

## "What Will it Take for Maria to be Ready for School?"



What will it take for Maria to be ready for school this fall? New shoes? Check. Pencils? Check. Backpack? Check. These are the answers that come readily to mind each year during the dog days of summer in Austin. Thankfully, with the help of several terrific community sponsors, we are able to ensure that these important items are available to our neediest client children.

But what about those things you can't see or touch? Those things that can't be purchased on the tax free weekend but rather must be imprinted on a child from the day she is born? Those intangibles that ensure Maria will be able to thrive in school and succeed in life? Contrary to the popular book title, the more I learn about the needs of children, the more I believe that everything a child needs to know, they learn BEFORE kindergarten.

For example, if a child is not held on a lap with a book in front of them and read to before the age of 12 months, an important window has been closed. It is in this process that a child learns sequencing, the relationship between verbal cues and word or picture symbols and basics of vocabulary development. If a child does not have a consistent relationship with a stable adult before the age of three, they have missed an important window of emotional development. During this window, a child learns trust and the foundations of social skills necessary to later navigate their school classroom. Studies prove that these types of early learning experiences are critical to a child's success in school and later in life.

Most research on children who do not succeed in school identifies three primary risk factors: the deprivations associated with living in poverty, the stresses associated with single parenthood, and limitations related to lack of parental (especially maternal) education. Travis County has over 44,000 children living below the Federal Poverty Guideline (\$20,000 for a family of 4). Almost half (48%) of single mothers in Travis County with children under the age of five live in poverty. Given these staggering statistics, what can we do to ensure that every child entering school this fall has the full range of abilities and skills needed to succeed? That each child has an EQ (Emotional Quotient) as well as an IQ? That they have confidence as well as crayons? Research indicates that the earlier in a child's life his family receives well targeted supports to mitigate these risk factors, the greater the impact will be on that child's entire future. Early intervention is also the most cost effective way for communities to address an array of social issues.

Thank you for the support you give to Any Baby Can. With your help, we improve the lives of children by empowering their families. Side by side in the family's home, we work to ensure that the parents of the most vulnerable young children have the tools and training they need to provide a stimulating learning environment and the emotional support necessary for their children to thrive...long before that school bell rings.

Warmest regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ellen".

Ellen Balthazar  
Executive Director  
Any Baby Can