

## AGENCIES SERVING MACOMB, OAKLAND AND WESTERN WAYNE COUNTIES

Supported by the Head Start Innovation Fund since 2017

**Oakland Livingston Human Service Agency** & **Macomb Community Action Agency**

**\$235,000**

IN TOTAL GRANTS

from the Head Start Innovation Fund

Up to  
**1,179 children**

served each year

**\$225,000**

IN TOTAL GRANTS

from the Head Start Innovation Fund

Up to  
**1,022 children**

served each year

Oakland Livingston Human Service Agency and Macomb Community Action Head Start are unique in that each of the agencies serves an entire county within the region. In addition, they are unique in that they came together to strategize and apply for funding for a common interest—addressing the impact of trauma on children and families. Both agencies have worked over the last two years to implement the *Trauma Smart* model as the core component of their behavioral intervention plan, with support from the Innovation Fund.

*Trauma Smart* is a systematic practice model to address the aftermath of violence and trauma within the context of a natural environment—Head Start classrooms. *Trauma Smart* serves as a “pause” and “reset” button so that children can enter kindergarten prepared to succeed socially and academically. *Trauma Smart* actively includes parents in their child’s school experience, improves the work environment for teachers and creates practical and enduring change for children, families and communities.

The agencies view the implementation of this model not only as a critical service to children and families, but also as a staff retention tool, by providing all staff with the tools of trauma-informed care in the classroom. All staff of the two agencies – well over 350 staff – have received training.



## Collaborating to Address the Impact of Trauma on Children and Families

Children in Head Start have a higher exposure rate to trauma than other children. One study of 155 Head Start families found that 78% of children self-reported exposure to trauma and 66% of parents expressed that their children had experienced an episode of community trauma. The same trend is happening with Oakland and Macomb families.

Through its partnership with *Trauma Smart*, MCA and OLHSA have provided onsite training and coaching support regularly throughout the year. All Head Start staff will receive a minimum of 20 hours of trauma-based training with separate ongoing coaching. A total of 366 staff between the two organizations are projected to be trained on *Trauma Smart*.

In addition to staff training, *Trauma Smart* also offers a Smart Connection parent workshop component. Smart Connection provides parents with information regarding trauma-informed care and bridges the gap between home and school. Parents will also be able to continue their trauma-informed trainings by participating in family engagement activities. These family engagement opportunities will improve parental resilience and skill building and will allow for a consistent message that supports a trauma-informed focus at home.

**Actively including parents in their child’s school experience.**



Social-emotional support for kids, families and agency staff has been a key focus on Head Start Innovation Fund investments. Several key agencies, including the two that serve all of Macomb and Oakland counties, chose to apply for funds to implement TraumaSmart, a program to train and support all of their staff in methods to better support social-emotional needs of kids.



## MISS CHRISSY'S STORY ORGANIZATIONAL SPOTLIGHT

***On many school busses and over many years, Miss Chrissy has seen a lot,*** including an all-out assault by one boy on another.

But until she started on bus #219, a mini-bus in Macomb County, Chrissy Rogers had not seen what she recognizes now as the trauma of poverty on the face of a child.

"It's hard for me to grasp," says Chrissy, who grew up in one house, with dinner at the table each night, church every Sunday and parents still together after 50 years. Now, she drives 13 young children to and from Head Start, five days a week, and knows many of them don't have much to count on. She's seen the symptoms, up close and in her rear view mirror – tears, fears, acting up.

Now, she and every other person in Macomb Community Action's Head Start program are being trained in Trauma Smart, a nationwide mental health program, funded by the Head Start Innovation Fund. A grant funds the same program for Head Start workers at the Oakland Livingston Human Service Agency.

Behind the wheel, rolling through her kids' neighborhood of small lots and 800-square foot bungalows, Chrissy is a small, energetic woman who talks fast, describing what she has learned from Trauma Smart: While some children are traumatized by violence, even murder, around them, far more are traumatized by the realities of poverty. Even babies' emotional landscapes are marred by chaos and fury around them.

And this: Some people get to drive the car. Others are content to ride along. But many are consigned to the trunk, cowering anxious and afraid. They are the victims of trauma, yesterday or long ago. They are unnoticed unless they make noise.

"We had one little girl who really tested our patience," Chrissy remembers, speaking of herself and the teacher's aide who rides along every day. "The girl would cry and scream, one day the whole way home," and thrusting toys at her to distract her did no good. "Come to find out she was in foster care, taken from her dad. I'm don't know if Mom was even in the picture. But she was living with Granny, who had four or five other kids to watch over."

The next time the child stumbled to the bus screaming, Chrissy used her Trauma Smart intelligence. She got out of her seat and embraced her. "Come here, honey, and I held her head to my chest. It's OK, there's nothing to be afraid of. It's OK, honey. You're safe with me. I love you and Miss xxx (name of the aide, to come) loves you too.

"She stepped up and sat in the back and she hasn't had a meltdown since.

"It's hard for me to realize, but oh my gosh, all she needed was somebody to love her. She had so much upheaval in her life, she didn't feel safe anywhere."

Miss Chrissy's small yellow bus is a haven of peace.