WHY I GIVE

Child Development Center Donor

A UGMTC donor recently contributed to the purchase of several new car seats for children in the Mission's Child Development Center.

"My donation to the Child Development Center for car seats will support the children attending outings and enriching experiences this summer. Car seats are essential for their safe transportation to these activities. Participating in such opportunities broadens the children's horizons and nurtures their dreams of what is possible."

—Anonymous Donor

MEET A CHILD'S NEEDS

Become a Monthly Donor

You can help meet the physical, educational, and spiritual needs of a child by becoming a UGMTC monthly donor. There are three easy ways to begin your monthly giving:

1. Create a monthly giving plan **online** at **ugmtc.org/donate**
2. Complete the enclosed form with your desired monthly donation amount and **mail** to:
   Union Gospel Mission Twin Cities
   376 Western Ave N
   Saint Paul, MN 55103
3. **Call us** at **651-789-7558**.
   We would love to talk with you!

INVEST IN THE HEART OF A CHILD

Your gifts bring hope, joy, and light into the lives of children.

Young children living in UGMTC's Naomi Family Program residence attend the Mission's Child Development Center along with children from the surrounding community. Every day, these children learn about Jesus, hear stories from Scripture, and sing songs of praise in a nurturing environment.

A donation of only $2.27 makes it possible for a child to receive one hot meal, godly care, licensed teaching, and guidance from trained, Christ-centered psychologists. Gifts from generous donors like you also provide the books, toys, and educational materials needed for a rich learning environment.

Make a gift today to meet the ongoing needs of these precious little ones: **ugmtc.org/donate**.

Thank you!

1920: Babies Welcome Here

Union Gospel Mission opened a Rescue Home at 1245 Hamline Avenue in St. Paul in 1920 as a refuge for pregnant, unwed women. Thousands of babies were born into this loving, supportive environment before the home was placed under Ramsey County's supervision in 1933.

Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

UNION GOSPEL MISSION TWIN CITIES
120 YEARS

Save the Date

120th Anniversary
Open House

Wednesday, August 3rd
3–7 p.m.

Men's Campus
435 University Ave E,
St. Paul, MN 55130

For details, visit:
ugmtc.org/120th

N612-2022

MESSENGER

UNION GOSPEL MISSION TWIN CITIES

JULY 2022 — OUR MISSION IS CHANGING LIVES

TRAIN THEM IN THE WAY THEY SHOULD GO

"He reminds me to read his 'Baby Blessings Bible' and pray when I turn off the lights for bed."

Welcoming children in Jesus' name has been a part of Union Gospel Mission Twin Cities' heart since a Rescue Home was opened for young unwed mothers more than 100 years ago. More recently, the Mission opened its arms to children of women experiencing homelessness through our Child Development Center (CDC). Many of the young children served there find joy and healing from trauma through the skilled and tender care of the CDC teaching staff.

Founded in 1997, the Mission's CDC provides early childhood education and care for children from six weeks through Kindergarten. Many of these children belong to mothers who have found shelter from homelessness in UGMTC's Naomi Family Program (NFP). Others are members of the community, or continue to attend the CDC after their parent has graduated from NFP.

Nationally accredited and rooted in sound biblical teaching and principles, children that participate in the CDC programming tend to thrive, even if they weren't doing so when they arrived.

Melissa Sonen, CDC director, loves to tell the story of a child that began attending the CDC as a preschooler.

"When he first came to us, he could not name a friend; he could not even name himself. When his mom asked him what his name was, he couldn't tell her. He could speak words, but not very well."

"He was with us for nine months and, by the time he left, could name each of his teachers, each of his friends, his mom, and himself. And he was speaking in sentences. It's one of the stories I won't forget."

Another little boy began attending the CDC at the age of 10 months, when his mother enrolled in the Naomi Family Program after becoming homeless. The knowledge he's gained after learning from teachers in the CDC over the last year, while still under the age of two, is notable: he can count to 30 in English (99 if numbers are pointed to) and to 13 in Spanish; knows the entire ABC song; can name a variety of colors and shapes; loves books and being read to; and sings a number of songs, including "The Lord is My Shepherd" and "Jesus Loves Me."

Most meaningful to his mother—who says of her son's accomplishments, "I didn't teach him that!"—is his sweet love for Jesus fostered in school each day by the CDC teachers.

"At bedtime, he reminds me to read his *Baby Blessings Bible* and pray when I turn off the lights for bed. Our nighttime prayer is, 'Lord, keep us safe this night; secure us from all our fears. May angels guard us while we sleep, till morning light appears.'"

MEET MELISSA SONEN:

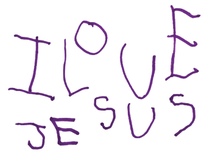
Child Development Center (CDC) Director

† ***When did you begin working at CDC?***
I began at UGMTC in February 2017. My degree is in elementary education, but I learned that I love early childhood education. A child's brain develops 90% from the time they are born to age three, so we see so much change in the kids—sometimes from day to day! It's a beautiful thing.

† ***What does your position as CDC Director involve?***
I lead the teaching staff (seven to nine infant, toddler, and preschool teachers), do administrative work, fulfill Department of Human Services requirements, and apply for licensing and accreditations. I collaborate with the Mission's Naomi Family Program, Mental Health Services, and chaplain program. And supporting the teachers is extremely important to my role; they're the ones working day in and day out with our kids.

† ***What makes the Mission's Child Development Center unique and successful?***
CDC is an NAEYC-accredited, four-star-rated center. We have highly experienced teachers with a lot of longevity; our preschool teachers alone have more than 30 years of combined experience at the CDC. They are passionate about what they do, and we really enjoy working together. That creates a fun, loving atmosphere for the kids. And we're a Christian organization. We incorporate prayer and the Word and talking with the kids about God and Christian concepts throughout each day.

Our children's chaplain comes twice a week to do lessons about God, and we partner with the Mission's Mental Health Services to provide free mental health support for the kids. We also work with Saint Paul Public Schools (SPPS), so if a child has developmental concerns, SPPS comes onsite to observe and provide extra support needed. There's also a grandparent who comes to work with the kids each day—Mr. Henry—through Lutheran Social Services. The kids love him and get intergenerational support and a strong male presence in their lives through him.



† ***Does serving children connected to a homeless shelter have unique challenges?***
Many kids we work with have had adverse childhood experiences at a very young age. Studies are showing that trauma in kids can actually slow or stop brain development and can manifest in behavior issues. I continue to learn about trauma in children and provide training to our teachers every year so they can better understand it as they work with our kids. We want to effectively prepare all of the kids for success in school, in their relationships, and in life.

WOULD YOU SERVE A MEAL? VOLUNTEERS.UGMTC.ORG

A MESSAGE FROM
PAM STEGORA AXBERG, CEO

Children's hearts and lives are changed here, too.

When volunteers, donors, and guests complete a tour of our Men's Campus, they often tell us they had "no idea" how many services the Mission provides to men experiencing addiction and homelessness. The lifechanging programs we offer to women tend to be still less known. And the ways children's hearts and minds are nurtured and ministered to in our Child Development Center (CDC), even less so.

Young children that attend the CDC are learning, developing, growing—and finding healing—under the watchful care of our talented director and licensed teaching staff. Up to 42 children could spend their weekdays in the Center, learning key information that will prepare them for success in school, hearing Bible stories and singing songs about how much Jesus loves them, and developing healthy relationships with teachers and classmates.

Because many of the children we serve have experienced trauma in their short lives, these seemingly typical accomplishments are by no means trivial. They are the result of collaboration among our teaching and Mental Health Services staffs, regular interaction with our children's chaplain, and a great deal of passion, patience, and love from our entire CDC team. What an immense privilege it is to be part of changing the lives of little ones for good. Thank you for making this possible!

Blessings,

Pam Stegora Axberg