

**Making It Better** offers a variety of programs that are tailored to meet the needs of each campus. Whether our program is academic or enrichment, delivered during or after school, on a school campus or in an apartment-based program; our student: teacher ratio is always low (4:1 academics and 8:1 enrichment) and our goals are always the same . . . developing relationships and improving self-esteem by sparking creativity, fostering success, developing social skills, and expanding life experiences.



**Making It Better** is the only agency providing tutoring services at no cost to at-risk children in west Houston. But more importantly, **MIB** has sought to offer research-based solutions to the academic and social problems facing at-risk children. Lacking the crucial support systems that help young people develop



into successful adults, **MIB** seeks to nurture at-risk children by maintaining low student to adult ratios (4:1 academic and 8:1 enrichment) that allow for developing meaningful relationships with our students. **Making It Better** understands the relationship between development, social skills and academic success. By addressing these issues collaboratively, **MIB** seeks to improve grades, decrease behavioral issues, and inspire personal excellence.

**Making It Better** saw tremendous growth over the 2009 - 10 school year. Students served *doubled* increasing from 165 to 320 and two programs were added to serve students attending five HISD schools (Walnut Bend Elementary, Askew Elementary, Shadowbriar Elementary, Shearn Elementary & Paul Revere Middle School ) – all located in what was formerly known as the West Region of HISD. **MIB** will continue this growth during the 2010-11 school year by adding services at two additional elementary schools within HISD, Piney Point Elementary and Frost Elementary.

Our full-time staff increased to 4, who, along with a part-time staff of 8, work with 75 volunteers to implement **MIB's** programming. Our Board of Directors welcomed four new members adding much needed diversification.

**Target Population:** **MIB's** students are ages 6-14 and have been identified by their classroom teachers as having academic difficulties and/or discipline/social issues. The students served by **Making It Better** are typically 70% black and 25% Hispanic, and 95% participate in the free/reduced school lunch program. Targeted students in the 2009-10 school year attended Paul Revere Middle and four elementary schools–Walnut Bend, Askew, Shearn and Shadowbriar—all HISD schools. The targeted population lived in high risk, low rent apartment complexes in close proximity to the schools they attended. Children living in this type of environment are exposed to multiple risk factors including crime and violence; poverty; poor academic performance; and lack a sense of social connection and bonding to their school, community, and family.



**Programs:** Making It Better's programs are designed to be scalable, so they can be tailor-made to fit the needs of each school. MIB's Senior Director works closely with the school's principal and classroom teachers in developing a program and schedule that meets the needs of their particular students. Once MIB's staff and board are sufficiently satisfied that they are reaching the majority of children with a need in the targeted area, MIB will replicate the program in other parts of Houston.



Our fall, 2009 programs included an 18 week Literacy tutorial program at Askew Elementary; Leadership Academies at Revere Middle, Askew Elementary and Shadowbriar Elementary; after school tutorials/enrichment at the Belmont Place – La Fontaine Apartments (serving children attending Walnut Bend) and at Shadowbriar Elementary, WAIT Training at Revere and West Briar Middle Schools as well as a skills workshop and boys' & girls' peer group programs for Revere Middle School students that followed the same group of students throughout their middle school career. Our Spring, 2010 programs included continuation of the fall programs and added a Literacy Program to thirty-six 3<sup>rd</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> grade students attending Shearn Elementary.

### Academic Tutorials

Making It Better offers children intensive tutoring and skill building both after school and in "pull-out sessions" during the school day. These sessions take place over the course of the school year. MIB offers a low 4:1 student to teacher ratio in their comprehensive tutorial programs with trained, degreed professionals. This low student to teacher ratio not only provides the students with the close attention they so desperately need, but it also allows the tutors to develop a close relationship with each child, which ultimately contributes to their overall emotional well-being. By working closely with school administration and teaching staff, "pull-out" sessions are scheduled in such a way that the students do not miss valuable classroom instruction. Many of the pitfalls encountered in after-school tutorials are alleviated by having the program during the school day, e.g., transportation problems, students choosing to go home instead of attending tutorials, etc.



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**2009-10 Results** Taking into consideration all programs, 83% of MIB students passed the Reading TAKS on the 1<sup>st</sup> attempt and 78% of MIB students passed the Math TAKS on the 1<sup>st</sup> attempt. School administrators reported decreases in disciplinary referrals, increases in student grades, school attendance, confidence, and social skills for students attending our programs.

### Literacy Program

Learning to read is a formidable challenge for approximately sixty percent of our nation's children. Research shows that children who are at risk for reading failure must receive early, intensive, and systematic reading instruction during elementary school if long term success is to be expected. Research also shows that early education is arguably the most important key to future educational success. It is the one public investment that has the single

biggest payoff.<sup>1</sup> Good reading skills are a critical piece of early educational development. Consider the following data from Texas Appleseed:

- High school graduation can be predicted by a child's reading ability at the end of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade
- Reading difficulties have a clear, causal relationship with serious behavior problems.
- Low reading skills in elementary school are a strong predictor of later incarceration.

Given the preceding information, we can no longer ignore the fact that, without academic intervention, many of our children will be destined to a lifetime of poverty and unfulfilled potential which will translate into a huge financial burden for our citizenry and an ill-equipped work force for companies who need employees with a high level of competence.

MIB's comprehensive literacy tutorial program is hands-on and begins by teaching students the sounds of the English language as preparation for strong reading skills. This program enables children to thoroughly learn the phonics skills that are the foundation for a lifetime of reading success. A survey of the relevant research conclusively shows that phonics ability is a key factor in reading success. The phonics portion of MIB's Literacy Program integrates computerized instruction with printed materials and fun games that reinforce the skills the students have acquired. The students also increase their vocabulary and comprehension skills through a tailor-made curriculum prepared by MIB staff. Early intervention that promotes language development is a powerful, cost-effective route to improve a child's school performance. **Making It Better** is the vehicle for that intervention and an affordable way to assure a child's success.



The objectives of the Literacy Program were that 85% children enrolled in the program would increase their reading comprehension by at least one grade level and 75% children would demonstrate improved conduct.

MIB evaluates program success by administering pre and post-tests at the start & conclusion of the Phonics Program according to the *Classroom Reading Inventory* by Nicholas J. Silvaroli and Warren H. Wheelock and by monitoring each child's report cards for improvement in their grades and their conduct scores. Teachers and administrators have provided anecdotal evidence that indicates students' improvement in reading leads to increased confidence and self-esteem, as well as reductions in the number of disciplinary infractions.

During the 2009-10 school year this program was administered to students attending Askew and Shearn Elementary as well as Walnut Bend Elementary students attending our After School program. In 2010-11, this program will continue at Askew, will expand to include students attending Piney Point Elementary, and will continue at Shearn (if funding is available)

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<sup>1</sup> *Growing Up In Houston 2008-2010: Assessing the Quality of Life of Our Children.* Children At Risk. November 2008.

2009-10 Results indicated that 86% of students enrolled in the program reported an overall improvement in their reading grade level.

### Leadership Academies

Leadership Academies were offered once a week to students who exhibited leadership potential, regardless of whether those leadership abilities manifested themselves in positive or negative behavior. These students were chosen by school staff as an opportunity to channel their leadership skills in a positive direction. The sessions were facilitated by Jacque Daughtry, Senior Director and assisted by other MIB personnel and special guests, using a curriculum developed by Mrs. Daughtry.

The personal objectives of the program were to enable these future leaders to put their gifts and talents to positive use through the development of a variety of skills such as team building, setting goals for themselves and for the team, conflict resolution and coping skills, social skills (confidence, eye contact, speaking to adults, and speaking in public), and service to their community. In the spring, all Leadership Academy students participated in Lemonade Day, a city-wide community event which introduced them to the concept of entrepreneurship; students learned to set goals, develop a business plan, establish a budget, seek investors, provide customer service, and give back to the community. By practicing their new leadership skills with support from adults, young people were able to put what they learned into action and become confident, positive leaders.



During the 2009-10 school year Leadership Academies were offered to students attending Askew, Shadowbriar and Revere. In 2010-11, this program will expand to include students attending Frost Elementary.

### WAIT (Why Am I Tempted?) Training



MIB was one of the sub-contractors to Change Happens! helping to deliver a multi-year federally funded abstinence program to African American youth ages 12 – 15. We successfully delivered the program to 115 students and 18 parents and held follow-up sessions for 100 students who completed the full program during the past calendar year. This curriculum was designed to give students the reasons, skills and support to choose abstinence over sexual activity until marriage by providing medically accurate, researched-based, culturally relevant information to teens at a critical time in their development.

This program was not a "just say no" program but rather was centered on equipping the students to have healthy relationships and to value themselves as individuals. While giving appropriate attention to the negative consequences of risk behaviors, there was information, dialogue and activities regarding the physical, emotional, and financial consequences of sex outside of marriage.

WAIT Training consistently teaches and emphasizes the psychological and physical benefits of sexual abstinence until marriage; the importance of marriage, commitment, responsible parenthood (especially fatherhood), and the potential negative consequences of out-of-wedlock childbearing.

During the 2009-10 school year WAIT training was offered to students attending Paul Revere and West Briar Middle Schools. In 2010-11, this program will be discontinued as a result of cessation of federal funding.

### After School Programs:

**Making It Better (MIB)** offered free After School Programs targeted to children, aged 6-14, both on school campuses (Shadowbriar Elementary) and in apartment complexes (Belmont Place/La Fontaine). According to From American's Front Line Against Crime: A School & Youth Violence Prevention Plan, a study by Fight Crime: Invest In Kids, an overwhelming 71% of the nation's law enforcement leaders chose providing "more after school programs" as the most effective strategy for reducing youth violence and crime. Children who have no adult supervision and no constructive after school activities are more likely to engage in risky behaviors such as drug abuse, criminal, and gang activity. Higher income families often



treat after school activities as part of their children's education in creative and critical thinking as there are many skills that cannot be acquired in the classroom. As many as 15 million "latchkey children," like those targeted by the efforts of **Making It Better**, go to an empty house on any given afternoon. These children do not receive the support services needed to ensure their academic success during the after school hours. Social, physical, and academic development suffers when children watch hours of television which requires minimal social interaction, no physical activity, and limited mental stimulation.

These kids, like the ones targeted by **MIB's** After School Program, belong to families who cannot afford to pay for after school care much less expanded learning opportunities. **Making It Better** offered the only program of its kind, free of charge, to the children in West Houston, as there is no YMCA or Boys and Girls Club available in this area. Participation in after school programs improves students' school attendance and performance, as well as their expectations for the future. **MIB's** After School Programs are designed to prevent youth involvement in drugs, alcohol, gangs, and other self-destructive activities; improve students' performance in school; and develop conflict management skills. **Making It Better's** comprehensive After School Program was designed to do just that for low income children, thereby giving all kids an equal shot at success.



Depending on the location of the program, students attended 2-5 times each week for 2-3 hours per day. The children were split into age-based groups and participate in various rotations. One rotation was academic (with a 4:1 student to tutor ratio) with guided homework assistance and/or math and reading tutorials wherein **MIB** supported the teachers' efforts for student growth of at least one year in academic assessment. A second rotation (8:1 ratio) consisted of a healthy snack and playing games, and the third rotation (8:1 ratio) allowed the students to

participate in an enrichment block that consisted of activities such as music, dance, art, sports, character education, and social skills development.

Many of the kids **MIB** served spend after school time wandering around high-crime apartment complexes. Unsupervised children often become involved in drug, alcohol, and tobacco use; delinquency, crime, and violence; and suffer from poor academic performance and a lack of bonding with caring adults. Research shows that after-school programs have a significant impact on positive youth development. **MIB's** after-school programs, whether delivered on a school campus or at center located within an apartment complex, provided children with opportunities to:



- decrease delinquent activities
- improve student achievement
- participate in activities that encourage abstinence from use of drugs, alcohol and tobacco
- participate in a variety of enrichment activities that promote increased self-esteem and develop skills
- increase leadership and personal development

The **MIB** staff incorporated leadership, team building, and conflict management skills into every aspect of the After School Program. Team building and role playing activities taught the students how to work cooperatively and to handle conflicts and feelings appropriately. The children were also exposed to opportunities never before experienced including positive activities such as art, hands-on science, culinary creations, dance, music, cheerleading, and lifetime fitness to broaden their worldview.

During the 2009-10 school year **MIB** facilitated a 5 day/week After School Program at Shadowbriar Elementary in collaboration with the City of Houston After School Achievement Program (ASAP) as well as a 2 day/week apartment based after school program at Belmont/La Fontaine Apartments for students attending Walnut Bend Elementary. In 2010-11, we will continue this 2 day/week program at the Belmont Place/LaFontaine Apartments, add another 5 day/week ASAP program at Frost Elementary and due to a major decrease in funding will continue a revised 3 day/week after school program at Shadowbriar.

#### **Apartment Community Outreach Events:** (3-4 per semester)



Through our *Parent Partnership Program*, **Making It Better** partnered with the elementary and middle schools that share the same apartment communities, as well as with the apartment managers, area businesses, churches, and volunteers to bring the "school to the parents". While the children were entertained by volunteers, school staff and parents gathered for parent meetings conducted by guest speakers. These meetings were an informal discussion format and covered a variety of topics of interest to parents (preventing gang involvement & truancy, healthy discipline techniques, dealing with daily stress, etc.) Afterwards, all gathered to share a meal and

anxiously await as names are drawn for door prize winners – each child also chose a party favor and all attendees received free coupons from area establishments.

## New Programs for the 2010-11 School Year:

### Positive Action



Positive actions matter! They are the basis of all goals. Teaching positive actions directly empowers individuals to make positive choices for a lifetime. Positive Action (PA) is a comprehensive social and emotional development program for enhancing behavior and academic achievement. PA is an interactive program that integrates teacher/student contact and opportunities for the exchange of ideas as well as feedback and constructive criticism. It takes a positive approach to social and emotional development rather than focusing on the negative. The Positive Action curriculum teaches a unique combination of academic, behavioral, and social skills and has been proven to achieve lasting effects, especially for at-risk and high-risk students. Positive Action improves academic scores, behavior, character, attendance, health, self-concept, family involvement and more. Positive Action reduces disciplinary problems, absenteeism, suspensions, truancies, drug, alcohol and tobacco use, violence, bullying, gang involvement and more. During the 2010-11 school year, this program will be offered to students attending Askew Elementary.

### Lifetime Fitness

Children at Risk identified childhood obesity as a growing epidemic in Harris County, as well as in the state and the nation. Texas ranks 6<sup>th</sup> in the nation for childhood obesity and 21% of Harris County's children are obese. To address these growing concerns, and in an effort to educate the children and families being served by MIB, we are introducing a **Lifetime Fitness Pilot Program** designed to eliminate childhood obesity among our students and to help them develop lifelong, healthy habits. This program will integrate all facets of wellness for students attending our **After School Program at Shadowbriar Elementary**.

Today, nearly 1 in 3 children in America are overweight or obese. Childhood obesity rates have tripled among school-aged children over the past 30 years. Some experts believe that if obesity among kids increases, our current generation could become the first in American history to live shorter lives than their parents. Only about 32% of third-grade girls and 28% of third-grade boys reached the "healthy fitness zone," meeting performance targets on six fitness tests.



According to The Children's Defense Fund ([www.childrensdefense.org](http://www.childrensdefense.org)), an expanding body of research shows that exercise can improve the performance of the brain by boosting memory and cognitive processing speed. Exercise can, in fact, create a stronger, faster brain.



Research has shown that certain ethnic minority populations, children in low socioeconomic status families, and children in the country's southern region tend to have higher rates of obesity than the rest of the population. The current increase is especially evident among African-American and Hispanic adolescents. With both sexes combined, up to 24% of African-American and Hispanic children are among the 95% percentile in obesity rank. This may be due to multiple issues, including genetics; living conditions and/or neighborhoods that discourage physical activities; pressure on families to minimize food costs, acquisition and prep time resulting in frequent consumption of convenience foods that are high in calories and fat; decreased opportunity for physical activity at school and competition for leisure time that was once spent playing outdoors with sedentary screen time including watching TV or playing computer and video games. Young people are at risk of developing serious psychosocial burdens related to being obese in a society that stigmatizes this condition, often fostering shame, self-

blame, and low self-esteem that may impair academic and social functioning and carry into adulthood. **Making It Better's Lifetime Fitness Curriculum** will provide education on all facets of wellness, including nutrition, exercise/sports and healthy lifestyle choices which will play a critical role in reducing the incidence of childhood obesity among the children we serve while increasing their self-esteem allowing them to lead long, healthy, and productive lives.

### What We Plan To Accomplish

During the 2010-11 School Year **MIB** expects to serve over 600 students. Much of this growth will be the result of **MIB's** continued expansion: the anticipated addition of two new elementary schools, Piney Point Elementary and Frost Elementary, and a Positive Action Program at Askew. Although the number of children served, in each program, is relatively low, **MIB's** model of building meaningful relationships through its low adult: child ratios works. For students from poverty, the primary motivation for their success will be in their relationships.<sup>2</sup>

### Cost and Sustainability

**MIB** has a well-diversified stream of income from local businesses, churches, fundraisers, and individuals. Funding for the Askew and Piney Point Literacy Programs came from and will again come from their Title 1 or Stimulus funds. Shadowbriar Elementary, in conjunction with The City of Houston Parks and Recreation Department, administered an afterschool grant program for which **MIB** was a sub contractor. We hope to continue our 3<sup>rd</sup> year of funding with the State of Texas Criminal Justice Dept. funds thru Safe and Drug Free Schools. Our 2010-11 after school program at Frost Elementary is in conjunction with The City of Houston Parks and Recreation Department, wherein we will serve as a sub contractor. 21<sup>st</sup> Century funds, received by Shearn Elementary, enabled **MIB** to expand its Literacy program into Shearn Elementary. The After School program at Belmont/La Fontaine apartments is 100% funded by The Children's Fund and the apartment complex provides the apartment and utilities at no cost to **MIB**. Enrichment



<sup>2</sup> Payne, Dr. Rudy. *Understanding Poverty*. Print.

program support was provided by the Junior League of Houston (covering Interface-Samaritan Counseling Center costs), and federal grants administered by Change Happens!.

**Making It Better** is an organization committed to excellence with a clear vision and passion for delivering outstanding results. **MIB's** dedicated staff, its relationship with HISD, and its ability to bring together different facets of the community - schools, businesses, churches and individuals - enable MIB to deliver high quality programs. **MIB** is making an impact by supplementing public schools' efforts to foster an environment in which children can flourish. **Making It Better** looks forward to preparing this generation to become contributing citizens who are leaders in their chosen fields.