

# FRIENDS of the CHILDREN

Generational Change,  
One Child at a Time

Boston



## **RATHER THAN ASKING, "WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU?" WE ASK, "WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU?"**

Research has shown that children who have experienced significant trauma and adversity and don't have the buffer of a caring adult often suffer the most from toxic stress. Our model was founded on research showing that the single most important factor in overcoming childhood adversity and trauma is a long-term, nurturing relationship with a consistent and caring adult. Our unique high intensity/high impact model, proven through rigorous evaluation, increases graduation rates, and opens up pathways to healing empowering our youth with the skills needed to overcome adversity and thrive.

### **CHILDREN AND TOXIC STRESS**

Children who have experienced multiple ACEs (adverse childhood experiences such as physical/sexual/verbal abuse, emotional/physical neglect, a family member who has depression or a mental illness, a family member with an addiction, witnessing a family member being abused or losing a parents to separation, divorce or another reason) over long periods of time are often at a much higher risk for toxic stress, which leads to long-term mental, emotional, social and physical health problems, including depression, substance abuse and obesity. According to the Center for Youth Wellness:

- Exposure to ACEs can change children's hormonal systems, immune systems and even their DNA. This can cause behavioral problems, learning difficulties and physical health issues.
- The more ACEs a child is exposed to, the higher the risk of developing chronic illnesses.

### **WHY OUR MODEL WORKS**

*Friends of the Children-Boston* has been working with children who have experienced significant childhood adversity for almost 20 years. We work with our youth one on one over a 12+ year period - kindergarten through graduation - to understand the barriers they face and help to break the cycle of childhood adversity. Here's why our model is a promising solution:

## **HEALING CHILDHOOD ADVERSITY WITH FRIENDS**

## CONTINUED...

- ***We seek out those who need us most.*** We intentionally select youth who have experienced and been exposed to significant adversity and trauma. Eighty-five percent of our youth have experienced <3 ACEs in their lifetime, and more than half have experienced <6. We also work closely with children in foster care and in communities that are at high risk for ACEs due to racial, economic and systemic inequalities.
- ***We stay for the long term.*** Children in our program have a salaried, Professional Mentor (a Friend) for 12+ years, from kindergarten through graduation. This provides them with the consistency, trust, and stability needed to help protect them from re-traumatization.
- ***Our model is relationship-based.*** Our Friends build one-on-one relationships with our youth, working with them for 3-4 hours a week at school and in the community. We become part of their family.
- ***We are trauma informed.*** We provide connection to potential paths for healing families and youth. We train staff to recognize the signs and symptoms of trauma. We respond by working to integrate that knowledge into our practices and policies. Most importantly, we seek to actively resist re-traumatization.
- ***We intervene as early as age 5.*** Research has shown that the earlier you intervene with a child who has experienced trauma, they are more likely to gain the tools needed to overcome past traumatic experiences and the coping skills to deal with life's challenges.
- ***We empower youth to build Core Assets.*** These are nine research-based qualities we focus on to ensure the social and emotional development of our youth. With our nine Core Assets in place, we believe our youth will be better equipped to overcome past and future adversity.

## THE RESULTS

We are especially proud of the youth who graduate from our program because of what they have had to overcome to get there. A snapshot of youth we serve demonstrates that our model works:

- 98% of Achievers graduate to the next grade, while 100% avoid incarceration, and 98% avoid early parenting
- 91% of Achievers report consistent school attendance, compared to 72% for all Boston Public School (BPS) students—despite our Achievers facing significantly more barriers and frequently attending schools that rank amongst the lowest in the city
- 80% plus of our alumni are persisting in pursuing a college degree and/or employed, despite the pandemic, which we know is a result of our ability to build years of trust and provide them with a network of support in every aspect of their lives



**We are relentless so they will be resilient. Learn more at [friendsboston.org](https://friendsboston.org).**