

Gheens Bridges to Tomorrow A New Approach

The Gheens Bridges to Tomorrow partnership is an intensive neighborhood based initiative that works to ensure that children are safe, healthy, nurtured and prepared to succeed in kindergarten. Since a family's financial stability has a tremendous impact on how prepared children are for school, the initiative also works with families to set and achieve goals that lead to financial stability, and ultimately, financial independence.

Successful families raise successful children and that in turn, successful children and families build successful communities. The work we propose will enable our community to successfully address two critically important and highly inter-related issues: the readiness of our young children to be successful in school when they arrive at kindergarten and the economic stability of their families.

Our Approach

The entire approach will be designed as a learning lab or incubator to produce results that can be replicated and taken to scale across our community. Again, what sets this apart is the intentional dual focus – on the child's readiness for school success and their families' economic stability and well-being.

We will use our power to convene and to focus talent, volunteer and financial resources, proven practices and innovative approaches in service to the preschoolers and their families at four targeted neighborhood centers that serve primarily low-income families.

By creating a diverse and powerful collaborative of business, education, government, faith-based and participating agency partners we will expand our Success By 6 work to include:

- A school readiness assessment of each participating child
- An individual development plan for each child
- Volunteer teams, to adopt the centers and enhance each center's capacity to successfully prepare the children for school
- Investments in each center to improve its ability to implement the most effective proven practices and

In respect to the challenge of helping the families achieve economic stability and begin the journey to economic independence, approaches will include:

- Family economic stability assessments and individualized development plans
- Creation of Family Coaches who will help not only with the assessments and plans but will work to help the families navigate our community's complex service systems as they work toward their economic goals and their child development goals.
- The support of Metro United Way and the Louisville Asset Building Coalition will provide financial tools allowing families to increase income, build savings, and gain and sustain assets such as post-secondary education, home ownership, and small business development. This will be accomplished by co-locating services at the targeted child care/neighborhood centers.

Expected Results

The vision is grand and we believe we can make lasting change and improve the lives of families and children and our community. Our work tackles the issues of economic stability and school readiness in three neighborhoods with child care centers that have an existing relationship with Metro United Way serving as the central contact points.

We expect to achieve measurable results on both fronts. For the children we anticipate greater readiness for school success as measured by pre and post testing and assessment. They will arrive in kindergarten more curious, confident, healthy and with the social and cognitive skills they'll need to get on the road to long-term success. Specific gains will occur in the following areas:

- Language development
- Social and emotional responsiveness
- Physical health and development
- Learning and cognitive performance

For the families, the end result of this effort would be the creation of a family environment characterized by financial stability where children are provided the conditions for life-long success. They would move from instability to stability – able to cover their basic needs and plan for the future.

Measures would include the following:

- Increased personal savings
- Increased credit scores
- Decreased Debt
- Increased educational attainment

We intend to also monitor the potential for gains in home ownership and micro-enterprise development over the longer term.

The stage would be set after the fourth year to take the effort to scale, with enormous return on investment. Long term studies (High Scope in Michigan and The Abecedarian Project in North Carolina) have demonstrated that the return on investment is at least seven to one for every dollar invested in quality early childhood development.

For Metro United Way, it would transform how we do our work because it would provide compelling evidence of the power of true community collaboration – of bringing resources together by crossing organizational and community boundaries - of taking the best of what we know works and daring to add innovation and risk to the equation.

The short and long term benefit to the community would be immense. Children in economically stable families are much better positioned to succeed. Children who are engaged in school are more likely to graduate, pursue post secondary education opportunities and be prepared to work in the jobs in a global economy. Economically stable families will contribute to the overall tax base, lessen the demand for remedial services and most importantly, move from dependence to self-sufficiency.