



■ **A COMMON BOND** Emily gets a hug from her friend Waly, the pair best friends do not share a common language, but, do share a common living situation. They are both homeless

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Beyond language

*"We're friends.
We don't need to talk"*

- Emily, 6, Kindergarten

Story and Photographs by

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TAMPA, Fla. - "Ella es mi amiga," proclaims Waly, six, proudly in Spanish of her friendship with Emily. Emily speaks no Spanish at all except for counting to ten.

"We don't need to talk, we're friends," Emily quietly adds. The two have come together in the class room of the Metropolitan Ministries Academy, the first charter school in America for homeless children.

The girls, who line up together, sit together and play together, are living in the Metropolitan Ministries family care centre with their families.

The average family lives in the shelter for six to eight weeks and if they have children they attend the one-classroom school.

Despite the high turnover of students from the Tampa Bay area, the atmosphere in the classroom is calm.

Students work on their math, English, geography and other tasks relatively quietly and efficiently with encouragement and positive feedback from the teachers.

Jazzmyne spills her crayons on the floor, Emily helps her pick them up.

"Did that feel good to help Jazzmyne?" Luisella Mazzone, one of two teachers that share the classroom, asks Emily.

"Yeah," replies a soft spoken Emily.

"Yes, Thank you," Jazzmyne answers looking at Emily.

There are about 20 to 30 students enrolled at any one time in the school. With two teachers, a principal and a handful of teaching assistants, the students in the class get lots of attention.

The attention pays off. Mazzone repeats the lesson in Spanish for Waly and some of the students in the class are picking up the language. In fact all of them can count to ten.



■ **TWICE THE STORY** Patiently reading in English and then translating to Spanish, teacher Luisella Mazzone reads with Emily and Waly. The Academy's classroom looks like any other in North America.



■ **QUIET ALLEGIANCE** Emily sits alone at quiet time (left), after lunch break. It is one of the rare times that the pair are not hanging together during school day. Emily and Waly (above) mimic each other, wrongly using their left hands to cover their hearts during the Pledge of Allegiance.