotional problems
- 37% exhibit aggressive behaviors
- Lower levels of academic achievement and increased risk for suspension, expulsion, and identification for special education.
- Timing and chronicity matter.
- However, many children do not conform to these risk trajectories, suggesting that intervening experiences may support the resilience of children experiencing homelessness.

# HOW DID WE BEGIN?

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- At a round table in a very hot room at the top of the stairs
- A new connection with a desire to be of service
- An unmet need and desirer to support students experiencing homelessness
- A new professor with service learning as a priority to build capacity and awareness
- A team of professionals who wanted to make a differences and do something new
- Schools that were willing to meet the challenge and supports students with a new idea
- A district willing to accept the research aspect of the mentoring program and find a positive and compelling way to support students experiencing homelessness in an innovative way.

# PROJECT OVERVIEW

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## **Building Academic, Social, and Emotional Supports at School for Young Children Experiencing Homelessness**

- Partnership between MMSD-TEP and Reach Dane
- Five Main Objectives:
  - Provide school-based supports for young children experiencing homelessness
  - Enhance on-going relationships and academic support through extended opportunities
  - Build capacity of teachers and staff through on-going professional development
  - Enhance system-capacity through research, evaluation, and advocacy efforts
  - Educate and inspire UW students through service-learning opportunities

# THE MENTORING PROGRAM

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- UW students commit to weekly mentoring sessions in their “little’s” classroom for one academic year
- Enroll in year-long service learning course: Supporting Children Experiencing Homelessness in School
- Develop a mentoring plan in consultation with the child’s teacher, social worker, and family
- Weekly Field Notes, Mid-Term and Final Reflection Papers
- Official school volunteers – vetted by MMSD (background checks, sign in at schools, track hours)
- **220+ mentors, 250+ children, and over 6500 hours of direct service!!!!**

# THE MENTORING MODEL


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- Deep commitment– one academic year
- Fostering a meaningful relationship between mentors and children is the top priority
  - Mentors develop an academic and social-emotional goal in consultation with the child and teacher, but this is secondary to the connection.
- Emphasize reciprocal transformation– everyone has something to teach and everyone has something to learn
- Supported through weekly reflections
- Trauma-informed strategies
- EVERY child is capable of benefitting from a mentor.



# WE ARE OFTEN ASKED TO HELP NAVIGATE HARD QUESTIONS AND SHARE TIPS ON HOW TO RESPOND

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- Remain calm – it may feel like a crisis to you, but not to the student
  - Do not over-react in the moment
  - Express kindness but do not make promises that everything will be fine
  - Resist the urge to try to “fix it”
  - Know that your gift of consistency and kindness make a difference
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# ALONG SIDE THE MENTORING IDEAS: GETTING STARTED IN THE SCHOOLS

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- Determining school sites?
  - Which students will be mentees?
  - Classrooms considerations?
  - Mentoring times for mentors to meet with mentees?
  - Who can be our partners?
  - Who can our mentors be? **CONSISTENCY** and **COMMITMENT**
  - District expectations/considerations – visitor protocols
  - Point of Contact at the school
  - Celebrate time together
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# PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT/ ADVOCACY

- TEP PD Series and Action Research Project
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- PD provided in schools before mentoring happens
  - Provided training for over 300 Madison-area/ Wisconsin teachers
  - Trauma-Informed Behavioral Support and Instruction
  - Grand Rounds and On-Going Consultation
    - Mentors, Social Workers, Teachers, School Staff
  - Recently launched community-based trainings for child care providers
  - Early Childhood Homelessness Workgroup (ECHW) Madison
  - Doubled Up Work group
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# “BRANCHING” OPPORTUNITIES

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- Who We Are:Voice in Our Community--- Day away for Mentors and Littles
- TEP Summer Reading Program
- Building BASES - UW Student Organization
- Publication of the Celebration Program
- Research
- On-going conversations transform the way we work daily

# QUESTIONS AND OTHER THOUGHTS

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# LESSONS LEARNED

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- Provide good training and meet one a month to check in or at least answer questions
  - Give mentors opportunities to network and share questions with each other
- Have a point of contact in each school for mentors to be able to go to when needed
- Connect with trainings in the area that would be pertinent or helpful for working in the schools or with students
- Have good signage in the schools for mentors to know where to go and what to do (also where to park)
- Give mentors opportunities to network and share questions with each other
- Celebrate time together - a Day Away for both mentors and mentees

# LESSONS LEARNED

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- Mentors can disrupt deficit perspectives of children that have developed in the school environment.
- Mentors can feel overwhelmed when lots of children are competing for their attention— and feel guilty about focusing on only one. However, it is important for Littles to feel special, chosen, and that they are not competing for attention.
- Transitions and termination are difficult and important for Littles AND mentors.
- Important to have frank conversations about racism, bias, stereotypes, and areas of discomfort with mentors.
- Littles and Mentors become very important to to each other.

# CONTACT INFO

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