



Proposal to Framingham State University Nonprofit Giving Course

We at Horizons for Homeless Children greatly appreciate the invitation from the students and Juliana Schiappa to submit a proposal to the Framingham State University Nonprofit Giving Course. We hope that you will elect to support our work with homeless children and families and by doing so help to provide much needed services to one of our most vulnerable populations.

Never has our role in helping families with young children who are experiencing homelessness been more urgent. In addition to all they are normally going through, with the new COVID-19 restrictions, they are struggling with the confinement and isolation of living in shelters during this crisis. We continue to support our families by providing them diapers, wipes, and gift cards so that they can purchase food and necessities for their families. Our Family Advocates still support our families daily and our teachers provide lessons to the children and ideas to the parents remotely. And once we are operational again, we will continue to provide them with the critical support they need to be successful.

MISSION

Horizons for Homeless Children (Horizons) improves the lives of young homeless children in Massachusetts and helps their families to succeed by providing high quality early education, opportunities for play, and comprehensive family support services. Our Vision is that every homeless child will have the opportunity to learn, play, and thrive.

Thanks to our specially trained staff, whose efforts are supported and amplified by thousands of committed volunteers and donors, Horizons provides hope and opportunity to the families we serve. We accomplish this mission through our Four Major Pillars of Work:

- **Early Education Centers:** Our three high-quality, trauma-informed centers in Boston, providing a solid foundation for school through an effective evidence-based curriculum, enrichment activities, and ancillary services to 175 children each day.
- **Playspace Program:** More than 90 intentionally designed Playspaces in shelters statewide, bringing the joy of play and the wonder of learning to close to 1,400 children each week in shelters across the state with the help of more than 1,000 trained volunteers – one of the state's largest corps of volunteers.
- **Family Partnerships Program:** Our highly trained staff help parents set achievable goals, build their self-confidence, and ultimately leave the shelter system, providing support and coaching for families – acting as mentors and advocates as they navigate the daunting complexities of homelessness and achieve their goals.
- **Policy & Advocacy:** We highlight the unique needs of homeless children and families to ensure they are consistent priorities among policymakers, helping to break the cycle of homelessness through policy and advocacy, and maximizing the impact of our programs through state and local partnerships.

HISTORY

Horizons was established in 1988 to respond to the unmet needs of the enormous number of children living in Boston homeless shelters. We began providing Playspaces in Boston family shelters in 1990 and later spread to shelters statewide, in every region of the state. We opened our first early

education center in 1994 in response to the need for quality childcare for the children and to enable the parents in the shelters to pursue education and employment. We subsequently opened two more centers but still maintain a constant waiting list of over 150 children. We began our Policy and Advocacy work in 2002, seeking to engage and educate on issues affecting homeless children and families. In 2018 we were very proud to be called upon by Sesame Workshop, the non-profit educational organization behind Sesame Street, to assist them with their major new initiative to offer help and hope to the growing number of young children across the country who are experiencing homelessness. Horizons helped to inform the content behind a series of new professional development videos, articles, and strategies for providers who play a crucial role in supporting children experiencing homelessness. Sesame Street's new available resources, include four videos featuring the work at Horizons, showcasing our programs and best practices in creating healing environments and strategies for having positive adult-child interactions while in shelter. Also in 2018 we began our partnership with the Brazelton Touchpoints Center at Boston Children's Hospital to provide intensive professional development in the Brazelton Touchpoints approach to all of our staff on interacting with and nurturing relationships with children and parents.

Horizons is one of the few organizations focused exclusively on the needs of young homeless children and their families and is recognized as a leader in the early education of homeless children. We are the only organization in the state to provide opportunities to play with trained volunteers for young children living in homeless shelters.

EARLY EDUCATION/FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS PROGRAM

Should we be awarded the grant, we will utilize the FSU Nonprofit Giving Course funding for support of the operation of our three early education centers and Family Partnerships Program. All three centers are nationally accredited through the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and rank in the top 5% of all early education centers statewide as rated by the state Department of Early Education and Care's quality rating system.

Through our three early education centers, we provide access to a stimulating and nurturing early education experience – the kind that every child deserves. We pride ourselves on providing excellent, impactful services to the homeless children and families served by our centers. Our program produces happy, confident children who are poised for success and able to keep pace with their peers. We use a trauma-informed, strengths-based, and whole family approach in our programming to support children's development. Our centers provide the children with the type of early care and education programming most likely to help them enter school with the skills that they need to be successful both socially and academically. Parents receive assistance in developing and implementing a plan for self-sufficiency and accessing needed support services and resources, education and skills training, parenting skills classes, and financial management workshops.

Each of our centers is open 8am to 6pm each weekday, year-round and offers high-quality education for children ages two months through five years old. They provide the children with two nutritious meals and a snack each day, often the child's major food source for the day. The centers bring in additional assistance as needed to help each child reach his/her developmental potential, including early intervention, mental health, and therapeutic services such as speech therapy or occupational therapy, whatever the child needs to help to overcome developmental delays caused by the transitions and traumas of the homelessness experience. The teachers employ the strategies of the Center for the Social and Emotional Foundations of Early Learning's Pyramid approach to promote the social/emotional development of the children and remediate any behavioral issues.

Most of our specialized care is delivered directly by our teachers. We have three teachers in each of our classrooms, along with floating teachers for each center. By having a lower child: teacher ratio than

that required by the state, we can provide the individualized attention our children need. Each teacher is assigned specific children to care for and follow to ensure that they reach relevant developmental milestones and gain the social/emotional skills and academic foundation that they need to succeed. The individualized curriculum and lesson plans are adapted to meet the needs and progress of the child. Because more than 40% of our children come from families where Spanish is a primary or second language, we have ensured that each of our classroom teams includes a Spanish speaking teacher. The teachers all engage in continuous professional development and in training to deal with issues and the toxic stress associated with homelessness and specific trauma-informed approaches.

The centers are located in Roxbury, Dorchester, and Jamaica Plain and serve children living in shelters in those neighborhoods. They serve a total of 175 children each day, more than 250 over the course of a year (in FY18 we served a total of 266 children), through seventeen classrooms based on age. There are 5 Preschool classrooms, 9 Toddler or Infant/Toddler classrooms, and 3 Infant classrooms.

Horizons utilizes the Creative Curriculum, produced by Teaching Strategies, a curriculum that is comprehensive and evidence-based. It helps teachers to create a high-quality learning environment while customizing it to be trauma-informed and to meet the individual needs of each student. Through the Creative Curriculum, teachers weave into daily lessons STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, and math) and literacy education. We continuously focus on strengthening both our STEAM and literacy curriculum throughout our classrooms. Through our partnerships with Raising A Reader and Jump Start, we provide the children with books and opportunities to learn literacy skills as well as encourage and assist the parents in reading to their children. Our partnership with Tufts University School of Education's RISE (Readiness through Integrative Science and Engineering) program provides professional development and coaching for teachers as well as parent-teacher collaboration, to strengthen science and engineering learning in the classroom and at home.

We also help to strengthen literacy and math skills through our partnership with Young Audiences of Massachusetts. Their customized program *Expanding Horizons Through Music* reinforces literacy skills through music. Our aim in operating this program is to provide critical music education which helps the children express emotions, overcome toxic stress, and improve their educational outcomes while gaining an appreciation of music. Through mentoring, shadowing, and professional development workshops, classroom teachers learn strategies and curriculum for intentionally incorporating music into their regular instruction. Artists provide modeling in the classroom for teachers to help them better engage the children in learning literacy through music. Family events and a custom, bilingual songbook distributed to parents provide them with the tools they need to continue the work outside of the classroom.

Our two-generation model works with the children's families as well as with the children, helping their parents or caregivers to establish goals and implement steps that will enable them to achieve those goals so that they can successfully support their families and obtain permanent housing. Through our Family Partnerships Program, our Family Advocates use the evidence-based Mobility Mentoring™ model developed by EMPATH to support parents in identifying and creating goals that promote upward mobility. Our Family Advocates meet with parents regularly to monitor their progress and to act as mentors, coaches, and accountability partners in their goal achievement.

We also provide workshops for the families in topics such as financial management, job applications and resumes, child development, and health and nutrition. We teach them how to shop and cook healthy meals on a strict budget. And we provide ongoing opportunities for them to engage with their children's teachers and classrooms and opportunities for them to engage with each other and feel a sense of community through things such as Parent Breakfasts and Family Picnics. Our Family, Schools, and Community Coordinator works with the families to help them in their selection of the next school for their children and to help them and the children to make a smooth transition to their next school.

These programs provide homeless families in Boston with the opportunity to counteract the impact of homelessness and to lead successful lives. Family homelessness remains a critical issue in the state and in Boston. The increase in housing costs exacerbates the issue. The length of stay by families in homeless shelters continues to increase, with recent estimates averaging 1.8 years. It is estimated that there are approximately 18,000 children under the age of six currently living in homeless shelters in the state. And it is the very young children who are the most impacted by the traumas of the homelessness experience. The National Center on Family Homelessness found that homeless children experience violence, sickness, mental health problems, and low academic performance three to four times as much as their housed counterparts. According to the American Public Health Association, the experience of homelessness can result in "toxic stress," triggering a range of harmful biochemical impacts on the developing child, including abnormal brain development. Quality early education can reduce the detrimental effects of toxic stress and trauma caused by homelessness. It is the most effective way to ensure future school and life success. Without the high quality and trauma-informed care that Horizons programs provide, homeless children enter school well behind their peers, and it is difficult and sometimes impossible for them to catch up.

LEADERSHIP

Sheila O'Neil is the Executive Director of Early Education and Family Partnerships. Sheila joined Horizons in 2016 with more than 30 years of experience in the field of Early Childhood Education. Prior to Horizons, she served as the Head Start and Early Head Start Director for Communities United, Inc. Throughout her career, Sheila has held a number of different positions in Early Childhood Education, including as a Regional Manager for Bright Horizons as well as a Director for a small nonprofit school.

Jayd Rodrigues is the Director of the Early Education Centers. Ms. Rodrigues has been with Horizons since 2009, first as a teacher and then a lead teacher in the toddler classroom in the Roxbury center. She was promoted to Director in 2017, and then to Director of all three centers in 2019 in anticipation of the combining of all three centers into one with the opening of our new Horizons Center in 2021. Ayesha Rodriguez, Director of Family Partnerships, has been with Horizons for over four years. Her experience prior to Horizons includes School Readiness Manager for the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative and Family and Community Outreach Coordinator for Boston Public Schools.

GOALS

Our short-term goals are to provide stabilization and consistency for the children and the families, to provide them with a structure and routine and accompanying support which help them to begin their path to success. We look to develop an individualized curriculum for each child and a Mobility Mentoring plan for each family, with goals and accompanying action steps.

Our long-term goals are: that the children are provided with high-quality, trauma-informed care and a solid foundation of learning so that they overcome any developmental delays and enter kindergarten on level with their peers, enabling them to be successful throughout their school experience; and that their parents accomplish the goals they set for themselves and become permanently housed.

EVALUATION AND EVIDENCE OF SUCCESS

Screening and following the progress of the children is essential to ensuring their successful development. It allows us to individualize the curriculum to address developmental delays in specific areas and to ensure continuous progress. Intervention before kindergarten has huge academic, social, and economic benefits. Studies have shown that children who receive early treatment for

developmental delays are more likely to graduate from high school, hold jobs, live independently, and avoid teen pregnancy, delinquency, and violent crime, which results in a savings to society of about \$30,000 to \$100,000 per child. If social-emotional problems are identified and addressed early, children are less likely to be placed in special education programs—and later in life, they're also less likely to experience school failure and unemployment.

At Horizons individual children are screened at intake and then every six months, using the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) and the Ages and Stages Questionnaire-Social Emotional (ASQ-SE) developmental screeners to document their developmental status and subsequent growth. Results show that we are having a significant positive impact on children after six months in our program. Their progress is monitored regularly within the classroom using MyTeachingStrategies™, GOLD® as an on-going assessment tool to collect meaningful data on the children's progress and to make adjustments in their individualized curriculum to ensure their continued development in each of six major categories - social-emotional, physical, language, cognitive, literature, and math. Over the last fiscal year, we saw a 15% average decrease in the number of children performing below widely-held expectations for their age group in physical, social-emotional, language, cognitive, literacy, and mathematics. In cognitive development, we went from 29% below and 71% meeting or exceeding to 15% below and 85% meeting or exceeding standard expectations. In September we successfully “graduated” 28 children from our preschool classrooms to their next schools. Kindergarten teachers all report that our children were well prepared for school.

We assess the quality of our classrooms and teachers utilizing the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS) and the Infant Toddler Environmental Rating Scale (ITERS). Our classrooms also undergo CLASS reviews conducted by HeadStart which assess teacher/child interactions. We also seek feedback from kindergarten teachers. We measure the progress of the families through the use of Mobility Mentoring™ goal tracking tools. Utilizing the Mobility Mentoring Goal Action Plan and SMART Mobility Goal Worksheet, our families are able to identify clear goals and individual action steps to accomplish those goals, and gain confidence and encouragement as they document their completion. Just in the last quarter, our families set 64 goals and achieved 20. Our Family Advocates meet with each parent and review their progress toward goal achievement. And we evaluate the effectiveness of parent workshops and services through parent surveys.

FUNDING

Horizons receives some public funding for the operation of our programs but the majority (60%) of our funding must come from private sources. We are fortunate to have generous donors, both individuals and organizations, and we hold successful fundraising events. A listing of our hundreds of donors can be found in our Annual Report, posted on our website. Our largest organizational donors include MFS Investments (\$250,000), Anonymous (\$150,000), the Selander Foundation (\$100,000), Liberty Mutual (\$60,000), the Boston Celtics Shamrock Foundation (\$50,000), and Bright Horizons Foundation for Children. However, we must constantly seek new funders to help to maintain the high level of quality services upon which our families depend. The budget for FY20 for our early education centers is over \$5.5m, of which \$2m must come from private sources. Funding from the Framingham State University Nonprofit Giving Course will help us to provide much needed services to homeless children and families through our early education centers.

Please find attached the additional documents requested, our FY20 organizational budget and our 501c3 letter of determination. Should you require any additional information or have any questions, please feel free to contact Katherine Carroll Day, Managing Director of Development - Corporate, Foundation, and Community Giving, at kcarrollday@horizonschildren.org or 617-553-5417.

Thank you for your consideration.