

# IMPACT

YOUR

In This Issue

## YANNA'S STORY

Pictured is a drawing shared by one of UrbanPromise's students. Art therapy is just one of the innovative strategies used by its Wellness Center in trauma-informed care work.





# LEARNING THROUGH HEALING

**At United Way, we know that a quality education is the foundation for a successful life.** Empowering students to leverage and expand on that knowledge is what allows them to become even more successful. Through your generosity, you enable us to pave the way for more high school graduates by improving the quality of education from cradle to career.

But sometimes, what happens outside the classroom has a profound effect on how a child learns.

In this issue of our *IMPACT* newsletter, Jodina Hicks, executive director of UrbanPromise, one of several organizations throughout our footprint with which we partner on this critical work, shares how adopting a trauma-informed approach to caring for and teaching students has transformed their lives and put them on track to a brighter future.

United Way's work to expand trauma-informed care began with the philanthropic leadership of Carole Haas Gravagno, who founded our Healthy Parenting Initiative (HPI) in 2009. Originally designed using expertise and input from the Institute for Family Professionals, the HPI helped child care professionals understand and effectively address challenging behaviors in students and their families. The work expanded over time to include a focus on the effect of childhood trauma and as a result, thousands of teachers, social workers, counselors, community leaders and other professionals have received training to help them intervene with children who have had experiences some of us cannot even imagine.

Thank you for your continued partnership to drive measurable, lasting Impact that none of us can achieve alone.



President and CEO  
United Way of Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey



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Knowing they needed a new way to meet the needs of their students, Jodina and her staff established the UrbanPromise Wellness Center. Through innovative approaches to help youth like Yanna work through traumatic experiences, “we knew instinctively that we found a way to change lives.”

# YANNA'S STORY



When 5-year-old Yanna opened the door to her family's Camden apartment, her life changed in an instant. In charged men who not only murdered her father right in front of her, but also kidnapped her before fleeing. Yanna was rescued by her mother, who never spoke about what had happened, believing her daughter didn't remember the experience. Years later, after being expelled from various schools for negative behaviors, Yanna landed at UrbanPromise Academy, a program of United Way Impact Partner UrbanPromise, where the trauma-informed staff recognized the need for specialized intervention.

Although Yanna's story is just one example, “it's not a stretch to say that all children in Camden, like so many from other urban environments, have experienced trauma, whether directly themselves, through a friend's or family member's experience, or because of a situation in their neighborhood,” says Jodina Hicks, executive director of UrbanPromise. “We see evidence of that even in our youngest students. So, instead of asking, ‘What's wrong with you?’ we trained our staff to ask, ‘What happened to you?’ Our youths' personal experiences, whether from the past or just this morning, affect everything in their lives, including their ability to learn and thrive.”

It was a critical shift in approach, as more than 50 percent of UrbanPromise Academy students reported three or more Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). These traumatic events can have a direct effect on a child's ability to learn and often lead to behavioral issues, emotional instability and other health-related risks later in life. Worse, roughly 20 percent have experienced significant trauma. Adds Jodina, “The majority of our teens have already experienced the death of a close family member or caretaker. And traumatic

experiences increase the risk of early death, meaning that the unhealed grief that our youth carry, if unaddressed, has the potential to cut lives short.”

Knowing they needed a new approach to meet the needs of their students, Jodina and her staff established the UrbanPromise Wellness Center. Built around leading trauma-informed practices and intervention techniques, the center offers students like Yanna and their families training, counseling and more. And United Way is helping to drive this work forward throughout our region. Through investments from the Impact Fund and dedicated staff, United Way is creating awareness and forging partnerships—with UrbanPromise and others—to ensure this life-changing work touches more individuals.

“It was simple conceptually, but the result was profound. We knew instinctively that we found a way to change lives. We start with staff, who are trained to recognize and deal with trauma, and pull in professionals when needed. From there, it moves to the students. Classroom time includes a focus on mindfulness, learning to self-calm and other techniques to empower students to take control of their emotions and triggers,” Jodina continues.

It's clear the focus on creating a trauma-informed environment is working.

“When I see how far these students have come, it's inspiring,” Jodina says. “And it's because we've changed the conversation. Yanna thought about her experience every single day, but by allowing her to confront this trauma in a safe environment, her grades, attendance and behavior improved. By opening dialogue and creating safe spaces, we've developed a deeper ability to move kids beyond their trauma and into hope...hope for healing and a brighter future.”

## TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE BY THE NUMBERS



1 — 1 TRAINED PROFESSIONAL

CHILDREN IMPACTED

ADULTS IMPACTED

1 trauma-informed professional reaches 55 children and 30 adults. In Fiscal Year 2016, United Way trained 389 professionals—ultimately impacting 33,065 individuals throughout our region.

**“AS MANY AS 90%  
OF CHILDREN  
ARE AFFECTED BY  
TRAUMA IN SOME  
WAY, POTENTIALLY  
ROBBING THEM OF  
THEIR RIGHT TO  
LEARN AND REACH  
THEIR POTENTIAL.**

**With the right interventions  
in our schools, we can  
ensure trauma-sensitive  
practices are present to  
help students succeed.”**

**—Diane Wagenhals**

Program Director  
Institute for Professional Education and Development  
of Lakeside Educational Network and The Institute for  
Family Professionals

## INVESTING IN EDUCATION

*A quality education is the foundation of a lifetime of success—it opens doors and expands futures.*

It takes everyone—parents, teachers and the community—to help children thrive in school and in life. The returns on investing in our children are phenomenal—kids who experience quality education will give back to their community 10-fold.

With your support, we work to pave the way for more high school graduates by improving quality education from cradle to career.

In 2014–15, we invested more than \$7.8 million in our Education work through:



### Success By 6®

*A “whole child” approach to early education that focuses on cognitive skills and social and emotional development while improving the quality of education at child care centers nationwide.*



### Early Grade Literacy

*Helping children become proficient readers by providing appropriate books and resources, connecting them to committed volunteer readers and increasing the professional skills of educators.*



### Early Warning Indicators

*Helping middle schools identify and intervene with students in need of academic and behavioral help to get back on track to graduation.*



### Impact Grants

*Three-year general operating support for nonprofits delivering measurable results in our Education strategy areas.*

When more students have access to quality education from cradle to career, our communities become stronger. And this work is only made possible through your support and investment.

**THANK YOU FOR LIVING UNITED!**



# HELP UNITED WAY DRIVE IMPACT

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There are thousands of people across our region who are just one opportunity away from a brighter future.

Join us in paving the way for more high school graduates.



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## “TEACHERS AND PARENTS MUST BE EQUIPPED WITH THE RIGHT KNOWLEDGE AND TOOLS TO MEET THE NEEDS OF CHILDREN AFFECTED BY TRAUMA.”

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—*Carole Haas Gravagno*

Philanthropist  
*Founder of United Way's Healthy Parenting Initiative,  
including Trauma-Informed Care*