

## **Moving Everest: A Catalyst for Community Transformation**

### **Transformed Lives Lead to Community Transformation**

#### **Poverty is not just poverty. It is compounded adversity.**

Austin is home to thousands of kids who face enormous obstacles to success in school—and life. It is one of the most violent neighborhoods in Chicago, where gangs, crime and drugs and other social ills besiege blighted pockets of concentrated poverty. Many households lack an involved male role model—often due to incarceration, divorce, unplanned pregnancy or abandonment. Child hunger, lack of medical care and even homelessness are everyday realities for many of the kids we serve. And traumatic childhood experiences such as sexual, verbal and physical abuse, violent assault, family dysfunction, and emotional or physical neglect are way too common.

With nearly nine out of 10 students coming from low-income households, Austin schools often do not have the resources to meet the individual needs of each student. Many students are unable to read at grade level by the time they reach third grade, which makes them four times more likely to drop out of school than proficient readers—eight times for black and Latino children living in poverty. Yet this is the norm in Austin, where 39.5 percent of residents have not graduated from high school. Public schools can typically only offer “one size fits all” learning programs—and so cannot possibly meet the intensive needs of Austin’s diverse student population (especially those who start their education already behind their peers and in critical need of extra attention).

Born into these circumstances, underperforming with low expectations and internalizing the hopelessness that surrounds them, kids are not just slipping through the cracks—they are falling into a giant void. This is where Moving Everest Charter School steps in.

#### **Austin students need intensive, personalized and holistic attention.**

Moving Everest is uniquely equipped to fill this void, with a proven model for addressing every barrier to academic and lifelong success. Because students from under-resourced neighborhoods like Austin need intensive, personalized attention in order to catch up and move ahead, Moving Everest is developing a personalized educational plan for each student.

Plans are tailored to ensure that each student learns at a challenging yet appropriate level and pace for that child. In addition to whole and small group instruction, all students participate in technology-enhanced blended learning, which individualizes educational options at a student’s own path and pace. Students work independently through a variety of online programs that are chosen based on their individual needs and that allow students to progress at their own pace. Proficiency is monitored by classroom teachers, brain lab teachers, our Director of Digital Learning, and even the students themselves. The immediate and ongoing feedback not only lets students know how they are progressing, it helps motivate them and facilitates instructional intervention. This intervention is often

driven by Moving Everest's staff, which includes both reading and math intervention specialists—who work with struggling and accelerated students alike. The goal is to help students in the Austin neighborhood excel—not just catch up with their grade level.

Moving Everest is also uniquely focused on the special, more sensitive needs of students living in high-trauma neighborhoods. Recognizing that childhood trauma is linked to emotional, physical and social problems, Moving Everest has a dedicated social and emotional learning (SEL) curriculum and dedicated SEL time. Moving Everest is also in the process of becoming a trauma-sensitive school with a full-time social worker trained in Trauma Sensitive School programs. As such, Moving Everest will be a trauma-safe environment where kids feel secure, welcomed, and supported by socially and emotionally competent adults who are trained to provide SEL support. This will help our student population cultivate healthy, lasting behaviors and thrive in the face of difficulties and hardships.

Concurrent with our SEL initiatives, Moving Everest also focuses on building character and instilling a growth mindset. Grit, hard work and perseverance are necessary for accomplishing long-term objectives despite long-standing obstacles—as are traits such as courage and self-confidence. We also work on self-awareness, self-control, social awareness, respect, relationship skills and responsible decision making as part of our SEL curriculum.

**If there is a need, it will be met.**

To extend our school mission beyond the traditional school hours, Moving Everest has partnered with By The Hand Club For Kids, an after-school program that emphasizes academic excellence and a holistic approach to child development. This enables students to attend school in a safe, caring, academically rigorous environment—the key to reducing chronic stress, which is shown to inhibit learning and memory. Then—if their parents choose—students can attend By The Hand in the same building during the most dangerous time of day, when most crimes by and against youth are committed.

Along with additional academic support, By The Hand offers a robust suite of services designed to break down barriers to learning and success. Students are offered three nutritious meals every day—two during school hours at Moving Everest and one at By The Hand during afterschool hours. These breaks prevent hunger and inadequate nutrition—both known to affect a child's intellectual and social capacity as well as his or her grades and school attendance.

Through By The Hand, children receive free eye and dental exams, including eyeglasses and dental procedures when needed. Vision problems are the primary cause of reading failure and, subsequently, academic problems among at-risk, inner-city children. And untreated tooth pain adversely affects student learning and can lead to problems eating, speaking, socializing, sleeping and overall health issues. These barriers must be addressed and eliminated.

Augmenting the social and emotional support students receive from Moving Everest, By The Hand reinforces character development, provides for professional counseling for anger, trauma and grief and facilitates interactions with social workers and students. By conducting home visits, By The Hand works closely with Moving Everest and students' parents to prevent truancy, increase parental involvement and offer deep family support—strengthening the school-family connection.

By The Hand also expands students' horizons through life-enriching experiences such as summer camp, professional ballgames, music or dance instruction, visits to museums and special attractions, and interactions with leaders from different professions.

The Moving Everest and By The Hand collaboration is more thoughtfully designed and therefore more effective than a traditional school plus after-school partnership. These two organizations share an emphasis on learning and character development initiatives, intentionally coordinating and collaborating when possible on professional development opportunities. This is accomplished through close communication between the Moving Everest principal and By The Hand site director as well as Moving Everest teachers and By The Hand team leaders.

Now with a new school opportunity, we want to take this same highly successful model, go to a new area of Austin and add another strong community partner: ReVive Center. The ReVive Center is founded on the principle that citywide transformation begins with the individual, then radiates out to the family, and then to the community. ReVive networks and coordinates with different community organizations to impact lives and families, knowing that strong families benefit neighborhoods, and neighborhoods are the building blocks that shape neighborhoods and a city.

The center will be a resource for people who lack the means to rebuild their lives. This may involve the provision of food, clothing, furniture, temporary housing—or the opportunity to rest, recover and rebuild. Long-term, the center works to help families—often single or abandoned women plus their children—to secure affordable rental housing and establish the stability to afford a modest lifestyle. Through its wellness center, ReVive also partners with healthcare providers to deliver needed healthcare, potentially including the children and families we seek to serve.

**More than a charter school. More than an after-school. More than a ReVive center.** For kids and their families, this comprehensive level of support provides hope in the tangible forms of an excellent education, increased opportunities, abundant resources and personalized ongoing support.

A troubled student who was getting into fights almost daily at school and disrespecting adults after his grandfather died—the only father he had known—learns how to process his grief. With the help of counseling and caring adults, he begins the process of healing and becomes a model student.

A shy first grader doing poorly in school suddenly begins earning good grades after receiving eyeglasses to correct her vision.

Another student—reading four levels below his grade and earning D’s and F’s—learns to decode multi-syllable words after his reading coach discovers and corrects his problem. His reading comprehension improves an astounding five levels in one year.

A student who stopped caring about anything after the loss of her mother improves her grades from straight F’s to all ABC’s. With the love and support she receives at school, she eventually decides she needs to be there for her younger sister—as others were for her.

A single mother working two minimum-wage jobs to make ends meet knows her child is receiving three nutritious meals a day, getting a quality education and being kept safe during the afterschool hours while she is still at work.

A mother and grandmother are displaced from their home due to loss of income. Yet they and seven children have hope in the form of temporary housing, clean clothes, basic necessities and a supportive community of people who will help. As they rebuild their lives, the children can stay in the same school instead of moving away from their friends.

All of their (and many others’) life stories would be radically different if it weren’t for the expanded support they received—support that gave them hope and the means to successfully overcome their challenges.

The comprehensive and individualized support provided only through the combination of a charter school, after-school and ReVive center allows for such an expanded level of support. With the proposed development of 1830 N. LeClaire, the Moving Everest Charter School and its partners can break down the multitude of barriers to learning and a successful life.

**Impacting a life—or a family—impacts a neighborhood.**

Currently, only 12.4 percent of Austin residents have a bachelor's degree. Consider the economic and societal impact it will have if more elementary and middle school students from Austin were able to enter and excel at one of Chicago's excellent high schools. After graduating, they would be prepared to earn a bachelor's degree from a well-respected college. On the average, this would enable them to earn \$2 million over the course of 40 years. In contrast, it costs taxpayers nearly \$2 million for every high school dropout who enters a life of crime and drug abuse.

Fortunately, personalized, holistic and strategically focused attention makes a difference. For example, 85 percent of the kids who attended both Moving Everest 1 and By The Hand were reading at or above grade level by the end of the 2017-2018 school year, according to Lexia<sup>®</sup> Core5<sup>®</sup> student data. This is a dramatic increase from only 37 percent at the beginning of the school year.

Instead of falling behind, a transformational educational experience combined with individual support can help even the most challenged kids achieve a successful life. Long-term, the cascading effect of a generational change in the lives of children and their families can extend throughout North Austin and beyond to surrounding communities. With Moving Everest 1, about 80 percent of our students are from families within a 1.5-mile radius of our school. At the Moving Everest 2 North Austin location, a 1.5-mile radius will include multiple neighborhoods.

As such, the development of 1830 N. LeClaire represents much more than a charter school, much more than an after-school program, and much more than a community center. The (proposed) transformation of a real estate asset that has sat vacant for nearly 50 years will be of immense and far-reaching value to families, neighbors, homes, communities—and the city.

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