



FAMILY CONNECTION

The Family Connection Program began in 1989 to provide comprehensive supportive services for homeless children living in emergency, transitional or domestic violence shelters. Rainbow Days' mission is to *inspire and prepare children to live a life filled with hope and promise*. A homeless child is certainly in a high-risk situation and needs these important life-skills. The "core" of the program is weekly *Curriculum-Based Support Groups (CBSGs®)* that provide much needed life skills for these children. The program also provides a menu of drug-free life enrichment services including art retreats, family outings and summer camps.

The Need

Every year, hundreds of thousands of American families become homeless. In fact, families with children are among the fastest growing segment of the homeless population. At least 1.35 million children are homeless during a year's time, over 2,000 in Dallas alone. Most children living with homeless parents are very young (42 percent are under age 6) and are therefore physically and emotionally vulnerable in the event of household disruptions. Homeless children are much more likely than children who live in homes to experience serious difficulties, including physical, cognitive, emotional, and mental problems. Further, childhood homelessness translates into a greater risk of homelessness in adulthood.

Children who are experiencing homelessness are considered to be living in a high-risk situation which can "overwhelm children's coping abilities" (the definition of "traumatic stress.") High-risk situations do not provide the essential "protective factors" known to inoculate children against negative influences and psychosocial risks. Without intervention, traumatic stress can lead to diagnosable behavioral health disorders.

Our Solution

Family Connection fills a significant gap in the continuum of care for homeless children and their families by offering a program of supportive services in family and domestic violence shelters and transitional living centers.

Family Connection provides three types of core services:

- *Curriculum-Based Support Groups (CBSGs®)*
- Support Groups for Parents
- Drug-Free Life Enrichment Activities

The *CBSG® Program* provides a research-based, interactive, multi-cultural curriculum. Lesson content and intent are essentially the same across all age groupings, but discussions and experiential activities – which are the foundation for each lesson – are targeted to specific ages/developmental levels, and adapted to address the unique needs of different implementation settings.

The *support group* modality sets the *CBSG® Program* apart from other preventive interventions and provides several additional protective factors, including: small group numbers; more time for discussion and skills practice; the emotional and social safety of a highly structured and supportive process, including group rules and confidentiality; opportunities for bonding; having an outlet and learning ways to cope with stress; and the emotional support of a caring, trained group facilitator.



Goals

The Goals of Family Connection are to:

- **Protect the Children** -- to interrupt and prevent the intergenerational cycle of family chemical dependency and homelessness by helping children to build individual coping skills and personal resiliency (the capacity to withstand and overcome adversity and hardship).
- **Help Parents Protect Their Children** -- to help parents build their parental coping skills, restore personal resources, and improve family bonds and communication, which in turn helps protect children from the risks associated with being homeless.
- **Help the Community Protect Homeless Children** -- to help identify gaps and to build knowledge, networks and resources needed to meet the unique needs of homeless children.

The Curriculum

Through our award winning curricula, *Kids' Connection, Too*, children meet in small groups with a trained facilitator in a child/youth-appropriate and confidential setting. All support group sessions include an opening activity, a guided discussion, one or more "skills practice" activities, reflection and a closing activity.

Session topics include Feelings, Handling Anger, Chemical Dependency, Dreams & Goal Setting, Making Healthy Choices, Friends and Resisting Peer Pressure.

In a Rainbow Days Support Group, children learn how to:

- Listen and communicate effectively
- Manage emotions - especially anger
- Practice self-control/self-management
- Be part of a team and practice teamwork
- Deal more effectively with change
- Choose friends wisely
- Make healthy choices and decisions
- Refuse negative peer pressure

Major Messages

Through the support groups children learn Rainbow Days' Major Messages. These messages help them become more autonomous, socially competent, interdependent, able to solve problems and hopeful about the future.

I AM likeable, capable, unique and valued.

I CAN treat others like I want to be treated.

I HAVE strengths, capabilities and people who care about me.

I WILL make healthy choices and be alcohol, tobacco and drug free.

I BELIEVE I have a purpose.



Outcomes

Children who complete a Rainbow Days' Community-Based Support Group Program (CBSG®) show the following outcomes:

- Participants improve their understanding of what constitutes good character, including a decrease in rebelliousness and conduct problems and an improvement in their coping, life and social skills.
- Participants increase their understanding of and commitment to healthy choices including adopting a non-use attitude toward alcohol, tobacco and other drugs.

Site-Based Activities

Children's Support Groups: Children meet in small groups once a week with Family Connection staff to participate in guided discussions and activities, which help them learn about themselves, their feelings, friends, how to make healthy choices and how to set goals for the future.

Parent Support Groups: Parents meet in small groups with Family Connection staff. This group provides a support system for the parents, focusing on their children.

Learning Tool Kits: Learning Tool Kits contain activities for children and parents to do together to reinforce lessons from the support groups. Learning Tool Kits contain all of the materials and instructions needed to complete these fun, interactive, and educational activities. Additionally they increase family bonding and communication.

Play Connection: Parents learn about play and the importance of engaging in healthy, interactive play experiences to build stronger, happier, healthier families. Play Connection provides a combination of knowledge acquisition and skills practice through ten sessions, five for parents alone, and five for families (parents working with their children), in a fun and relaxed atmosphere.

Family Play Time: Family Connection staff facilitates recreational activities with children and parents such as reading, board games and imaginative play to build stronger children and families through play. Games that require little or no materials are introduced to assist parents in understanding that play doesn't have to be expensive and can be incorporated into their everyday routine.

Drug-Free Life Enrichment Activities (Off-Site)

In addition to the on-site services, *Family Connection* provides a wide range of activities to help children and families reintegrate into the community and enrich their lives. Life enrichment activities help children, and ultimately many times families, build educational goals, develop their personal attributes and assets, practice using their new life skills in natural settings, re-connect to the community, help others, and "recapture lost childhood and encourage age appropriate activities."

Art With a Heart: A day retreat in which adult art mentors teach children about the arts and model appropriate life skills. Children are matched one-on-one with an adult mentor in a creative arts project. At Art With a Heart events, visual and performing arts activities are combined to give the children the opportunity to be "a star" and complete art projects that they can keep.



Family Outings: Social, cultural and recreational outings for the whole family are conducted at various locations throughout the city. These outings allow families to reconnect with each other and give parents quality time to spend with their children. The 3 biggest Family Outing offered are: Saturday with Santa, Easter EGGstravaganza and the annual Back-to-School Party.

Kids' University: Conducted in partnership with a local university or college, this academic camp involves the children in a variety of interactive learning experiences. **Kids' University** promotes the merits of higher education, develops social competency and builds self-esteem while reinforcing the importance of staying in school and continuing their education.

Camp Bravo: This is a unique performing arts camp during which homeless children learn songs, dances and speaking lines and create props, costumes and scenery for an original live production. The experience culminates in a musical production performed for an audience of family, friends and supporters.

Outdoor Adventure Camp: This traditional recreational day camp experience focuses on skills development and team building activities. Besides having fun swimming, riding horses, and making crafts, the children learn and practice skills, especially communication, cooperation, goal-setting, problem-solving, and teamwork under the guidance of skilled and caring adults.

Back-to-School Party: A variety of activities including games, arts, and crafts, prizes and snacks make this a special family event that celebrates the beginning of school. Children receive new school uniforms and backpacks filled with everything they need to start the school year on a positive note.

Community Service Projects: Children engage in projects and activities that teach the importance of helping other less fortunate than themselves. They also learn through these activities that they can help their community by contributing and making the world a better place.

Children Tell Us

“What I learned at Rainbow Days was how to be respectful and to treat others as you want to be treated. Rainbow Days has inspired me to step up and be kind.”

“At Rainbow Days I learned how to control my attitude and how to make better choices.”

“At Rainbow Days I learned not to smoke. I love coming here. It means a lot to me. I feel great coming here. I love it.”

“I like it when Ms. Lollipop comes to the center for Rainbow Days and to teach us and because I have somebody to share my feelings with. At Rainbow Days I have learned about peer pressure, that all of your feelings are okay, it is okay to be sad and to treat others fair.”

Parents Tell Us

“I just wanted to send a little thank you for last Saturday! My children and I had an awesome time. It gave me an opportunity to bond with my 11-year old, which made it even more enjoyable. So, thank you for a very relaxing and adventurous day. Many thanks and may God bless you all.”

“My three children and I recently completed a ten-week Rainbow Days program. What a wonderful, powerful and educational experience it was! Phoebe, mother in a Parent Connection support group

“I now understand the sense of sharing within a healthy family. I leave with a sense of peace and competence as a parent - something which I NEVER felt before. I also leave here with an understanding and sense of community. Group has given me skills to handle most anything my children will go through. The change in my son's behavior – he was so angry – is unbelievable.

His self-esteem is so much better now. He has turned his life around thanks to his group. His school grades and attitude are terrific and now he's able to have additional interests in life!"

Shelter Staff Tell Us

"I do want to say thank you for providing all my kiddos with backpacks, supplies, uniforms and shoes. You all are the only resource these families have to meet those crucial needs before school begins. Thanks again for always providing fun and games and those much needed supplies!"

"I just wanted you to know that the kids were excited about the stockings and presents. All the way home all I heard was "oh my gosh" over and over again. They just loved everything. Of course, the movie, popcorn, pizza, drinks hit the spot also. One mother said that they played with their things all afternoon. Thanks for all that you do for these kids. It does mean a lot to them."

Awards and Recognition



"Rainbow Days' Family Connection Program Selected as 2009 Honorable Mention Winner for the Mutual of America Community Partnership Award"

The **Mutual of America Community Partnership Award** recognizes outstanding nonprofit organizations in the United States that have shown exemplary leadership by facilitating partnerships with public, private or social sector leaders who are working together as equal partners, not as donors and recipients, to build a cohesive community that serves as a model for collaborating with others for the greater good. Each year, from hundreds of submissions, ten applicants are selected for these awards. There is the national award recipient, two honorable mention awards and seven merit finalists. Family Connection

was named as one of the two honorable mention award winners. This award recognizes that the Family Connection program makes a significant positive impact on those it serves (14,000 children and 4,000 parents in the Dallas community to date); fosters partnerships among government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and private businesses; displays creativity in addressing a real-life problem; and is effective in leveraging resources.



**CENTER FOR NONPROFIT
MANAGEMENT**

"Excellence in Mission Achievement Award for the Family Connection Program"

The Family Connection program for homeless children and families was awarded the "Excellence in Mission Achievement Award" by The Center for Nonprofit Management. Chosen from 30 applicants, this award recognizes organizations that exemplify distinctive achievement in nonprofit management. A beautifully engraved Tiffany's plate, a check for \$5,000, and consultation from Association Work were presented to Rainbow Days at A Night of Light, an awards dinner benefiting the Center.



"HUD Best Practices Award"

Selected from over 3,000 nominations, Rainbow Days' Family Connection program for homeless children and families was recognized as a "Top 100 Best Practices" program in the nation by the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in 1999. Secretary



Andrew M. Cuomo presented the award and called the recipients the “Best of the Best.”

Sites
Annie’s House
ASD/Spencer Garden Apt.
Dallas Life Foundation
DISD – Arlington Park Elementary
DISD – City Park Elementary
Exodus Ministries
Family Gateway Shelter
Family Gateway Transitional
Genesis Women’s Shelter
Hernandez Elementary
Housing Crisis Center
Interfaith Housing
Jonathan’s Place
Mosaic Family Services
New Beginning
Nexus Recovery Center
Reconciliation Outreach
Salvation Army
Samaritan Inn
Shared Housing
The Family Place
Union Gospel Mission
Vogel Alcove

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