

# Boston College Study 2016

## The Impact of a Birthday Celebration An Exploratory Evaluation of Birthday Wishes

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The completion of the Boston College Social Impact Report this spring provided us, for the first time, with metrics around the impact on the families we serve. The primary objective of this evaluation was to determine whether a party can make a positive difference in the lives of homeless families.

### Results suggest the answer is YES!

In total, 280 residents and 78 shelter staff participated in the one-year study, which measured the relationship between participation in our program and family confidence and empowerment, hope and happiness. Residents who attend Birthday Wishes parties report better outcomes across all three of these variables. Families and staff expressed high levels of satisfaction with and participation in the Birthday Wishes program, and this was found to be associated with stronger resident cohesion.

### Key Findings:

- *It's not just any party; it's a Birthday Wishes party:* The Birthday Wishes party is unique in its positive impact, and the unique contribution of a Birthday Wishes party is significant.

- *Whose party is it?* It doesn't matter: Positive family outcomes did not vary between families of the birthday children and families attending the party as "guests". Bringing in volunteers to host the parties in the shelter is the critical component.

- *Quality Matters:* The study suggests that the positive impact on families is directly related to satisfaction with the parties. Holding successful parties that include high quality volunteers and party activities creates a stronger experience, translating to greater positive impact.

We are very excited about the findings from this study, which represent an important step in understanding the impact of Birthday Wishes. Results are promising and suggest the potential impact on both individual residents and the shelter environment, confirming high levels of support for and participation in the program. The study identified program strengths, as well as areas for improvement and will be invaluable moving forward in order to:

1. Maintain and achieve best practices
2. Increase our relevance to the population we serve
3. Achieve a deeper and lasting impact on children experiencing homelessness.



### Resident Perspectives on Birthday Wishes

"This program is the highlight of our children's stay here...thank you from the bottom of our hearts."

"Fantastic...My son looks forward to it every month. He asks all day 'what time are they coming?' and talks about it at school the next day."

"Birthday Wishes was something that made me aware that there are people who do care and that is huge for us single mothers that are trying to get our lives together."

"I believe it's great and the children love it, and it helps a lot of the parents that can't afford to do a lot for their children.  
Thank you."