

SEARCH

## SPRING 2010



Sally Bindley Millman is the founder and CEO of School on Wheels in Indianapolis, a nonprofit that offers tutoring and educational services for homeless children.

### SALLY BINDLEY MILLMAN: EDUCATING HOMELESS CHILDREN WITH SCHOOL ON WHEELS



*Photo by Casey Cronin*

Advocating for homeless children, Sally Bindley Millman (BS92) embraces a broad definition of education — one that extends well beyond the traditional classroom. As founder and CEO of School on Wheels in Indianapolis Millman, her staff and hundreds of volunteers provide tutoring and educational services for homeless children and their parents. "We believe education is the key to breaking the cycle of poverty and homelessness," she says.

Millman began School on Wheels ([www.indysow.org](http://www.indysow.org)), in 2001 after hearing about a similar program in Los Angeles. She quickly learned that very little was being done to support homeless children's education in area shelters, since shelters must focus on clients' immediate needs. Millman set out to provide these children with important academic tools, including school supplies, homework help and mentoring. "The initial challenge was letting people know what we were doing," says Millman. "Still, eight years later, one of our challenges is explaining to people that homeless children actually exist," she adds.

She likens her role to running any small business. She works on a broad range of business issues during the day then goes out to the sites after school. "The best part of what I do is tutor kids," she says.

The cause has required Millman to draw on her entire professional background. She credits SESP with teaching her to view education from a "holistic perspective," a crucial skill in a non-traditional setting like School on Wheels. After her graduation from Northwestern, Millman worked in business and then earned a master's of social work from Indiana University. Before deciding which graduate track to pursue, she contacted former SESP assistant dean Fran Birndorf for guidance. "Her advice was invaluable," says Millman, who also appreciates the social policy component of her SESP training when navigating government regulations and interacting with other community organizations in her current position.

Today, Millman has a staff of 11 and more than 400 volunteer tutors, who work with children after school at 10 different shelters and one school. Together, they can see as many as 600 students per year. "Our kids love coming to tutoring," says Millman. "They run into the room. They crave that one-on-one attention." Children in grades K–12 are paired with the same weekly rotation of tutors to provide consistency as well as the opportunity to interact with several different people. Tutors represent a variety of cultural and professional backgrounds. School on Wheels also makes sure students are looking toward college by partnering with other local organizations that help secure scholarships and provide mentoring focused on college preparation.

In addition, School on Wheels works with parents to help them take an active role in their children's education and to explore their own education. Besides discussing a child's progress in tutoring, parents can take advantage of other

services provided by School on Wheels such as workshops to prepare for successful parent-teacher conferences. Staff members also assist parents in understanding report cards, making appointments at schools and even arranging transportation to those appointments when necessary.

According to Millman, the current economy has increased the need for the services provided by School on Wheels. At the same time, donations are down. She points out a silver lining, however. Volunteers are more plentiful. She has found that while people may have less money to give, they do have time and are coming forward to help out however they can.

Despite the challenges, Millman intends to remain focused on the children. "My goal is to always maintain the connection to each kid that we see." She emphasizes that each child is unique. "They need us," she says, pointing out that School on Wheels is the only organization in Indianapolis providing this service. "We've connected for a reason."

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