

Enhancing Quality of Life in Haverhill's Acre Neighborhood (see http://youtu.be/RMH0_P1wKoE) Using Montessori Early Childhood Education to Empower Families and Break the Cycle of Poverty

Haverhill is a city undergoing revitalization but poverty and crime in the Acre is weighing down revitalization in this neighborhood. Many families with children who live in The Acre struggle with:

- a large number of crimes per square mile (758 for Haverhill City center) as compared to other areas (40 Nationally, 34 State-wide, and 51 for Haverhill) as reported by "Neighborhood Scout" September 2013.
- Haverhill being the 15th most violent community in Massachusetts (as reported by the FBI for 2012)
- an inability to break out of the cycle of poverty, violence, or crime (as poignantly captured in Andre Dubus III's *Townie*, his memoirs which depict the struggles of many children growing up in The Acre)

Effective early childhood education is a key lever for ending cycles of poverty and crime in Haverhill's struggling neighborhoods:

- In a policy brief commissioned by Ready Nation, Elaine Weiss states that investing in healthy early childhood development—from before birth through age 5—produces substantial educational, social and financial benefits for children and their communities.¹
- According to Nobel Prize-winning economist James Heckman, early interventions raise academic achievement, reduce grade repetition and special education costs, prevent teenage births, promote high school graduation and college attendance, and reduce crimes.²
- Providing early childhood programming also allows parents to work so they can better provide for their family.

Montessori early childhood programs are producing results in urban districts across the country and can transform the Acre neighborhood in Haverhill too. Haverhill can reap the benefits experienced by these other urban communities that have invested in Montessori early childhood education in the public sector:

- High quality early childhood education programs are a cost-effective way to address the Acre's biggest challenges including failure in school, crime, violence, and poverty.
- Current public policy and investment are supportive of effective early childhood education³ so starting a public-sector Montessori school for young children in the Acre will provide a vehicle for bringing more of that state and federal support to this area.
- Many local early childhood centers that serve disadvantaged families in Haverhill have waitlists proving that more high quality options are needed.
- Montessori early childhood education is an effective approach for providing a strong cognitive and social foundation.
- Haverhill is on a path of revitalization, and public sector Montessori programming is an important strategic step in this journey.

Urban Village Montessori, a new early childhood program in the Acre, is beginning to work with neighbors, local officials, and other non-profits with similar goals to help enhance the quality of life in that neighborhood. How can all of us who care about the Acre work together to foster positive change?

¹ Weiss, E. (2011, January). Paying later: The high costs of failing to invest in young children. Retrieved from http://www.readynation.org/uploads/20110124_02311PAESCrimeBriefweb3.pdf

² Heckman, J. and Masterov, D (2007). The productivity argument for investing in young children. National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper. Retrieved May 8, 2014 from <http://www.nber.org/papers/w13016>

³ U.S. Department of Education (n.d.). Early Learning. Retrieved May 25, 2013 from <http://www.ed.gov/early-learning>