January 10, 2014

Jason Swanson

Business Publications Corporation

100 – 4th St.

Des Moines, IA 50309

Dear Jason,

I am writing to recommend Emily Hamilton for this year’s class of 40 Under 40. I do so without reservation and with complete enthusiasm. I believe she is an ideal candidate for this year’s class of 40 Under 40.

In my current capacity as Vice President of Corporate Marketing at The Principal Financial Group, and with many years of experience working in the business and volunteer arena, I have worked with literally hundreds of young people. I would put Emily at the top of my list in terms of individual quality and likelihood to succeed. She is truly a special person with an incredibly bright future. It has been a privilege to get to know her and work with her.

I came to know Emily when I was part of the committee that hired Emily for the role of Executive Director of the Des Moines “I Have a Dream” Foundation. Since then, I have worked closely with her over the past several years.

“I Have a Dream” works to ensure more students in our community graduate from high school and are able to pursue education after high school. Since our inception in 1990, we’ve adopted three groups of 45 at-risk students. These Dreamers are students that have a lot of risk factors – meaning they’re much less likely to graduate from high school. We work with them and their families from 1st grade through high school to ensure they do graduate, and that they have the opportunity to attend college by providing significant tuition scholarships. Our efforts are successful – 95% of our students have graduated from high school, and half go on to college.

When Emily came on board, she and I began to brainstorm – what if we could make an impact for even more students? Emily took that challenge and ran with it. As a result, for the past two years, Emily has been working on a new vision for “I Have a Dream.” That new vision includes adopting an entire elementary school, middle school and high school pipeline, and provide all the students in those schools with academic assistance, social and emotional support, mentors, college and career readiness, and tuition assistance.

It’s a bold direction, but one that Emily sees has the potential to change lives and make a sustainable impact in our community. With Emily’s leadership, the board of directors has embraced this new model, which will greatly expand our reach into the community. And after countless hours of planning, fundraising, strategizing and researching other educational models, “I Have a Dream” is launching the Dreamer Academy this spring.

Leaders in our community are paying attention – large gifts from the Community Foundation of Greater Des Moines and United Way, and encouragement from the Greater Des Moines Partnership are strengthening our efforts.

I have served on many boards and worked with many nonprofit leaders, and Emily stands out as one of our community’s most thoughtful, hardworking, and persistent leaders. Her leadership is also getting attention from other “I Have a Dream” affiliates and the national board of directors. They are looking to the Des Moines “I Have a Dream” Foundation as a leader in organizational change, and hope to adopt our Dreamer Academy model and implement it in other cities around the country.

Emily’s leadership with “I Have a Dream,” her commitment to strengthening education in our community, and her commitment to making an impact are all reasons that I ask you consider Emily for the 40 Under 40 class.



Sincerely,

Steve Whitty

Vice President of Marketing

Principal Financial Group