NONPROFIT SPOTLIGHT

Giving Foster Children a Fighting Chance:

The WHIT Program's Mission to Close the Education Gap

Submitted by Diana Marin



Across the state of Texas, a quiet crisis unfolds in classrooms. Foster children who have already endured trauma, instability, and upheaval face another devastating challenge. They have the lowest high school graduation rate of any group tracked by the state. Lower than children in poverty. Lower than ESL students. Even lower than homeless children.

But one organization refuses to accept these statistics as inevitable.

The WHIT Program, based in San Angelo, Texas, was born from tragedy and transformed into hope. Named for Whitney Thompson, the late daughter of program founder Jennifer Lisson, the organization carries forward Whitney's legacy of compassion and care for those who need it most. Whitney's love for people and dedication to helping the less fortunate now lives on through every tutoring session, every breakthrough moment, and every foster child who discovers they can succeed.







CATCHING UP, ONE STUDENT AT A TIME

The program's mission is straightforward but powerful: provide free, personalized tutoring in math and reading to bring foster children up to grade level. These kids start out behind, and The WHIT Program aims to catch them up.

The model is elegantly simple yet remarkably effective. College and university students volunteer their time and participate in a rigorous three-hour training session that covers tutoring techniques, confidentiality protocols, and how to spot signs of abuse and neglect.

After passing a criminal background check, these trained volunteers are matched with foster children struggling academically. They meet weekly, working together until the child reaches grade level.

What makes The WHIT Program particularly remarkable is its sustainability model. The organization accepts no tax money, running entirely on private donations. This means every dollar contributed goes directly to supporting these vulnerable children's education, with no bureaucratic overhead eating into the mission.

THE POWER OF CONSISTENCY

For children in foster care, consistency is often a luxury they've rarely experienced. The WHIT Program provides that steady presence who shows up, week after week, ready to help, encourage, and believe in them.



The testimonials tell stories of transformation that go far beyond improved test scores. One foster parent described how their daughter initially viewed tutoring as "just a waste of time." After a few sessions, everything changed. The student began admiring her tutor, and her attitude shifted completely. "Her studies and grades became her main focus," the parent shared. "Her grades are now mostly As, and she is passing all of her classes. Before tutoring, she was failing all of her classes."

Another foster parent witnessed mathematical confidence bloom in their daughter. Skills like adding and skip counting improved significantly, and multiplication facts that once seemed impossibly abstract suddenly made sense. "In such a short period of time, it's heartwarming progress to see," they noted.

Perhaps most touching are the testimonials from the students themselves. One shared: "Ever since I started with the program I have been able to get caught up on my work more, and I have been able to understand my work... even if I have a lot of work she's willing to stay late and help me, and I really appreciate that."

The bond between tutor and student often becomes as important as the academic progress. One foster parent described how their son Ayden, who was reading at a kindergarten level in third grade, jumped two grade levels through the program. But the real victory? "Ayden would ask every week 'Is it Thursday yet, I get to go to tutoring right?'" For a child in foster care, having something to look forward to and someone who consistently shows up for them can be transformative.

TUTORS TRANSFORMED TOO

The impact flows both ways. Tutors report that the experience changes how they view the world and their place in it. One volunteer reflected on watching their student rise above difficult circumstances and realize that choices remain within their control. "I am thankful for the privilege I experienced in my childhood, and I have gained a new respect for others who have had to fight for the things I was given," the tutor shared.

Even CPS caseworkers have taken notice. One wrote simply: "You all are doing an amazing job, and we really appreciate all of your help with these kids."

GET INVOLVED

The WHIT Program needs support from multiple corners. Universities can bring the program to their campuses. College students can volunteer as tutors. CPS and foster care workers can refer children who would benefit. And donors can provide financial support that keeps this entirely privately funded program running.

CONTACT INFO

THE WHIT PROGRAM
P.O. Box 928
San Angelo, TX 76902
Email: whitprogram@whitprogram.org
Phone: (530) 521-5439
Website: whitprogram.org



