

LOTUS HOUSE FAMILIES PROGRAM

In our Families Program, children and families heal, strengthen, grow and thrive together as they build the foundation for safe, brighter futures.

By some estimates, 2.5 Million children across America will have no place to call home this year, no bed of their own in the richest county in the world.[1] Most are newborns to the age of 6, a time when they are most vulnerable and the potential for neural development is at its fastest. At this tender age, children in homeless shelters are already experiencing food insecurity, hunger, depression, anxiety, and other threats to their wellbeing and future success. They are an invisible, silent casualty of a nationwide epidemic of homelessness, caused by systemic, global and economic forces beyond their control, stagnant wages, rising rental costs and the lack of an adequate safety net for their basic needs.

Lotus House is more than shelter from the storm. Trauma in families and children has a definite cost that can be life long. Research shows that trauma negatively impacts memory, concentration and learning in children, especially those at greatest risk in our communities. Unresolved trauma can cause depression, anxiety, aggression, withdrawal or self-destructive, even suicidal, behaviors in our young ones. Studies indicate that homeless children[2]:

- Are sick at twice the rate of other children
- Go hungry twice as often as non-homeless children
- Experience twice the rate of learning disabilities and are twice as likely to repeat a grade

- Have three times the rate of emotional and behavioral problems of non-homeless children
- Most homeless mothers have a history of trauma themselves, often dating back to their childhoods.

Homelessness itself is another layer of trauma for mothers and children, and yet, there is hope.[3] The latest research indicates that it is possible to break the cycle of childhood abuse, domestic violence and homelessness with life changing support, tools, education and resources that heal broken bodies, minds and spirits. [4] [5] [6] Mothers provided with evidence-based trauma-resolution therapy and strong supportive parenting skills can positively impact everything from their child's chances of high school graduation to their success in the workforce as adults.[7]

Lotus House is committed to providing child and family centered services that promote trauma resolution in both children and mothers.[8] [9] Families benefit from evidence-based child therapy, dyadic parent/child therapy and parenting education to build the foundation for a safe, secure and better way of life.

Homelessness is traumatic for anyone, but especially so for children. And yet children and youth of all ages are arriving and languishing in unprecedented numbers all across this country in beleaguered, under-resourced homeless shelters that are ill equipped to understand or address their special needs. Unless the cycle is broken, these children are destined to know the intergenerational nature of violence, abuse, poverty and homelessness. It is the moral imperative of our time. The costs in mental health issues, educational success, health care and public expenditures on hospitals, prisons, systems, communities and families are staggering now and can only grow exponentially in the future. The costs in human suffering and trauma reach far beyond dollars and cents. They include a generation of children,

whose experience of homelessness is marked by confusion, loss, grief, fear, food insecurity, hunger, illness, violence and more trauma.

The experience of homelessness has become normative for these children. The real question we face is not can we afford the solutions – but how can we not? It is time to put our children first.

The “children first” principle is evident throughout Lotus Village with child-friendly furnishings in community rooms, the intake sanctuary, art and activities lab, a children’s playroom, and gardens that all lead into a central pavilion buzzing with activities. We are committed that these children have resources that allow them to not only feel normal, but to thrive – at school, in social settings, and in their family environment. In the Micky and Madeleine Arison Family Foundation Children’s Wellness Center, United Way Center for Excellence in Early Education is our childcare service provider for infants and toddlers from newborns to 3 years of age, and Lotus House provides the therapeutic overlay in beautiful play therapy rooms designed for children. Every aspect of Lotus Village was designed with the needs and wellbeing of children in mind, best practices for a trauma informed healing environment with strong protective factors for children to learn, grow, thrive and succeed. An onsite, state of the art health clinic (with 6 exam rooms and 7 dental operatories) is operated by Jessie Trice Community Health System, ensuring easy access to health services.

In a service driven research project commenced by Lotus House over three years ago, information gathered through the use of evidence-based assessments help our clinical team to establish priorities and guide interventions for our families. We work to identify potential developmental problems early on, so that children can receive vital services. Children may receive one of three evidence based therapeutic modalities based on their clinical needs. Moms can also participate in parenting groups designed to prevent and treat behavioral and emotional problems in children. We have

made significant progress in furtherance of our aim to understand more deeply and to develop a portrayal of the needs (developmental, behavioral, trauma histories and parent-child interactions) of sheltered children with the aim of sharing the outcomes of our research.

In this groundbreaking work, we recognize that every aspect of a child's experience in the Village, from therapeutic care and education to the physical space and its contents, are integral to children's wellbeing and offer opportunities for healing, growth, exploration, discovery, interaction and problem solving. We know that babies have the capacity to learn and experience feelings from birth. During infancy and early childhood, children develop their capacity for trust, self-esteem, conscience, empathy, problem solving, focused learning and self-control. It is a time of intense growth and development in all areas, including a child's intellectual, social and emotional development, laying the foundation for their success in school and later life. We have an opportunity to mend broken bonds and the trauma leading to homelessness with an inclusive, welcoming sanctuary designed to heal. An understanding of these fundamental principles of childhood development and promoting healthy social and emotional development of infants and young children is at the core of Lotus Village in ways that truly place children first. The core of our children's services and programming includes:

- Basic needs of infants, toddlers, and school-aged children experiencing homelessness – shelter, clothing, nutritious meals, and comprehensive support including access to physical and mental health care. Mothers and babies receive much needed supplies like formula, diapers, bottles, blankets, and maternity and infant clothing.
- Essential services to promote their well-being and safety, access to public education, tutoring, and support in school attendance.
- Year-round activities during the day and after school that help children to discover their strengths and talents, make positive

choices, and develop the resiliency to successfully overcome the challenges that confront them including: Arts/Creative Activities: arts and crafts, music, theater, visits to art museums, galleries; Recreation/Physical Activities: meditation, yoga, exercise class, soccer and similar games, computer and board games, park visits, field trips; Educational: math games, computers, reading, book giveaways, tutoring; Health/Nutrition: food and nutrition education, health related activities, food preparation/tasting classes, onsite food gardening; Literacy/Computer Skills: storybook reading, computer learning, library trips; Socialization: family or group movie and popcorn nights, mom/infant/socialization activities; healthy hands salon activities.

In a supportive and nurturing environment, our families are afforded a safe haven and an opportunity to learn and grow on every level.

In addition to free shelter, clothing, and nourishing meals, Lotus House provides coordinated, multi-faceted, wrap-around support services, arranging prenatal care, birthing and parenting classes, access to life saving medications, infant mental health screening, and medical and mental health treatment. Resource Coordinators serve as advocates to ensure every family receives social services and benefits essential to their new start to happy and healthy lives. Our job readiness training programs and employment specialists assist mothers in re-entering the work world after babies are born, learning how to juggle their new roles, and saving their nest egg for their future transition to permanent homes. When families are ready to move, Lotus House Thrift helps them get settled in their new homes with donated furnishings, linens, dishes and kitchen necessities, as well as special needs items for babies like cribs, strollers, car seats, and more. Lotus House continues to serve as a resource to provide stability to these new families long after their successful completion.

In holistic child and family centered programming and support services, Lotus House helps these special women and their children emerge from the shadows, give voice to their dreams and aspirations, and become who they are meant to be.

Your support truly makes hope blossom!

[1] National Center on Child Homelessness at American Institutes for Research. Waltham, MA. Nov. 2014. America's Youngest Outcasts: A Report Card on Child Homelessness.
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[2] NATIONAL CENTER ON CHILD HOMELESSNESS AT AMERICAN INSTITUTES FOR RESEARCH. Waltham, MA. Nov. 2014. America's Youngest Outcasts: A Report Card on Child Homelessness.

[3] Prescott, Laura et. al. 2017. A Long Journey Home: A Guide for Creating Trauma Informed Services for Mothers and Children Experiencing Homelessness". The National Child Traumatic Stress Network. National Center on Family homelessness.
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[4] A SCIENCE BASED FRAMEWORK FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD POLICY, USING EVIDENCE TO IMPROVE OUTCOMES IN LEARNING, BEHAVIOR, AND HEALTH FOR VULNERABLE CHILDREN, NATIONAL SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL ON THE DEVELOPING CHILD. CENTER ON THE DEVELOPING CHILD AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY. 2007.
<HTTP://DEVELOPINGCHILD.HARVARD.EDU/RESOURCES/A-SCIENCE-BASED-FRAMEWORK-FOR-EARLY-CHILDHOOD-POLICY/>.

[5] NICHOLAS D. KRISTOFF, "CUDDLE YOUR KID", THE NEW YORK TIMES, OCTOBER 20, 2012", CITING PAUL TOUGH IN HOW CHILDREN SUCCEED. <HTTP://WWW.NYTIMES.COM/2012/10/21/OPINION/SUNDAY/KRISTOF-CUDDLE-YOUR-KID.HTML>.

[6] THE SCIENCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT, NATIONAL SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL ON THE DEVELOPING CHILD. CENTER ON THE DEVELOPING CHILD AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY. THE INBRIEF SERIES. 2007.
<HTTP://DEVELOPINGCHILD.HARVARD.EDU/RESOURCES/INBRIEF-SCIENCE-OF-ECD/>.

[7] Prescott, Laura et. al. 2017.

[8] Bassuk, Ellen, MD and Steven M. Friedman, PhD. National Child Traumatic Stress Network, Homelessness and Extreme Poverty Working Group. Facts on Trauma and Homeless Children. US DHHS SAMHSA. 2005.
https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources//facts_on_trauma_and_homeless_children.pdf.

[9] HRC EXPERT PANEL ON EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES IN HOMELESS SERVICES, HOMELESS RESOURCE CENTER, U. S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES, SAMHSA. ROCKVILLE, MD. FEBRUARY 11, 2008.