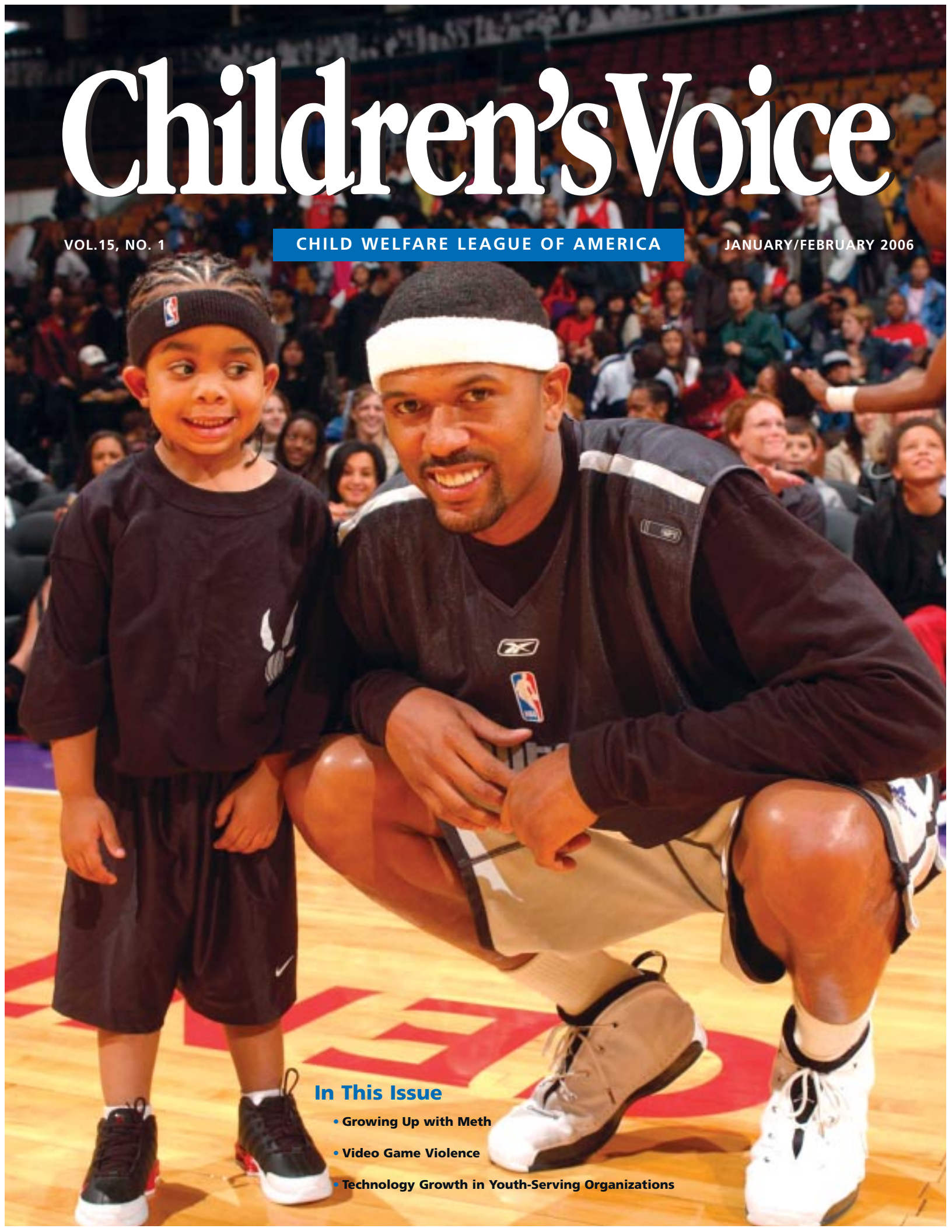


# Children's Voice

VOL. 15, NO. 1

CHILD WELFARE LEAGUE OF AMERICA

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2006



## In This Issue

- Growing Up with Meth
- Video Game Violence
- Technology Growth in Youth-Serving Organizations



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# Children's Voice



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**On the Cover:** NBA Star Jalen Rose and friend. Rose is serving as a Youth Ambassador for CWLA. Read more in "Eye on CWLA" on page 33. Photo courtesy of the Giving Back Fund.

# Executive

## DIRECTIONS



*Shay on the red carpet at the uBid Celebrity Auction, October 15, in Las Vegas. To read more, go to pages 32–33.*

During Hurricane Andrew in 1992, my family survived by huddling inside a bathroom in our Florida home. Once the wind and rain subsided, we emerged to find our windows broken, most of the ceilings in the house collapsed, and six inches of water on the floor. Neighbors' homes and local stores

and businesses in our community sustained similar damage. Our world, as we knew it, had drastically changed.

Thanks to insurance, we were able to rebuild within five months. During the reconstruction period, however, we felt overwhelmingly disconnected from the rest of our community. Our children didn't attend their school for a period of time, and our neighbors moved in different directions. Some eventually returned; others did not.

The damage Hurricane Andrew inflicted pales in comparison to Katrina's and Rita's destruction to lives, homes, and businesses in the Gulf Coast region last summer. But most victims of powerful hurricanes and other natural disasters have one thing in common—the disconnections they experience, for varying lengths of time, from all that was stable and familiar in their lives before the event.

These disconnections are not unlike what abused and neglected children experience after being removed from their homes with little or no notice. For these children, we have established a foster care system and supporting services. Public and private agencies work day in and day out to ensure their safety and well being.

Now we must work equally as hard for the thousands of children and families affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. So far, we have made attempts to meet emergency needs, providing shelter, food, and clothing. But we cannot lose sight, six months after the event, of the chaos and ruin the storms caused and the ongoing need to help families make new connections and reestablish old ones. Organizations such as the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) provide vitally important information on how families can cope following a disastrous hurricane. This information was very useful last fall and remains applicable months later.

NCTSN points out, for example, that children's reactions following a hurricane are strongly influenced by the reactions of the adults around them, including parents, teachers, and other caregivers. Children will turn to these adults for information, comfort, and help. It's important, therefore, that we model calm behavior in front of the children in our care and reassure them that they are safe and their friends are also safe and under the care of adults. We must practice continued dialogue with children and encourage their questions.

Now that families are either reestablishing homes in new communities or returning to their original homes or ones nearby, structure and routine are vitally important for children, such as consistent mealtimes and bedtimes. In addition to settling back into school routines, children should sign up for new sports, dance, or music classes that may have been disrupted by the hurricanes. Also, lost or damaged toys or special belongings should be replaced, if they haven't been already.

If families cannot return to their hometowns, it's important that children remain in contact with family and friends from whom they have been disconnected. Today's technology can make this easy. Even if families don't own a computer, children can e-mail friends and family from schools and public libraries. Online mentor and pen pal programs are also available.

The road to recovery could be long and arduous, but I have faith in the ability of the children affected by Katrina and Rita to bounce back emotionally to some sense of normalcy. Children have an amazing resilience, perhaps more so than adults. But all of us must commit to serving as links for these children between the old and the new in their lives, and to give them the necessary supports for recovery.

A year before Katrina, a series of hurricanes hit Florida, destroying hundreds of homes in its path, just as Hurricane Andrew had done a decade earlier. Some reports are that, more than a year later, many of these earlier hurricane victims continue to live in trailers, struggling to get back on their feet. Will we see the same struggles among Katrina's victims one, two, or three years from now? Perhaps, but even if families are continuing to rebuild, I hope we maintain the supports they will need to retrieve at least some of the scattered pieces of their lives and reestablish a semblance of community, leaving their children with a greater sense of security.

**Shay Bilchik**

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**T**his section of Children's Voice typically highlights new and innovative programs being implemented by child welfare agencies or other organizations that benefit children and youth. Since Hurricanes Katrina and Rita last fall, however, much of the news about child welfare in the Gulf Coast region has become less about program innovations and more about how agencies are simply maintaining or rebuilding roofs over their heads.

Shortly after Katrina swept across Louisiana and Mississippi, CWLA began working to establish contact with member agencies and others affected by the storm. Part of this effort has included facilitating discussions and opportunities for members to share information and resources with one another. Following are a few of our members' tales of loss and rebuilding, as well as one former Florida agency CEO's advice for child welfare agencies in the event of a hurricane.

To learn more about CWLA's efforts in the wake of the hurricanes, see "Eye on CWLA" on page 32.

## Mother Nature's Hand in Turning Around Youth Behavior

Just as Hurricane Katrina's winds scattered tree limbs, personal belongings, and other debris, it also dispersed families, friends, and coworkers across cities and states.

At least one group of nine youth, ages 11–17, however, was able to stick together. The girls, all living in a group home run by Raintree Children's Services in New Orleans, did not have immediate family to care for them, but during one of the country's worst natural disasters, they realized they had each other.

"One of the surprises to come out of this experience is watching them develop relationships with each other and take care of each other in a strange town," says Raintree Clinical Therapist Shannon Lovell. "These are kids that have histories of serious acting out behavior, but we have not experienced that through this crisis, and I find that remarkable."

As soon as she got the word that Katrina was headed straight for New Orleans, Executive Director Laura Jensen booked rooms at a La Quinta Inn in Houston for herself, the girls in the group home, and a few other staff. She also called all of the foster parents working with Raintree and urged them to leave the area.

Jensen is no stranger to arranging an evacuation for Raintree's children and staff due to an impending storm, but the speed with which Katrina bore down on New Orleans was like none she had experienced before.

"This hurricane came so much faster than what we normally experience. It's really hard for people outside of the area to understand why there were people here," she says. "By Saturday, I couldn't find anymore reservations in Houston, and if you didn't have a vehicle to get out, you just couldn't get out. Some of the foster parents thought they'd just wait it out, but we had to contact them and say, 'You have to get out of here.'"

After spending about a week and a half in their Houston hotel, the Raintree group moved into a house and office space in Natchitoches, Louisiana, a five-hour drive from New Orleans. The staff of Cane River Children's Services in Natchitoches

found the space for Raintree to rent. Cane River also obtained donated furniture and school supplies for the girls, who enrolled in local schools.

In November, Lovell and a few other Raintree staff were still living in Natchitoches, away from their own families, to care for the girls in the group home.

"I've had to get real creative with individual counseling and therapy...because I don't have a lot of my tools with me. I don't even have an office," Lovell said in October. "Pretty much, we are like a little grassroots operation."

The girls were depressed, Lovell says, and all of them, staff included, were dealing with post-traumatic stress. "When you've...gone through such loss already and been in the foster care system and had multiple failed placements, an experience like this triggers old wounds and memories."

Raintree Children's Services is located in Orleans Parish. Its facilities sustained wind damage but were spared the flooding that deluged the rest of the city. Two months after Hurricane Katrina, Jensen was back in the New Orleans office trying to get things in order with only 25% of her staff, while the girls in the group home remained in Natchitoches.

"Some people have lost their homes and are not returning," Jensen says. "Some people have not decided yet what they are going to do—they're looking for housing and can't find it. And some people have said they're going to return, but they haven't returned yet. One of the biggest costs is going to be recruiting, training, and hiring new staff."

As of last fall, Raintree had not yet resumed its afterschool program, aimed at kids at risk for drug and alcohol abuse, because most schools were still closed. The city was reopening in small sections, and most things the girls in Jensen's group home were accustomed to, such as the zoo and the city trolley car, were not operating.

"I think it's time for them to start dealing with coming back, and they want to come back, but we'll have to prepare them for a different place to be," Jensen says.

## From Social Worker to Engineer: Rebuilding After Katrina

Keith Liederman's background is in social work, not engineering, but he's learned a lot about building construction, and reconstruction, as Executive Director of Kingsley House. Over the last decade, Kingsley House has spent more than \$8 million renovating its 110-year-old, 75,000 square foot campus located on nearly four acres in New Orleans's lower Garden District.

When Hurricane Katrina blew into town, Kingsley House staff went through their usual storm drill to secure the seven buildings on the campus. Then they held their breath. When it was over, the buildings were still standing and untouched by flooding. But the staff couldn't completely let out a sigh of relief.

Four of the seven buildings sustained severe internal damage. Wind and rain from Katrina blew in third-floor dormer windows, and water seeped down to the second and first levels of the buildings. Floors buckled, and mold had spread. Everything had to be gutted.

"People who were seeing it for the first time, myself included...were just crying," Liederman says. "We've worked so hard and have such a great facility to offer to the community, that to see it in this shape is really hard to fathom."

Thankfully, one of the crown jewels of their renovation—a computer learning center with state-of-the-art equipment funded by the Magic Johnson Foundation and Hewlett Packard—was spared damage. Their gymnasium, housed in a 175-year-old former cotton mill, also survived unscathed.

Before Katrina, Kingsley House served 7,500 people in greater New Orleans, birth to 100, through a variety of programs, including early and preschool Head Start, an after-school program for kids 5–12, a teen center, summer camps,

community-based programs for families, and an adult day care center.

In October, much of New Orleans was still a ghost town, and Kingsley House was pulling in just \$60,000 a month in revenue, compared with about \$500,000 before Katrina.

Liederman was again playing engineer, this time to perform damage control on his campus, as well as working with groups through-



*Although spared the flooding that struck most of New Orleans, several of Kingsley House's buildings still suffered substantial damage from Katrina.*



out New Orleans to restore the city's infrastructure. Construction workers were working around the clock to restore Kingsley House back to health. Some of the staff was working out of a satellite office near Baton Rouge. Liederman had to lay off others—66% of his staff—because he could no longer pay them.

As for the children and families once served by Kingsley House, all were evacuated from the area. "A lot of our families lost everything," Liederman says. "They lost their homes; now they've lost their schools, and even if they wanted to come back, there's no place to rent."

During the storm and its aftermath, Kingsley staff didn't lose touch with those they served, however. "Our community-based program workers actually were called on their cell phones and text messaged by the families they were working with who were trying to reach out to them and make sure they were okay," Liederman recalls, laughing at the irony. "The participants were calling the therapists to see that they were okay. It was amazing."

By the end of October, Kingsley House had received requests to enroll more than 120 children in its child care

programs, as well as for adult enrollment in its adult day care program, which it hoped to have up and running on a small scale by last December. In the meantime, Kingsley House remained open as a drop-in facility for people needing information or emergency assistance.

Liederman considers Kingsley House lucky. "We're incredibly blessed. Other agencies that I've talked to aren't going to open for 12-18 months. They have buildings that are totally destroyed. We're one of the exceptions."

By mid- to late-November, Kingsley House planned to partner with the Salvation Army to have a disaster recovery center set up in tents on the Kingsley House campus to provide daily meals, case management and referral services, counseling, vouchers for furniture and clothing, and access to a mobile medical unit. Other agencies, as well as local foundations, were partnering in the effort, including Catholic Charities, Volunteers of America, Family Services of Greater New Orleans, Children's Bureau, the Louisiana Public Health Initiative, and New Orleans Knowledge Works.

"For the legacy of this organization, I'm just so happy we are still able to be here," Liederman says. "We fully intend to do everything we can do to make sure we are still here for another hundred years, because not only are we needed, we've got a responsibility here."

### Lessons Learned from Hurricane Andrew

The aftermath of Katrina has presented a double-edged sword for some child welfare agencies in the most devastated regions—lots of work to be done, but little revenue to work with. Despite this predicament, Father Bob Tywoniak hopes most affected agencies will be able to hang on to their staff. "They will come out there with hammer and saw, and they will physically rebuild your building when they see that you're going to employ them," he says.

Tywoniak is the former CEO of the child welfare division of Catholic Charities in Dade County, Florida. During his tenure there, he saw the division through Hurricane Andrew in 1992. The buildings that housed Catholic Charities' emergency shelter and residential program for children were destroyed, but all children and staff survived the ordeal unscathed due to careful planning for such an emergency, and rehearsal of that plan.

"It's the training and the drilling and the rote memory of what to do that helps save your life," says Tywoniak, who today serves as Director and Pastor of the St. George Parish Social Ministry in Fort Lauderdale. He adds that agencies need to not only plan for what they are going to do before and during a hurricane, but what will happen afterward. "Those of us who are veterans have always worked by this adage: 'It's not the hurricane that kills, it's the aftermath.'"

In preparation for Andrew, Tywoniak had his staff assembled into a prestorm team, a storm team, and a post-storm team. The prestorm team determined their evacuation location and mobilized their files, medical supplies, and equipment. The storm team, including Tywoniak, evacuated to a nursing home

run by Catholic Charities, where they weathered the storm with 14 children. Tywoniak recalls paying careful attention to the needs of his staff during and after the storm so they could best attend to the needs of the children.

The post-storm team helped pick up the pieces after the storm, and there were many pieces to pick through. Even though their buildings were destroyed, Tywoniak says he and his staff found an overturned picnic table on the grounds of the destroyed campus, set it upright, brushed it off, and proceeded to get back to work.

"We met under the stars coming back from where we were all dispersed to...and sat down with our executive staff, and I said, 'Okay, this is the first day, where do we go from here. Let's start planning, and know this—you all have a job as long as you want it.'"

Those staff who stayed on had to report to work every day, even if their office was still a slab of concrete and all they could do was push a broom, Tywoniak explains. In addition to helping with the cleanup efforts, Tywoniak loaned some of his staff to other agencies that needed help.

"We emerged from this a better, leaner agency than we were before [Hurricane Andrew]," Tywoniak recalls. "I couldn't have done that if I had not kept them employed. Through the down time, they were there."

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### CHILD WELFARE FACES A CATEGORY 5

"Systems of care are already stretched and struggling to meet the needs of vulnerable children and their families. The aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita could easily overwhelm these already challenged safety nets."

—Keith Liederman, CEO  
Kingsley House, New Orleans

"All of the children are understandably frightened and upset because they have not been able to contact family members. The staff is working around the clock to deal with their anxiety and stress. Most of the staff have sustained damage to their homes and apartments, have been without power, and are having difficulty finding gas to be able to drive to work."

—Chris Cherney, CEO  
Mississippi Children's Home Services

"Most of the boys evacuated from St. Francis Academy homes have never been outside of Mississippi, so they have been scared by the change in scenery after their trek across the states... The local women's prison sent over afghans for the youth, and those prisoners who are from the south have worked to put together a southern cookbook for the St. Francis Academy."

—Sharon Ringler, Vice President  
St. Francis Academy

# Other Voices

## Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

*National partners are helping focus the attention of lawmakers and the public on the needs of these families.*

Nationwide, more than 6 million children live in households headed by grandparents and other relatives. Both within and outside of the child welfare system, these relative caregivers provide an important safety net by preventing children from entering foster care, caring for abused and neglected children, and stepping forward as legal guardians to children who would otherwise remain in foster care.

They often do so alone and with little support. Whether they need legal authority and rights to care for children or assistance in caring, little or no help is available.

Responding to this frustration, CWLA, Generations United, and the National Committee of Grandparents for Children's Rights have begun to partner with other national organizations, such as AARP and the Children's Defense Fund, on a number of national and local efforts to support grandparents and other relatives raising children, and the children for whom they are caring.

For example, with the generous support of the Pew Charitable Trusts, and the cooperation of other partners involved, Generations United enlisted a team of creative talent and qualitative research experts to help develop an effective message to build public support for grandparents and other relatives raising children. The needs and circumstances of these families are as complicated and diverse as the families themselves. As advocates, we must sharpen our ability to shape a consumable, consistent national message that elicits positive media coverage and builds widespread support for these caregivers and children.

This groundbreaking research has yielded several important lessons, and the findings provide a solid first step in framing messages to the public, the media, and policymakers.

First, we must be strategic in how we describe the families, the numbers, and the issue. The most effective language is child focused. Economic arguments may be influential with policymakers and possibly other groups, but the mantra with the public needs to be, "It's about the child." Families should be kept together for the children's sake, and no matter why parents can no longer take care of their children—be it death, divorce, neglect, abuse, or poverty—it never, ever is the fault of the child.

We have also learned that certain terms the field uses may leave the public cold. *Grandfamilies*, *families raising families*, and *stay-together families* all received high marks, whereas *kinship care* left the public neutral at best. In fact, only a social worker liked the term *kinship care*. Although further research will help inform future work, Generations United is already in-



By Donna Butts and Brigitte Castellano

corporating different language into its publications, its website, and other public discussions.

The partners who work so well together will continue to build on the cornerstone this research has provided. Together, we believe we can begin building greater support for these important families.

The timing is perfect. In 2003, our partnering organizations sponsored the first grandparent rally in Washington, DC. Grandparents from more than 30 states, from California to Maryland, united in one voice to tell their stories to lawmakers, the media, and the public. Senator Hillary Clinton (D-NY), who addressed that first rally, subsequently introduced the Kinship Caregiver Support Act; she and cosponsors Olympia Snowe (R-ME), Tim Johnson, (D-SD), and Thad Cochran (R-MS) reintroduced the bill in May 2005.

In September 2005, grandparents and other relative caregivers came together again for a GrandRally on the grounds of the U.S. Capitol. We're hopeful our work for children will finally inspire Congress to pass this important legislation, which will begin to address fundamental needs for grandparents and other relative caregivers and the children they are raising.

The Kinship Caregiver Support Act has four major components:

**Kinship Navigator Program.** Because the education, legal, health, child welfare, and public assistance systems aren't geared for non-parent caregivers, these caregivers do not have clear information and access to these systems. In almost every state, caregivers don't even



know where to find basic information, let alone actual help. Many become so weary and frustrated that they just give up and carry on as best they can.

The Kinship Caregiver Support Act would provide funds for states to create navigator programs that link caregivers to existing support services for their children and themselves. Navigator programs can provide one-stop shopping by centralizing services and eliminate much of the unnecessary runaround caregivers endure. They can also help agencies serve grandfamilies more effectively and efficiently.

State and local agencies, those serving large metropolitan areas, and tribal organizations could apply for the competitive grants to establish toll-free hotlines, websites, and resource guides on local parenting support available to kinship families, including enrolling children in school, obtaining Medicaid and other health care, safeguarding their homes for small children, applying for housing assistance, obtaining legal services, and locating child care.

### **Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program.**

Over the past 15 years, most states have increased their use of kin as foster parents. Yet, for the most part, relatives are treated the same as nonrelative foster parents. They have no special opportunity to become permanent caregivers.

The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA) mandates that children in foster care have the right to alternative permanency options if returning to their parents is not an option. ASFA made relative care one of these options, but it didn't provide financial assistance to relative caregivers unless they adopt. Many grandparents aren't

willing to adopt since it means termination of parental rights and the negation of their own son or daughter as the child's parent.

The Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program would help ensure permanent homes for these children by allowing states the option of using federal funding, via Title IV-E, for subsidized guardianship payments to relative caregivers on behalf of the children they are raising in foster care, provided the children are eligible for federal foster care payments, by allowing them to exit foster care to the guardianship of their grandparent or other relative. States would have to rule out returning home or adoption for the child, ensure this type of placement was the best permanency alternative for the child. Thirty-five states and the District of Columbia already have subsidized guardianship programs.

**Notice to relatives when children enter foster care.** Many relatives are not informed by child welfare authorities when related children are placed in foster care, nor informed they could become foster parents. Sadly, once children are in the foster care system, their relatives have no special rights to become their caregivers. Unless the local department is willing, it's almost impossible for family to become custodians.

Part of the issue is that ASFA's overarching goal runs on two tracks: reunification with parents, and a concurrent alternative permanency plan. Switching from a nonrelative foster parent to a relative means switching tracks. New York State passed legislation that mandates all grandparents be notified when a child is removed or placed voluntarily, and that they be told their custodial options. Thus, families are informed at the beginning and can become caregivers as soon as possible.

The Kinship Caregiver Support Act includes a similar notification provision, requiring state child welfare agencies to provide written notice to all adult grandparents and other relatives within 60 days of the removal of a child from the custody of the child's parents, subject to exceptions due to family or domestic violence. Thus, when suitable family members are willing and able to become foster parents, as few children as possible will lose their families, culture, and heritage.

### **Separate licensing standards for relative foster parents.**

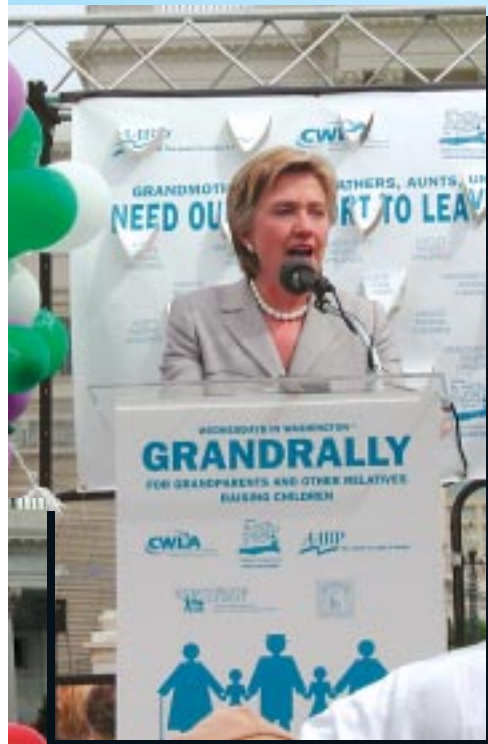
ASFA resulted in the same standards for foster care certification being applied to both relatives and nonrelatives. As long as children are safe, some of the stricter licensing requirements seem unnecessary. For example, foster parents must have a separate bedroom for a child. Clearly, not all children grow up in homes with their own rooms, and many grandparents, who have moved into smaller homes, should be eligible for certification. It's more important that children be with loving family members rather than having their own bedrooms.

The Kinship Caregiver Support Act would allow states to have separate licensing standards for kin and nonkin foster parents, as long as both standards ensure the safety of children. Such a change may make some relative foster parents eligible for higher payments and also allow states to receive federal support for more children living with relatives.

With 1 in 11 grandparents caring for grandchildren, the Kinship Caregiver Support Act is not a wish list but a necessity. The children in our care deserve the same opportunities as other children. A grandmother in a support group said recently, "No one knows how hard it is or how rewarding it is to raise a grandchild." It's up to us to help support those who are doing the hard work by changing the way we frame the issues and help move important legislation forward.

*Donna Butts is Executive Director of Generations United (www.gu.org), Washington, DC, and Brigitte Castellano is Executive Director of the National Committee of Grandparents for Children's Rights (www.grandparentsforchildren.org), Stony Brook, New York.*

*"Other Voices" provides leaders and experts from national organizations that share CWLA's commitment to the well-being of children, youth, and families a forum to share their views and ideas on cross-cutting issues.*



*U.S. Senator Hillary Clinton (D-NY), above, and Rep. Jim McDermott (D-WA), left, address the GrandRally last September. Both are sponsoring kinship caregiver support legislation. Read more on page 37.*

# VIDEO GAME VIOLENCE

By Mark and Keisha Hoerrner

**T**homas has a 21-inch flat-screen monitor and an optimized computer with a 4 GHZ processing speed. His hard drive is fast and large; he's packed in close to three gigabytes of RAM and has a video card with dual 512K processors. It's all about speed and graphical processing. He's jacked in to a high-speed Internet connection, and he's off and running.

Thomas isn't a programmer or a network engineer, though he's considering that as a possibility for the future. He doesn't have to worry about that now, though—he's only 13 years old and has a long time to make up his mind about a career. For now, he's content with the fact that, in the next three hours, he'll commit 147 felonies including aggravated assault, murder, attempted murder, robbery, arson, burglary, conspiracy, assault with a deadly weapon, drug trafficking, and auto theft while violating just about every section of the RICO Act, the nation's anti-organized crime law. He'll even be so brazen as to gun down bystanders and police officers and will personally beat someone to death with a golf club.

All without ever leaving his room.

The entire video game industry has changed dramatically since the days of Pong, where competitors sat through the rough and tumble world of a pixelated square bouncing between two rectangles in a tennis-like match of reflex and skill. Although that game was considered high tech just 30 years ago, the games today are vast and dazzling environments that seek to create an "immersive experience" for the player. Games like *Everquest*, *World of Warcraft*, *Asheron's Call*, *Lineage II*, and *Star Wars Galaxies* have developed massive online, ever-changing settings that range from futuristic swamps, to steamy jungles and rainforests, to arid deserts.

Futuristic and fantastic settings aren't the only options—vast cityscapes in games like *City of Heroes*, and more realistic environments reflecting an expansive version of California, such as in the game *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*, are also available.

The common thread in all of these games is that the player is role-playing a character, determining everything from the outfits he or she wears to the way in which the character interacts with the online world and other players. These games range from single-player to thousand-plus-multiplayer in which all players are in the online world simultaneously through a clever grouping of a large number of servers, all processing their whereabouts.

Although these games can be highly entertaining, and they showcase some of the best qualities and abilities of the gaming industry, concern is growing over their violent content. *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* represents the extreme when it comes to violence, but many have a

cartoon-like quality, such as the very popular *World of Warcraft*. They all share one goal—kill as many creatures as possible to gain rewards.

## A Link to Violent Behavior

Retired Lt. Col. Dave Grossman, a former Army Ranger and tactical trainer, asserts that video games are actively training children to kill. Learning, he says, happens all the time, especially during active play. The subject of that active play, however, can be negative or positive.

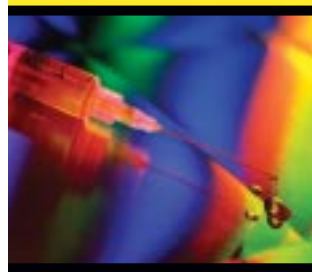
Grossman has authored two books on the connection between violent media and actual violence. He argues that children learn to use weapons and become sharp shooters through simulated games the same way soldiers use simulations to improve their shooting precision. Just as children can improve their phonics with *Learn to Read with Winnie the Pooh*, they can learn to shoot with deadly accuracy playing *Doom*, *Splinter Cell*, *Hitman*, and other first-person shooter games.

Grossman has been a consultant to a number of school systems following deadly shooting incidents, assisting with grief counseling and understanding what brings children from what should be a carefree time in their lives to the point of committing multiple murders. In his book, *Stop Teaching Our Kids to Kill*, Grossman says that in 1997's high school shootings in Paducah, Kentucky, the 14-year-old who opened fire on a before-school prayer group landed eight out of eight shots on eight different targets. Five of those were headshots.

According to the FBI, in shootouts less than three meters from their targets, trained law enforcement officers land, on average, one out of five shots—these are trained officers who are familiar with their weapons. The teenage shooter had never held a real gun before his shooting rampage, Grossman says. He had, however, spent long hours playing first-person shooter games that simulated killing with the same weapon he used that morning. Grossman, who now travels the country talking to police departments and educators, asserts that the combination of playing these games and watching violent movies taught the youth how to load, actively target, and shoot as if he had been watching an instructional video.

Unlike watching a video or television show, a child is actively making choices and weighing options when playing video games. He or she is rewarded for certain behaviors, which, depending on the game, may range from solving a puzzle to opening fire on a group of bystanders.

"In a violent video game, you rehearse the entire aggression sequence from beginning to end," says media violence researcher Craig Anderson, Chair of Iowa State University's Department of Psychology. "You have to be



vigilant, looking for enemies, looking for potential threats; you have to decide how to deal with the threat, what weapon to use, and how to use it; and then you take physical action to behave aggressively within the game.

"We have considerable evidence these games cause violent behavior," Anderson says, pointing to hundreds of scientific studies on video games, and more than 3,000 on the effects of other violent media, that he says all suggest a causal link between violent behavior and the consumption of violent content. This isn't an overt link, he cautions—a child isn't likely to go out and commit a major felony after playing a violent game for an hour—but children will act more aggressively and show more negative social action, such as the intent to do violence to another person, over time.

## Friend or FoE?

Anderson is quick to note, however, that games have positive aspects. He bought his son a copy of the flight simulator game *Flight Unlimited* and a realistic joystick and foot pedal. His son spent considerable time learning to fly, which paid off when the child went to a NASA summer camp and was assigned the role of pilot on a space shuttle mission simulator. Anderson's son was able to land the craft on the first try, something camp organizers said had never been done. Anderson credits the flight simulator as the catalyst for helping his son develop the necessary skills.

In a study at the University of California, Santa Barbara, diabetic children who received a video game showing them how to better manage their illness had improved blood sugar control and fewer emergency room visits. "Video games are great teachers and great motivators," Anderson says, "but they can be misused. It's society, not science, that must decide how to deal with the negative effects of violent video games."

To this end, the video game industry helped create the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) to develop a system of ratings for video games to define content for parents and allow

them to make informed purchasing decisions. (See "ESRB Ratings," below, left.) ESRB ratings include six age-based rating symbols, ranging from "EC—Early Childhood" to "AO—Adults Only," and more than 30 content descriptors (such as "Mild Violence," "Intense Violence," "Sexual Violence," "Partial Nudity," "Drug Reference," and "Simulated Gambling") that indicate elements in a game that may have triggered a particular rating or may be of interest or concern to the buyer.

Although the rating system is comprehensive, some recent studies raise the question of whether parents rely on or ignore the ratings. In a study by Peter D. Hart Research Associates, 78% of parents said they were aware of the rating system, 70% said they check the ESRB rating for age appropriateness when buying computer and video games for their children "every time" or "most of the time," and 54% said they check the content descriptors.

On the other hand, according to a Kaiser Foundation study of media habits of youth and families, among 11- to 14-year-olds, 75% of parents set no limits about what video games their children could play. For teens ages 15–18, the lack of parental supervision on content jumped to 95%.

The irony is that most of these parents would be leery of letting their teen watch a movie with an R or NC-17 rating, yet they seem to have no qualms about buying a video game for their children with an M rating or higher.

Barry Ritholtz of the webzine *The Big Picture* reports that last year, U.S. sales of video games topped \$7 billion, giving video game producers a huge incentive for turning out more and more engaging games. Even more lucrative is the growing market for online games. The market research firm DFC Intelligence Group has projected that by 2009, the online game market will generate just under \$10 billion annually. Most console games, such as those made for Nintendo and Playstation, are one-shot purchases. Online gamers, however, not only pay \$40–\$50 per game to get started, but often fork over as much as \$15 per month to play games.

Within this massive market, researchers like Anderson say there should be some degree of accountability for game manufacturers. Yet, despite its promotion of the ESRB rating system as a comprehensive tool for parents, the Video Software Developer's Association has waged an intense legal campaign against any legislative limits on the content of games, even when legislation corresponds directly to the industry's voluntary ratings.

Game developers display an almost cavalier attitude in creating software. Recently, the makers of *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* came under fire from U.S. Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-NY), who publicly condemned the game's developer, Rockstar Games, when gamers uncovered hidden objectionable sexual content within the game. Many games, especially those for home computers, can be altered through third-party modification software—"mods"—that allows users to create customized content for a game. Teenagers using mods discovered strong sexual scenes hidden within *San Andreas*. The sexual content wasn't created with third-party software; it was already resident in the original retail game.

In response, ESRB immediately changed the game's M rating to AO (Adults Only). What followed was the only show of public power the market has retained—many stores refuse to carry AO-rated titles, and the game was yanked from store shelves nationwide.

## ESRB Ratings

Source: Entertainment Software Rating Board.  
Rating symbols used by permission.



**Early Childhood:** Content may be suitable for ages 3 and older.



**Everyone:** Content may be suitable for ages 6 and older.



**Everyone 10+:** Content may be suitable for ages 10 and older.



**Teen:** Content may be suitable for ages 13 and older.



**Mature:** Content may be suitable for youth ages 17 and older. Mature sexual themes, more intense violence, or strong language.



**Adults Only:** Content suitable only for adults; not intended for youth under age 18.




**Rating Pending:** Submitted to ESRB and awaiting a final rating. Only appears in advertising before a game's release.

## Advice for Parents and Caregivers


With a growing surge of violent games on the market, parents and child advocates need to know how to keep children out of the less prosocial aspects of the video game industry and concentrate on getting children into games that offer fun and challenging scenarios. Here's what experts suggest for parents:

- Be aware of game content. If parents are unsure about the rating or other information about a game, ESRB's ratings website, [www.esrb.org](http://www.esrb.org), features a number of tools for parents, including a searchable database of games and an explanation of the corresponding ratings.
- Play video games with your children, just as television and film experts suggest that parents view programs and movies with their kids. This way, parents are clear on the content.
- Locate game consoles and personal computers outside of children's bedrooms. Studies have found that when these items are located in a bedroom, children spend two to three times longer playing games than engaging in other activities. They also remain cloistered behind a closed door, making it harder for parents to monitor the content.
- Become savvy consumers. Just as they use the Internet to find the best airline and hotel prices for vacations, parents need to research game titles on their children's birthday and holiday wish lists. Anderson's site, [www.psychology.iastate.edu/faculty/caa](http://www.psychology.iastate.edu/faculty/caa), provides recommendations for educational games. The MediaWise website, at [www.mediafamily.org](http://www.mediafamily.org), also lists recommendations, as well as titles to avoid.

As MediaWise founder David Walsh says, "The storytellers define the culture." Parents, teachers, social workers, and child advocates need to clearly understand the stories being told in video games, because the line between fiction and reality will continue to blur. 

*L. Mark Hoerrner is a freelance writer and author of several articles on the media's effects on children. His wife, Dr. Keisha L. Hoerrner, is an Associate Professor of Communication and Director, Communities for Learning Success, at Kennesaw State University, Kennesaw, Georgia, and a researcher who specializes in children and media issues. They are the parents of two pre-school boys.*

## Is the Research Flawed?



Although most media scholars and critics, parents, teachers, and legislators agree violent content in television, movies, and video games is harmful to children, some vocal media defenders dispute such an effect.

The largest group of media defenders is the media themselves. When Congress held one of its first hearings on the issue of television violence, in 1954, Merle Jones, CBS-TV Vice President of Owned Stations and General Services, told the assembled senators he had research showing TV did not contribute to juvenile delinquency. Fast forward to the 1970s or the 1990s, and the sentiments from media executives are the same. They can present research that electronic media are not harmful to children or adults.

Several media scholars also believe the research on media violence isn't as conclusive as author Dave Grossman and Iowa State researcher Craig Anderson believe it to be. In an essay for PBS.org, Henry Jenkins of MIT argues that the scientific evidence linking video games to aggressive behavior is spurious. He notes that "no research has found that video games are a primary factor [in aggressive behavior] or that violent video game play could turn an otherwise normal person into a killer."

Jenkins targets Grossman's claim that because video games are used in military training, they are teaching the same skills to young players. Jenkins, who calls Grossman a "moral reformer," points out that the context of military training is quite different from playtime in a teenager's bedroom: "The military uses games as part of a specific curriculum, with clearly defined goals, in a context where students actively want to learn and have a need for the information being transmitted. There are consequences for not mastering those skills."

Cheryl Olson, a professor of psychiatry at the Harvard Medical School Center for Mental Health and Media, offers similar criticism of video game research. In an article published in *Academic Psychiatry* last year, Olson argues the research on video games and violence is too superficial. "There's no indication that violence rose in lockstep with the spread of violent games," she writes, attributing conflicting findings on the subject to vague definitions of aggression, as well as a failure to examine use of violent media in context with other known contributors to aggression, such as illegal substance use and family poverty.

"It's very difficult to document whether and how violent video and computer games contribute to serious violence such as criminal assault and murder," Olson continues. "It's time to move beyond blanket condemnations and frightening anecdotes and focus on developing targeted educational and policy interventions based on solid data."

Jenkins and Olson agree with Jeffrey Goldstein, a professor at the University of Utrecht in the Netherlands, and others who argue that the real concern with research that links media content with real-world violent behavior is how

the studies were conducted. Methodology is what led Jib Fowles to write his book, *The Case For Television Violence*. A professor of communication at the University of Houston–Clear Lake, Fowles refutes the thousands of media studies that have found a link between media content and aggressive behavior.

Fowles agrees with Olson: The first glaring problem is definitional. Just what is violence, and why are so many definitions used in those thousands of studies? Researchers have to define violence before they begin counting and analyzing the violent actions in media content. If a character in a game threatens another character verbally but doesn't actually harm him physically, is that a violent act? What about humorous acts like throwing a pie at someone? Is that violence? The more expansive the definition, Fowles says, the more violent a show, movie, or game becomes.

In a talk to the Cultural Policy Center at the University of Chicago a few years ago, Goldstein said the accepted psychological definition of violence—the intentional injury of another person—shouldn't be used in video game research. There is no intent to injure, and no live victim. Players are striving to win games, not engage in aggressive behavior—and the behavior isn't real anyway.

According to Fowles and others, another glaring problem is that many researchers find a relationship between violent media content and aggressive behavior, but they frame it as cause and effect. As Jenkins notes in his essay, there's a big difference between correlation and causation: "Most studies found a correlation, not a causal relationship, which means the research could simply show that aggressive people like aggressive entertainment."

Establishing a cause-effect relationship between two variables requires a complex study, generally a laboratory experiment. That's one of the few ways to control the study enough to state conclusively that one variable actually caused the other.

But, as Goldstein noted in his address in Chicago, "Play is a voluntary, self-directed activity, an experience that probably cannot be captured in a laboratory experiment." He argues that whatever action takes place in a controlled setting cannot be compared with the enjoyable activity that children and adults choose to engage in within the comfortable surroundings of home. "Being required to play a violent video game on demand is no one's idea of an entertainment experience."

Such is the nature of scientific debate—a tit-for-tat exchange over which controlled setting is more sterile, and which scientist's variable and control groups will be the most accurate. Worth noting, however, is that most researchers who have challenged the link between media violence and violent behavior have never conducted counter-experiments themselves. Further, Goldstein, Olson, and many of their contemporaries are or have been paid consultants for various media entities, which might lead some to question their motivation.

Human behavior seldom has easy answers, especially for something like aggression, which can be influenced by multiple variables simultaneously. The debate is invigorating to researchers but frustrating for parents, teachers, and child advocates who want answers. As a media professor who is also the mother of two small children, my advice to my students is, weigh the preponderance of evidence and make a decision that feels right to you.

— Dr. Keisha L. Hoerrner



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# National

## NEWS ROUNDUP

### ARIZONA

Child advocates in Arizona are pushing a plan to keep foster children in the same school, even if they move to a different family. If they must change schools, advocates want to ensure it happens only once for the child, according to the *Arizona Republic*.

Prompting advocates to take action are recent studies that show 75% of children in foster care are working below grade level, and 83% will be held back a year. About 60% of the 10,000 children in Arizona's care are school age, and the more often they change schools, the further they fall behind, advocates contend.

Dennis Ichikawa, Director of Casey Family Program's Phoenix office, has assembled a group of child welfare officials, educators, judges, and attorneys to consider how to improve the school experiences of children in foster care. Additionally, last year, 60 juvenile court judges attended training on how their decisions regarding children in foster care, including where and with whom they live, affect their education. The judges received a list of questions to ask to better assess children's education situations.

The advocate group also plans to train volunteers as education advocates for children in foster care and track their school progress, the *Arizona Republic* reports.

### MAINE

Governor John Baldacci (D) has decided to stop accepting federal funds for an abstinence-based sex-education program, in part because federal guidelines do not allow any of the money to be used to teach so-called "safe sex" practices, according to the *Portland Press Herald*.

Maine is the third state, following California and Pennsylvania, to turn down the federal money amid a national debate about whether the government should promote abstinence-only programs or give youth birth control information. Maine accepted federal abstinence funds between 1998 and 2004,

but state officials did not apply for \$165,000 in funds in the 2005 fiscal year and will not seek \$161,000 in funding for FY 2006.

Maine has used federal money in the past to fund public service announcements discouraging youth from having sex prematurely and encouraging better communication between parents and their children. New, tighter federal guidelines, however, would prevent the state from providing "comprehensive information" to simultaneously encourage abstinence and help sexually active young people, state Public Health Director Dora Anne Mills told the *Press Herald*.

Mills also said the state's teen pregnancy and abortion rates have dropped substantially and, therefore, the funds are not needed. She pointed out that the federal government's guidelines stating that sex should be limited to marriage complicates educating gay and lesbian youth.

"This money is more harmful than it is good," Mills told the paper. "You can't talk about comprehensive reproductive information."

### MINNESOTA

Large numbers of young Hmong girls are being raped or forced into prostitution by Hmong gang members who go unpunished because their victims are too ashamed to step forward, according to the Minneapolis-St. Paul *Star Tribune*.

The paper conducted an analysis using FBI data revealing that between 1999 and 2005, some 76 Hmong men and 21 Hmong teens were charged with sexually assaulting or prostituting girls in Ramsey County, home to about 60% of the state's Hmong population. More than half of the men were charged with crimes against victims younger than 13; 81 of the 97 were charged with attacks against victims 15 and younger.

"It's a huge problem," St. Paul Police Sgt. Richard Straka acknowledged in the *Star Tribune*.

The community has begun to take action: St. Paul public schools are training staff to spot Hmong girls who might be in trouble, the Hmong Youth Task Force meets monthly to brainstorm solutions, and St. Paul police and Ramsey County sheriff's deputies are actively looking for Hmong runaway girls, departing from their previous runaway policy.

According to the *Star Tribune*, the number of young rape victims at one St. Paul clinic started to disturb Pediatric Nurse Practitioner Laurel Edinburg, who began collecting information. In her preliminary analysis, she found Hmong girls treated at her clinic were about six times more likely than other victims to have been raped by five or more people.

### NEW JERSEY

New Jersey's youth jails have stopped illegally housing dozens of mentally ill and neglected children and are developing a more sophisticated tracking system to make monitoring youth in detention easier, according to New Jersey's *Star-Ledger*.

In June 2003, state officials agreed to a series of reforms to settle a lawsuit filed by Children's Rights Inc. One promised change was removing all children in need of mental health or child welfare placement from detention. According to the *Star-Ledger*, a court-appointed panel monitoring New Jersey's compliance with the settlement set a June 30, 2005, deadline for this to occur, but on that date, 29 children were still being held in detention. State officials promised to end the warehousing by September 30. In early October, the *Star-Ledger* reported that just one child remained illegally detained.

Kathi Way, who oversees children's services for New Jersey's Department of Human Services, said the state moved the youth into a variety of settings, including institutional treatment facilities and foster homes. "This is one of the most important accomplishments for us," Way told the *Star-Ledger*. "We feel so much better knowing children are not...waiting in detention."



## OHIO

The Ohio Supreme Court ruled unanimously last October that the grandparents of an 8-year-old girl must be allowed to visit her over the objections of her father, upholding the constitutionality of a state law granting non-parents visitation rights to children, according to the *New York Times*.

The decision comes at a time when parents nationwide are challenging the constitutionality of such laws. Courts in Florida and Washington State, for example, have struck down similar laws, while courts in other states have upheld them.

The Ohio ruling is the result of a legal battle over Brittany Collier, who lived with her mother and grandparents for the first two years of her life after she was born in 1997. In 1999, Collier's mother died of cancer, and her grandparents, Gary and Carol Harrold, won temporary legal custody of Brittany.

In 2002, custody was awarded to the girl's father, Brian Collier, who removed her from the Harrolds' home. The Harrolds initiated a battle for visitation rights. According to Ohio law, in cases

where parents of an unmarried minor dies, the courts are permitted to grant grandparents and other relatives of the deceased parent visitation rights if they are "in the best interest" of the child. Collier argued the law was too broad and infringed on his rights.

The state Supreme Court's decision took into account that Brittany had lived in the Harrolds' home for her first five years. "The facts of this case clearly warrant granting grandparent visitation" to the Harrolds, Justice Alice Robie Resnick wrote in the court's decision.

## WASHINGTON

The *Seattle Times* reports that four Washington community colleges will offer bachelor's degrees as part of a pilot program approved by the state legislature. The four-year degree programs will launch in fall 2007.

As in most states, Washington's community colleges currently offer only two-year degrees. The four-year degrees would be aimed at students who want to advance their careers in specialized areas, such as hospitality or health care rather

than those seeking general education in liberal arts or science.

The state will choose community colleges to participate in the program this spring. To be selected, colleges will have to show that a demand exists among students and employers and that similar courses aren't offered elsewhere. Washington joins about a dozen other states where students can earn bachelor's degrees outside traditional university settings.

"There has been controversy," Norma Kent, spokesperson for the American Association of Community Colleges, told the *Times*. "Of course, the four-year institutions are a little bit wary about what it means. And some in the community college system think it might erode its mission."

The pilot program will start with 80 full-time-equivalent students in 2007, expanding to 160 in 2008. A study by the state's community college board indicates there is demand for 3,000 slots. The board hopes to convince lawmakers to allow it broader degree-granting authority.

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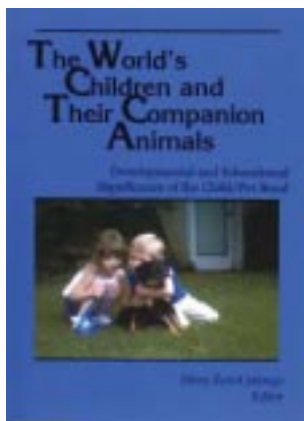
Making Children a National Priority



A screenshot of the NDAS website interface displayed in a web browser. The browser's address bar shows "http://ndas.cwla.org/". The website header includes the CWLA logo, a search bar, and navigation links for Home, About Us, What's New, Data &amp; Statistics, and Research &amp; Information. The main content area features a large banner with the text "Making Children a National Priority" and a grid of four colored boxes: "About Us", "What's New", "Data &amp; Statistics", and "Research &amp; Information". Each box contains a list of links and information. The footer of the website includes the text "CWLA is a registered trademark of the Child Welfare League of America" and "© 1996-2005. All Rights Reserved".

# The World's Children and Their Companion Animals: Developmental and Educational Significance of the Child/Pet Bond

Mary Renck Jalongo, Editor



*Internationally renowned physician Albert Schweitzer once said, "We need a boundless ethic which will include the animals also." It is just such an ethic, an ethic of compassion and generosity, that holds the greatest promise for more responsive parenting, more compassionate teaching, and a more tolerant and just society.*

**Foreword:** Stars in a Child's Universe by Michael J. Rosen

**Introduction:** The Special Significance of Companion Animals in Children's Lives by Mary Renck Jalongo with Marsha R. Robbins and Reade Paterno

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- \* Companion Animals in the Lives of Boys and Girls: Gendered Attitudes, Practices, and Preferences
- \* Companion Animals at Home: What Children Learn From Families

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**Afterword** by Mary Renck Jalongo

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## The Down to Earth Dad



Make No Mistake About It

# Dads Are Necessary

I apologize in advance for the sports metaphor, but I need to tell you about the time back in college in 1981 when the University of Idaho Vandals basketball team was ranked 16th in the nation and looked like they could go all the way. That was big news for our school, and it was perhaps even bigger news that I became an ardent sports fan that fabled season—something I hadn't been before and haven't been since.

Our boys couldn't lose. Every week, they smashed their opponents with ease. The team's rise in prominence nationally was linked to their proven track record and ability. They enjoyed a long winning streak, but they became overconfident, and another team beat them. Their national ranking fell, and the fans were devastated.

I feel the same thing could happen to the "fathers matter" message as an accepted truth backed up by 20 years of research showing that dads reduce negative outcomes in children's lives. The fact that children's cognitive, emotional, educational, and social development is enhanced via father involvement has enjoyed a long "winning streak," you might say, just like my college alma mater basketball team did. I fear the "Father Involvement Team," representing an affirmative message of the positive outcomes associated with father presence, might lose to an opposing team that's gunning for them.

The message that dads matter is under subtle attack, the opposing team comprising those who don't believe fathers matter much at all. *Good Morning America* (audience of 4.3 million) recently did a lengthy feature report on the book *Raising Boys without Men*, by Peggy Drexler. The book, subtitled, *How Maverick Moms Are Creating the Next Generation of Exceptional Men*, suggests that boys who are raised without their dads (or even "a man in the bedroom" as the author puts it) turn out just fine and, moreover, that they excel at life.

The book's suggestion that fathers aren't necessary and that boys just need a male role model replacement for their fathers is deeply troubling. Boys raised in households headed by mothers not only can grow up emotionally stronger, the book says, they can become more empathetic and independent than boys raised in traditional two-parent households.

Such a position—and it isn't just this book; it's an increasingly vocal opinion—largely ignores the fact that a significant percentage of children growing up without involved fathers are at an increased risk for growing up poor, getting into trouble with the law, abusing drugs and alcohol, becoming a teen parent, dropping out of school, and committing suicide. I worry that the "father involvement" message will be muffled and that the mountain of



By Patrick Mitchell

research supporting father involvement might be ignored in favor of the superficially "new idea" that dads don't really matter.

To help caring professionals "prepare the team" to play ball, so to speak, here are four father involvement facts:

- Compared with living with both parents, living in a single-parent home doubles the risk a child will suffer physical, emotional, or educational neglect.<sup>1</sup>
- Boys born to unwed mothers are 2.5 times more likely to become incarcerated.<sup>2</sup>
- A child living in a household absent a father is 32% more likely to smoke, drink, and use drugs.<sup>3</sup>
- In studies involving more than 25,000 children, children living with only one parent had lower grade point averages, poorer attendance records, and higher drop-out rates than did students who lived with both parents.<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps the past decade of simultaneously raising the bar for dads and raising the public image of fathers has positioned the spotlight so intensely on dads that some want to illuminate moms instead. One of the first things I tell my audiences is, "Moms matter supremely!" That's true. I then segue to the benefits of father presence because that's why I'm there. Our "team" needs to support mothers, and we also need to cheer loudly for father involvement.

Sports metaphors notwithstanding, this much is true: Children stand the best chance of winning when their dads are involved, and we need to help children win. Anything less risks a devastating loss.

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A regular contributor to *Children's Voice*, Patrick Mitchell publishes a monthly newsletter, *The Down to Earth Dad*, from Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, and facilitates the *Dads Matter! Project™* for early childhood programs, schools, and child- and family-serving organizations. He conducts keynote addresses, workshops, and in- and preservice trainings. To reserve Patrick Mitchell for speaking engagements, or to implement the *Dads Matter! Project™* for your families and community partners, call him toll-free at 877/282-DADS, or e-mail him at [patrick@down-toearthdad.org](mailto:patrick@down-toearthdad.org). Website: [www.DownToEarthDad.org](http://www.DownToEarthDad.org).

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New York, NY

## ExchangeEveryDay

Issue #1167, January 18, 2005  
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Exchange

*"When the moon is not full, the stars shine more brightly." - Bugandan Proverb*

### Giving Effective Feedback

The **Exchange** article, "Guidelines for Effective Use of Feedback," provides eleven specific characteristics of effective feedback. Three of these are....

• **Feedback should focus on behavior, not the person.** In giving feedback, it is important to focus on what a person does rather than on what the person is. For example, you should say to a teacher "You talked considerably during the staff meeting" rather than "You're a loudmouth." According to George F. J. Lechner, "When we talk in terms of 'personality traits' it implies inherited constant qualities difficult, if not impossible, to change. Focusing on behavior implies that it is something related to a specific situation that might be changed" (Lechner). It is less threatening to a teacher to hear comments about her behavior than about her traits.

• **Feedback should focus on observations, not inferences.** Observations are what we can see or hear in the behavior of another person. Inferences are interpretations we make based on what we hear or see (Lechner). Inferences are influenced by the observer's frame of references and attitudes. As such, they are much less likely to be accurate and to be acceptable to the person observed. Inferences are much more likely to cause defensiveness.

• **Feedback should focus on descriptions, not judgments.** In describing an event, a director reports an event to a teacher exactly as it occurred. A judgment of this event, however, refers to an evaluation in terms of good or bad, right or wrong, nice or not nice. Feedback which appears evaluative increases defensiveness (Gibb). It can readily be seen how teachers react defensively to judgments which are negative or critical. But it is often believed that positive judgments 'praise' can be very effective as a motivational and learning tool. However, studies have shown that the use of praise has little long-term impact on employees' performance (Baehler). Often praise arouses defensiveness rather than dispelling it. Parents, teachers, and supervisors so often "sugarcoat" criticism with praise ("You had a great lesson today, but ...") that "when we are praised, we automatically get ready for the shock, for the reproof" (Farson).

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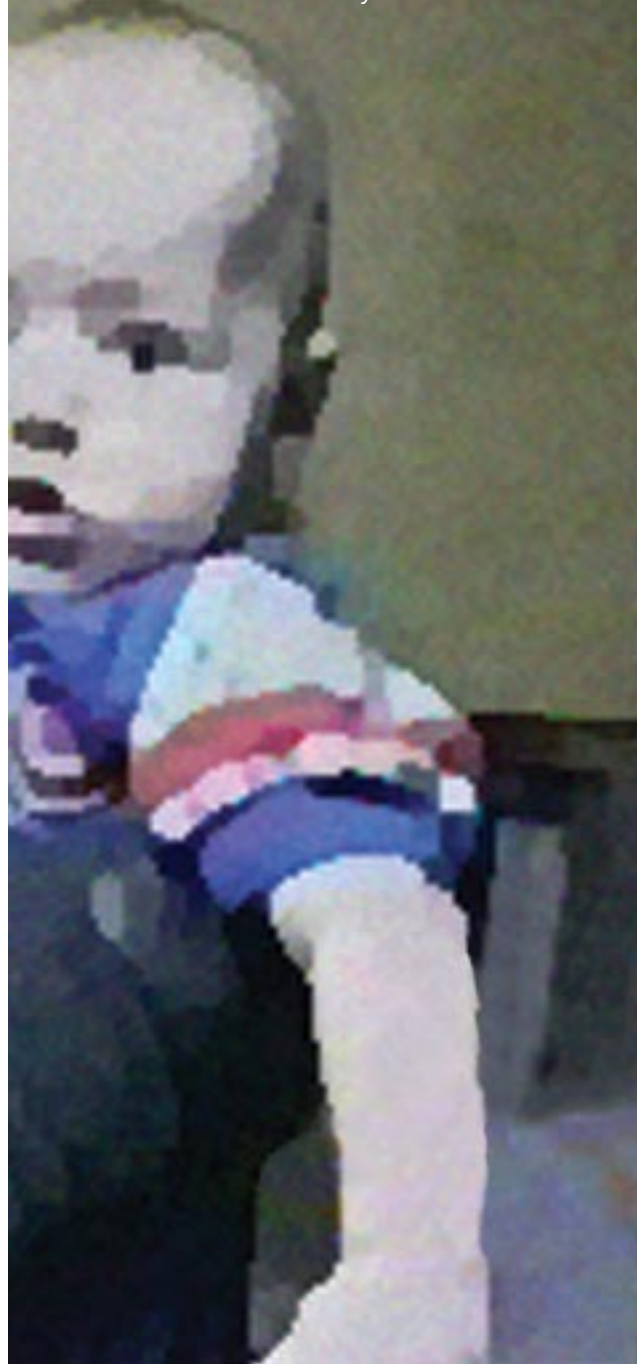
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# Growing Up wi

**M**eth addiction is spreading among American families, leaving thousands of children vulnerable and child welfare systems stretched.

# th METH

By Jennifer Micheal



ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE NORTH METRO DRUG TASK FORCE, DENVER, COLORADO.

Nothing makes a child grow up faster than having a parent who is addicted to methamphetamine, says Lori Moriarty, a Colorado law enforcement official who has raided enough meth labs to know. “Constant chaos” is how she describes home life for children of meth addicts. Parents abusing meth can stay high and wired for an entire week, then crash into comatose sleep for several more days. Meanwhile, the house grows filthy, and the refrigerator goes empty.



Children in these situations many times are left to fend for themselves. Moriarty recalls entering a home where a 3-year-old child had taken over feeding his 1-year-old brother. The parents were too high to notice his hunger, so the older child resorted to feeding his baby brother a bottle of chocolate syrup—food he thought was appropriate for an infant because it was in a bottle. In another case, the 4-year-old boy of a meth addict couldn't count to seven for Moriarty, but he could draw a meth lab in detail for her.

“These children are totally neglected,” says Moriarty, who serves as President of the Colorado Alliance for Drug Endangered Children and is Commander of the North Metro Drug Task Force in the Denver area. “Law enforcement realized that we have to do early identification of all the children living in these dangerous drug environments and work hand-in-hand with social services to make sure children are identified and receive immediate care.”

The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration reports that 61,782 meth labs were seized nationwide between 2000 and 2004. These meth raids affected more than 15,000 children—and those were just the reported cases. Many states are only beginning to collect data on the presence of children at lab sites, so the total number of children who enter child welfare because of parental meth use is still uncertain.

Nonetheless, child welfare has unquestionably felt the effects of the methamphetamine epidemic. In a survey released last summer by the National Association of Counties, 40% of child welfare officials in 303 U.S. counties reported increased out-of-home placements because of meth in the last year.

The survey results brought a slew of media coverage—considered long overdue by many child welfare experts—exposing the struggles within child welfare to cope with the effects of meth abuse. With burgeoning foster care caseloads, communities have had to step up foster family recruitment efforts, which is a chronic problem nationwide anyway.

To better protect social workers and lessen trauma for children, many states have enacted strict protocols for responding to meth lab seizures. And child welfare workers have undergone

crash courses on the science behind meth, how it affects the brain, and the dangers of meth environments so they can better work with meth-addicted and recovering parents to achieve family reunification, when possible.

Coping with meth recalls, for some, the 1980s crack epidemic that sent the number of abused and neglected children soaring. "I think this is the next crack cocaine epidemic, as it impacts the child welfare community, and therefore is one that we need to take very seriously," says CWLA President and CEO Shay Bilchik. "We need to be vigilant, we need to be informed, and we need to be ready to respond when this happens in our own communities."

But unlike cocaine abuse, which was largely an urban problem, methamphetamine addiction has lobbed heavy blows to rural communities, overwhelming areas unaccustomed to drug problems and lacking sufficient services to address them. As a result, many communities are bringing all of their government branches and nongovernmental organizations to the table, including child welfare, law enforcement, school systems, and health care facilities, churches, and community organizations, to establish uniform protocols for responding to meth. Many communities are also exploring treatment programs for meth, which, though longer and more complex than for other drugs, can work.

Although meth has spread rapidly, it still accounts for a relatively small percent of people affected by drug and alcohol problems in the United States.

In 2003, alcohol accounted for 42% of addicts admitted for drug treatment in the United States; heroin and other opiates accounted for 18%; marijuana, 15%; cocaine, 14%; and methamphetamine and other stimulants, just 7%.

"The thing to keep in mind as you start to work with people around the issue of methamphetamine is not to let the media drive the caseworker's response to a person addicted to meth," advises Jay Wurscher, Director of Oregon's Child Welfare Addiction Services. "This isn't the bogeyman. This is a drug addiction, and it comes with the standard list of things for people to be concerned about."

Nevertheless, public and private child welfare agencies, observing how meth has inched from the West, to the Midwest, to the East like a contagious disease, have realized the immediate need to tackle the problem so that as few children as possible are affected.

"If the ultimate goal is to keep children from being the next users and to keep them out of jail...everybody is going to have to come together to be a piece of that change," Moriarty says.

## How It's Made, How It Works

Methamphetamine is a white, odorless, bitter-tasting crystalline powder that dissolves in water or alcohol. It's easily made in hidden laboratories with store-bought ingredients and is a powerfully addictive stimulant that dramatically affects the central nervous system. It can be injected, snorted, smoked, or ingested orally.

Early in the 20th Century, meth was developed from its parent drug, amphetamine, for use as a nasal decongestant and bronchial inhaler. The chemical structure of methamphetamine is similar to that of amphetamine, but has greater effect on the central nervous system, causing increased activity, decreased appetite, and a sense of well-being that can last from 20 minutes to 12 hours.

The ease of manufacturing meth, and its highly addictive potential, has contributed to the drug's spread. Methamphetamine releases high levels of the neurotransmitter dopamine, which stimulates brain cells, enhancing mood and body movement.





“Meth is better than sex and food,” Wurscher says. “It grabs people in a way that no other drug does because of that dopamine release.” Meth, he explains, affects the brain such that addicts are more likely to remember their first high—that initial surge of dopamine—than all other aspects of their addiction, causing them to return to the drug time and time again.

As for the characteristics of meth addicts, 47% of meth drug treatment admissions are women, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. The nearly equal split between male and female addicts is unusual. Most drugs have higher numbers of male addicts, says Nancy Young, Director of Children and Family Futures, and Project Director for the National Center for Substance Abuse and Child Welfare (NCSACW). The statistics are all the more reason for child welfare to address meth abuse issues, Young points out, because women are usually the primary caregivers for children.

Not surprisingly, so many female meth addicts mean treatment rates for pregnant meth addicts are on the rise. In the past eight years, drug treatment admissions for pregnant women addicted to meth and marijuana have nearly doubled. Meanwhile, according to NCSACW, admissions for pregnant women using alcohol and heroin have remained stable, and admissions for pregnant women using cocaine have fallen since the mid-1990s.

In terms of age, high numbers of young adolescent girls are being treated for meth. “It’s something to be very aware of in terms of drug-use pattern,” Young notes. Of the 12- to 14-year-olds treated for meth in 2003, 70% were female, according to NCSACW; in the 15- to 17-year-old range, 56% were female.

### The Youngest Victims

According to the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, 13% of U.S. children under 18 live in households where a parent or other adult uses illicit drugs, including meth. The risks to the safety and well-being of children under the care of a drug-addicted parent are numerous—inadequate supervision, exposure to second-hand smoke, accidental ingestion of drugs, possibility of abuse, HIV exposure from needles used by the parent, and parents who exhibit poor judgment, confusion, irritability, paranoia, and violence.



Children of a meth-dependent parent is often exposed to risks more often and for longer periods than are other children. Chronic neglect is likely, their home life is often chaotic, and their households may lack food, water, and utilities. They may go without medical and dental care and immunizations. A parent’s involvement in meth trafficking may expose the child to violence and weapons, as well as physical or sexual abuse by people visiting the household. If a parent cooks small quantities of meth, the child can be exposed to chemicals, toxic fumes, fire, and explosions.

“[Children] clearly have all of those risks from a parent who is using or abusing, but we also have to pay attention to the chemical exposure,” Young says. “The children in those kinds of environments have higher risks than the adults...for reasons just having to do with their own development.”

For the unborn children of pregnant meth-addicted mothers, according to NCSACW, risks include birth defects, growth retardation, premature birth, low birthweight, and brain lesions. Problems at birth may include difficulty sucking and swallowing, hypersensitivity to touch, and excessive muscle tension. Long-term risks may include developmental disorders, cognitive deficits, learning disabilities, poor social adjustment, and language deficits.

Medical and psychological researchers discourage the use of such terms as meth babies and ice babies, however. Last summer, more than 90 leading physicians, scientists, and treatment specialists signed off on an open letter urging public policies to address prenatal exposure to meth, and media coverage “based on science, not presumption or prejudice.” The letter cited numerous inappropriate cases of print and broadcast media using the term meth baby.

“Addiction is a technical term that refers to compulsive behavior that continues in spite of adverse consequence,” the letter explained. “By definition, babies cannot be ‘addicted’ to methamphetamine or anything else.”

## Cleaning Up the Cooks

Living in the home of a meth-addicted parent who is operating a meth lab not only poses physical dangers, but also severe emotional trauma for children if the lab is raided. To lessen the trauma, many states have trained law enforcement how to provide initial care for children found in meth labs, and greater attention is being paid to children's needs during decontamination procedures.



Polk County, Iowa, for example, uses a state-of-the-art decontamination trailer to assist victims possibly exposed to meth. The 20-foot-long trailer contains enclosed shower stalls, a portable water heating unit, and other resources to reduce trauma during the cleanup process, particularly for children.

Polk County, Iowa, for example, uses a state-of-the-art decontamination trailer to assist victims possibly exposed to meth. The 20-foot-long trailer contains enclosed shower stalls, a portable water heating unit, and other resources to reduce trauma during the cleanup process, particularly for children.

"It has pictures and toys and is what you would think kids would like in terms of a bath and a warm, friendly place, as opposed to a sterile, adult environment," explains Mary Nelson, Administrator for the Iowa Department of Human Services Division of Behavioral, Developmental, and Protective Services.

Iowa is among the many states that have established uniform protocols that law enforcement, child welfare, and other agencies closely follow when responding to meth lab situations. In most cases, law enforcement is the first responder when the presence of meth is suspected, and children found in the labs are taken immediately to hospitals for observation. Responders are trained on the appropriate care to provide children in these situations.

Having law enforcement first on the scene also ensures safety for social workers who may encounter physical danger due to meth users' heightened sense of paranoia. Unknowing workers can also risk chemical contamination if they enter a home where meth is present.

Meth labs are becoming less of a problem, thanks to state laws that place cold medicines containing pseudophedrine—used in meth manufacturing—behind pharmacy counters. Customers are limited to the quantities they can buy and must sign for them and show proper identification. Oregon has gone so far as to make pseudophedrine a prescription drug as of July 2006.

But meth addicts remain within communities because more than 80% of the nation's meth supply is imported from outside U.S. borders. Luckily, treatment is proving successful for meth addicts, though it can take much longer than treatment for other drugs, due to cognitive damage and mental health issues such as depression and anxiety, which can accompany meth addiction. And more addicts are seeking treatment—between 1992 and 2002, admission rates for meth treatment nation-

wide increased 420%, according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

Cognitively, meth decreases the ability to recognize and recall words and pictures, make inferences, manipulate information, and ignore irrelevant information. People in early recovery may find it difficult to pay attention, comprehend spoken and written information, and remember information, both Wurscher and Young point out. Wurscher advises that child welfare should think about working differently with families affected by meth and explore "strategies to communicate information to this population that's having problems with manipulating and retaining information."

Research shows that meth abusers who stay drug free at least nine months display significant recovery. According to NCSACW, after four years of abstinence, no deficits have been found in their memory, learning, attention, executive function, or motor function.


## Holding Each Other Accountable

Meth may never be completely eradicated from communities, but citizens are becoming more educated about the problem. In Colorado, for example, meth has been an ongoing problem since the 1990s, but it wasn't until the early 2000s that communities began to pay attention to its effects on families and children, says the North Metro Drug Task Force's Moriarty. Today, 19 similar task forces are working in the state's 64 counties to establish integrated responses to drug situations that involve children. They are working with police officers, social workers, treatment providers, probation officers, prosecutors, guardians ad litem, and others to focus on the best interests of children endangered by drugs.

"I believe we have raised awareness in our state," Moriarty says.

"We all hold each other more accountable." Before drug

raids or planned arrests, she says, police officers check with social service departments to see if children might be living in the homes of offenders. Also, all drug arrests are reported to social services in case children may be adversely affected.

"We find the more we are sharing this information, the faster we are to the response and the protection of the child," Moriarty says. 



*In the spring issue of Children's Voice, read how Iowa, Oklahoma, Oregon, and North Carolina have successfully tackled meth abuse and its effects on child welfare through community collaborations and legislation.*

*Jennifer Michael is Managing Editor of Children's Voice.*

## The Rules of Believing

By Ellen Notbohm



It's a distinct privilege to be asked to join you in the pages of *Children's Voice* as a regular columnist. We know something about each other through my previous articles, "What Every Child with Autism Wishes You Knew" (November/December 2004) and "Ten Things Your Student with Autism Wishes You Knew" (May/June 2005). I appreciate the many heartfelt responses I received, and I never fail to be moved and inspired by the courage and stamina of people like you who love, teach, and work with our most vulnerable children.

Those who have read any of my work know the thing I most believe in is *believing*—nearly all children, whatever their disability or different ability, have the potential to achieve far beyond whatever stereotype society may be willing to settle for. Our job as parents, caregivers, educators, and advocates is to keep pushing for the outer limits of that potential.

I live in a state of ongoing astonishment—you'd think I'd learn—at what my sons (one with autism, one with ADHD) have been able to achieve when the level of expectation is carefully calibrated at a point that is challenging but not beyond reach. When we fail to set the bar high enough, we squash motivation as surely as when we set it too high. Too high: "I'm never good enough. Why try?" Not high enough: "You don't think I can do it. Why try?" It's a fine line—and it keeps moving, darn it! That's why we draw it in chalk, in pencil, in the sand.

Letting go of preconceived ideas of what a child can achieve may, like any worthwhile skill, takes practice. Here is the starting line: Make no assumptions about what this child can accomplish. Without factual backup, an assumption is no better than a guess. Wherever possible, believe that a child's so-called

disability is open-ended. At the same time, look for the invisible enemies that can hamper achievement—sensory or environmental issues, unrecognized medical problems, language difficulties, lack of adequate information or equipment, or cultural or socioeconomic factors.

Let's look at physical education (PE) as a microcosm for our belief system. PE and sports is one of those arenas where the expectations for special kids often seem to drop off a cliff. Our kids' cognitive, emotional, or motor issues are an impediment to successfully participating in "regular" PE or sports. Or are they?

Think about it—a lot of "regular" kids hate PE, and with increasing vehemence as they get older. Why is that? I believe it has to do with the fact that, almost invariably, the PE "haves" are lumped together with the "have nots." All kids take part in the same PE curriculum, with no attempt to separate students according to ability or interest level. In no other core discipline is this true. Reading and spelling groups start to shake out in elementary school. Math students are grouped by ability in middle school. By high school, English, science, history, and math classes separate into general, honors, and advance placement (AP).

Schools do this so each student can best achieve at the level of his or her ability. If general math students were placed in the same classes as AP students, they would quickly fall behind. You could also expect to see low self-esteem and, very possibly, behavior problems follow as surely as night the day.

My son Bryce, identified with autism at age 4, was assigned to an adapted PE class taught by an adapted PE teacher when he entered kindergarten. I had never heard of "adapted PE."

## Exceptional Children

The teacher, Sarah, explained her job was to modify curriculum and equipment so Bryce could participate with his peers in general PE.

It didn't take long before I recognized that the principles she applied to facilitating his gross motor and social development applied to the whole constellation of learning situations as well—cognitive, social, sensory, motor, and emotional. Over the years, I saw Bryce achieve things that at one time had seemed so far out of reach. With Sarah's help and encouragement, he became an enthusiastic bike rider, a competitive swimmer, a Little Leaguer, and a track and field athlete. Every one of these achievements was accompanied by marked increases in cognitive achievement, most strikingly in reading and math.

It was some years before I got around to actually sticking a tape recorder in front of Sarah and asking her exactly how she did it. Her response surprised me. She talked for an hour, and although she is a PE teacher, very little of what she said was about physical ability or motor skills. "Every kid I've ever worked with," she told me, "has an innate sense of whether the adults in their life believe they 'can do it.'"


With that belief, amazing things are possible. Without it, we're back at "Why try?"

With any kind of learning, Sarah's simple formula works. It is this: Repetition breeds familiarity. Familiarity breeds confidence. Confidence brings belief. Belief brings action.

Ability, disability, or different ability—it is truly only part of the picture. The seeds of a child's success rest in you. Here are the six most important things you can do for your child, student, client, or patient:

1. Believe she "can do it." Really believe.
2. Actively seek out and place him in situations where he will experience success. Also, look for opportunities where he can lead (organizing the art show or reading a favorite book to the kindergarten). To believe is one thing—to act on the belief makes it happen.
3. If you are a parent, involve yourself. "Don't just pass your kid off to somebody 45 minutes three times a week," Sarah says. Play with her, take her places, read with and to her. Watch how she does things, try to see how she learns and where she needs help. Work out how you can break down challenging tasks into smaller pieces for her.
4. Involve family, friends, people at school—all of his world as it surrounds him. The more reinforcement a child has, the more he'll progress and the more he will let others in. Bryce was surprised, then delighted, when his teachers attended his swim meets and his community theatre performances. Two of his friends joined his baseball team after hearing about it from us.
5. Siblings play a very important role in this. Siblings have much to learn from each other. Allow and encourage them to play together and participate together in whatever manner seems appropriate to their current age and stage of childhood. My sons will always have fond memo-

ries of their years together on swim team. Bryce was proud of Connor's being the team captain, and Connor was even more proud of Bryce earning the team's Most Improved Award. Having a shared history of good times together helps buffer the inevitable sibling squalls that seem to rage with greater intensity when there's a special needs child in the family.

6. Allow your child to be who she is—which may not be what you expected. It bears repeating: Where the expectation is too high, it can turn the child off completely to the very things you desire for her. Where the expectation is too low, gifts and talents go undiscovered.
7. Throw out any growth or expectation lists or charts you get from pediatricians, books, or websites. They are irrelevant to your individual child. Every child, regardless of ability or disability, is going to grow and develop at his own pace. "It's not about doing it in any specific order or in any specific way." Sarah says. "Children will flourish if they are nurtured and if their way of doing things is celebrated." 

*Ellen Notbohm is author of Ten Things Every Child with Autism Wishes You Knew and coauthor of the award-winning 1001 Great Ideas for Teaching and Raising Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders. Comments and requests for reprint permission are welcome at [ellen@thirdvariation.com](mailto:ellen@thirdvariation.com).*

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Butler County (Ohio) Children Services is accepting applications for this department head level position. The successful candidate will manage traditional investigative units, a specialized unit dedicated to the most severe referrals, and a seven-day-per-week screening operation. This position requires strong management skills, knowledge of best practice investigative and assessment skills, intake policy development, and the ability to work within a team-based environment. Positive interaction with community partners and participation in statewide initiatives are critical to this position.

Butler County Children Services is a child protective agency that offers a cutting-edge and innovative organizational structure. The agency is located in Hamilton, Ohio, which is midway between Cincinnati and Dayton. The region offers top-ranked school systems, cultural centers, outstanding universities, and professional sports. The Executive Director is Jann Heffner, who brings a national experience to this county-based organization.

A Master's Degree in Social Work or related field, and a minimum of five years experience in a management position within a social services setting are required. Highest preference will be given to the licensed candidate. A strong work ethic and passion for working with kids and families are essential. A very competitive wage is dependent upon education and experience. A comprehensive benefit package includes the state retirement program. Please send resume to BCCSB, Human Resources Director, 300 N. Fair Avenue, Hamilton OH 45011; or fax to 513-887-4260.

**For more information, please call 513/785-5902.**

By Manka Ngwa-Suh

# Facility Facelifts



**B**eanbag chairs, a jungle mural, a juice bar, video cameras, and televisions—sounds like a lounge from the 1970s or a movie set, not a working courthouse. Add lawyers who are still in high school and dogs in the hallways, and this courthouse becomes even more unusual.

Each of these elements, in fact, represents measures to better accommodate the children and youth who pass through the court system each year, whether they are testifying, having decisions made about their futures in foster care, or waiting for adults who are conducting their own court business.

Participating in court proceedings is daunting for many people. Just walking through metal detectors and navigating crowded courthouse hallways and courtrooms can be intimidating. Then there's the process of answering a multitude of questions and trying to understand obscure legal language while testifying before judges, lawyers, and an audience of strangers.

Imagine a child in this situation. What's intimidating for an adult can be even more so for a child. Being asked, in some cases, to speak to strangers about traumatizing events while sitting in furniture clearly not made for their proportions, or

in a hallway bustling with activity, can be awkward and unsettling. Many times, children have to wait a long time for their cases to be called—in some facilities, in close proximity with their alleged abusers, adding to an already uncomfortable environment. Once children enter the courtroom, they're not always prepared for the situation, including not knowing who the people in the room are, where they're supposed to sit, and what they're supposed to do.

Unfortunately, this is a common situation in courts nationwide. "Appearing before a judge can be stressful for anyone, at any age, particularly children who may not understand the process fully," says social worker Nancy McFall Jean, Senior Policy Associate for Children and Families at the National Association of Social Workers (NASW). "Training judges and attorneys in child development, cultural competency, and other key concepts in child welfare will help make the process better for children."

## Scaling Down

Many courts have already begun addressing the issue. Some are using technology to make the court process less stressful for



The Kids' Korner at Lake County Courthouse in Waukegan, Illinois.

children who are testifying, whereas others are working to familiarize young people with the workings of the court and provide a safer, more entertaining environment.

As part of the renovation and preservation campaign for its historic courthouse, Bexar County, Texas, decided to overhaul the separate courts dedicated to handling child abuse and neglect cases, outfitting them with the latest video conferencing equipment and touch-screen control panels. Leading the cause was Tracy Wolff, President of the Hidalgo Foundation of Bexar County and the wife of a Bexar County judge. Wolff took up the challenge to raise \$5 million for the Bexar County courthouse renovation project, including \$1 million to renovate the children's courts.

"It's been scaled down for a child," Hidalgo Foundation Director Leslie Cole describes one of the newly designed courtrooms for children's cases. "Everything is smaller, more intimate. There's a lot of interactive technology."

The new technology includes touchscreen computers on each of the lawyers' tables so participants in proceedings can highlight, circle, or annotate information contained in testimony or depositions. The court also features a television kids can watch to relax, and a computer station where they can do homework.

Not only did Bexar County make the changes with children in mind, it made them with their input, asking children already familiar with courtroom settings what made them feel most uncomfortable about attending court hearings. "It wasn't the judge, it wasn't the people, it wasn't the attorneys," Cole recalls. It was the court reporter sitting at a table, staring directly at them.

As a result of the children's feedback, the court reporter for child abuse and neglect cases works at a desk angled away from where children sit to testify. Other amenities, such as a juice bar in the waiting room and the design and placement of the furniture, were all chosen to accommodate children, including chairs that can have their height adjusted. Overall, the modifications cost more than \$4 million.

## Special Spaces

Sometimes there aren't enough funds to do an elaborate overhaul of an entire building, even though it might be needed, and changes

have to be adapted on a smaller scale. Courts in Hawaii, Illinois, and Maryland have designated special places within their facilities expressly for children.

Since 1994, the Lake County Courthouse in Waukegan, Illinois, has operated Kids' Korner, a colorful, inviting space for children visiting the court. Kids' Korner Coordinator Rosanne Sherwood says it is a clean, secure environment—a departure for some children who have chaotic home lives. Blue beanbag chairs, a colorful park mural, and a play kitchen "give them a fun, safe place...to let them be kids," Sherwood says.

Court filing fees provide the funding for Kids' Korner staff and allow them to care for up to nine children at a time. As part of a Give-A-Book Project, each child who visits Kids' Korner receives a book when they leave, and parents are encouraged to read it with their children. Local scout troops have donated books, and older residents have volunteered their time to read to the children. Volunteers and those who donate goods are able to tour the waiting room and courthouse to see where their donations are going. In this give-and-take environment, Sherwood says, "everybody wins."

The Howard County Circuit Court in Maryland has created a similar haven for its youngest patrons. A jungle-themed children's waiting room, with soft yellow walls and hand-painted animals interspersed among lush, green plant life is a scene from a child's picture book. An inscription on the mural explains the artist was inspired by images from *The Great Kapok Tree*, one of the many books tucked into a wicker table in the room.

Financed by a federal Children's Justice Act grant, the waiting room provides a peaceful place for parents to wait with their children among spotted cats and a family of frogs, just some of the animals depicted in the murals. For entertainment, the kids can read books or watch movies.

The children also receive a 30-page activity book if they want to learn more about the court process. *What's Happening in Court: An Activity Book for Children Who Are Going to Court* features games and activities for children with a range of abilities to inform them about court life and make them feel more comfortable and connected. Originally developed for California, the book has been adapted by Howard County court staff for their own use.

Another educational tool for the children is a video in which a judge guides a group of children of various ages, as well as the Baltimore Orioles team mascot, around the courthouse, explaining who staff members are and how the court process works. The video emphasizes the importance of speaking loudly while telling the truth and being oneself.

On display outside the room are educational pamphlets for parents in several languages on such topics as preventing child abuse, foster parenting, and how to communicate with children.

Similar to these efforts in Illinois and Maryland, the Hawaii Children's Justice Centers are examples of how judicial and legal organizations work together to establish collections of resources in a central location. Established under the Hawaii Judiciary by a 1986 statute, the justice centers include a child-friendly area complete with stuffed animals, books, and a video of *Finding Nemo*.

Although this area's primary focus is to give children the opportunity to relax and take their minds off why they are in court, the

centers “help give children access to the judicial system,” says Marianne Okamura, Program Director for the Oahu branch of the Children’s Justice Centers. At the centers, medical officials, social workers, victim support staff, police officers, and others have a single safe place where they can interview children and discuss matters with each other, thereby reducing the number of interviews children have to undergo. Interviews can be videotaped at the centers to eliminate repetitive questioning by different agencies.

## Peers Helping Their Peers

Not only are efforts under way to better accommodate the needs of young children who encounter the legal system, but court officials and others are also beginning to pay attention to the needs of teenagers facing the court system on criminal charges. In 2003, 1.7 million children under age 18 were arrested, and a 2001 census of juvenile offenders showed 104,413 children in juvenile correction facilities, according to data compiled by CWLA.

Autauga County, Alabama, has created a program of teens judging their peers. Juveniles charged with minor crimes can have their cases go before a teen court run by Peers Are Staying Straight: The NOBLE Idea Program (PASS), a local chapter of a larger organization established in honor of an Autauga County high school student killed in an alcohol-related accident in 1988. Under the program, peers serve as jurors, attorneys, clerks, and bailiffs. The only adult involved in the courtroom is the judge.

The PASS teen court handles about 40 misdemeanor cases a year that would otherwise be processed through the main juvenile court, thus easing staff workload. After hearing testimony, explains PASS Director Martha Ellis, teen jurors deliberate and decide on an appropriate sentence, ranging from an apology to ordering counseling or classes related to the offender’s crime. According to Ellis, the recidivism rate for juvenile offenders in the program is only 17%.

Young offenders aren’t the only ones who benefit from PASS, Ellis says. “A piece of this program that’s phenomenal [but] we don’t always measure [is] the impact it has on the volunteer students. They’re connected with leaders in the community, such as the attorneys and adult volunteers, and they have a place to connect with students from all the schools in our county—public, private, home school. It allows them to grow and mature in their ability to speak. And they have to sign a pledge that they will remain alcohol-, tobacco-, and drug-free. To watch them grow and learn to be assertive and speak out in court and argue a case is really quite phenomenal.”

## Comfort from Canines

At least one courthouse in Washington State has discovered that animals can be of great comfort to the kids who walk through its doors.

At the request of King County (Seattle) court personnel, Canine Companions for Independence (CCI), a nonprofit organization based in California, has placed one of its trained dogs in the courthouse to provide a more comforting environment for children and youth attending court. “This was an unusual request for us, but it fits within our mission statement,” says CCI Instructor Amy McPherson.

CCI placed a Labrador/Golden Retriever mixed breed named Ellie in the court facility, where she walks the halls with her han-



*In King County, Washington, a trained companion dog provides traumatized children a stabilizing influence in the courthouse.*

dlar, never asking anything of the kids, simply being there when they need someone. McPherson acknowledges CCI’s belief in the “ability of the dogs to minimize trauma.”

Matching dogs with people or facilities is not a matter of which dog has the best skills or most knowledge. “All of our dogs are taught the same skills,” McPherson says. CCI workers noticed Ellie’s calm temperament and thought she would be a stabilizing resource for the kids in an otherwise hectic atmosphere. “She had a tenderness to her,” McPherson explains. “She was comfortable with people going through emotions and a busy environment.”

## Spreading the Trend

Although CCI hasn’t received additional requests for its dogs to be placed in courthouse facilities to “help kids in crises,” McPherson says more placements are possible as a result of the success in Washington.

In Bexar County, Texas, the Hidalgo Foundation has received positive comments and praise from children’s families, attorneys, judges, and child protective service workers since the newly renovated child abuse and neglect courts were reopened in January 2005, says Hidalgo’s Cole.

As for the children’s impressions, “The ones who get to spend some time in the children’s waiting room are very appreciative of what’s been done for them,” Cole says. “Obviously, a child is not there for a good reason, and it’s a very hard situation, but I do think there’s a sense of comfort and security that lends itself to being well-received by the child.”

In Hawaii, the modifications made to the Children’s Justice Centers with the needs of the children in mind have resulted in organizational coordination that offers “a better quality of work for everyone, including the kids,” Program Director Okamura says.

Although many courts are making modifications and establishing programs to better serve children, NASW’s McFall Jean points out, “We continue to advocate for greater coordination and communication between the courts and social services, as well as increased community resources.”

*Mankaa Ngwa-Suh is a Contributing Editor to Children’s Voice.*



CWLA President/CEO Shay Bilchik meets the paparazzi on the red carpet in Las Vegas.

## CWLA and Hollywood Team Up for Hurricane Relief

CWLA hobnobbed with the stars in Las Vegas October 15 to raise funds for child welfare agencies directly affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Lance Bass, Jessica Beal, Ashton Kutcher, and Demi Moore were just a few of the celebrities who walked the red carpet to participate in a celebrity auction at the Empire Ballroom benefiting CWLA and two other charity organizations.

The event was part of uBid for Hurricane Relief, a fundraising effort organized by online auction website uBid.com with Lance Bass, AJ Discala, and Pantera Sarah Productions. During the live auction and two-week online auction on uBid.com, participants bid on an eclectic assortment of items, including outings with celebrities and guest appearances on TV shows.

In Las Vegas, CWLA staff were able to speak directly with celebrities about the needs for children and families. President and CEO Shay Bilchik addressed the audience, speaking about CWLA's work around the hurricanes and more broadly about serving children, youth, and families.

"It was wonderful exposure for the League, our members, and the issues we care about," Bilchik says. "It will also provide a great opportunity for follow up with those in attendance in pursuing ways they may be able to support our work."

The live auction, conducted by Christies Auction House, included a golf outing with Brett Favre that went for \$15,000; snowboarding with Justin Timberlake, which sold for \$30,000; and a 1950s Chevy used in a movie and rehabbed with all the conveniences of today's modern cars, which went for \$60,000. Singers Macy Gray and Marc Broussard, a Louisiana native, also performed during the celebrity event.

The auction received wide coverage by the Hollywood press and broadcast media and was the lead story on both *Entertainment Tonight* and *Access Hollywood*.

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## THE LINK

CHILD WELFARE LEADER OF AMERICA

CONNECTING JUVENILE JUSTICE AND CHILD WELFARE

### The Link

From CWLA's Juvenile Justice Division, this quarterly newsletter explores the link between involvement in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. Available as a downloadable PDF file.\* Receive e-mail alerts when the newest issue is available on the CWLA website! Sign up at [www.cwla.org/programs/juvenilejustice/jjdnewsletter.htm](http://www.cwla.org/programs/juvenilejustice/jjdnewsletter.htm).

\*Requires Adobe Acrobat Reader.





PHOTO COURTESY OF THE GIVING BACK FUND

## NBA Star Makes a Commitment to CWLA

CWLA is participating in a new program by the Giving Back Fund called *Be a Hero in the Eyes of a Child*. The program pairs philanthropic athletes and entertainers with a select group of leading national children's charities, including CWLA and Big Brothers Big Sisters of America.

Celebrities will serve as Youth Ambassadors to CWLA and other charities to raise awareness about and funding for children's issues. The ambassadors will make meaningful financial contributions before encouraging others to give.

NBA Star Jalen Rose (pictured left) has already committed to serve as a Youth Ambassador for CWLA. Last fall, he made a \$25,000 donation toward CWLA's efforts to help children devastated by Hurricane Katrina. "Although I've never experienced a hurricane, I feel blessed to be in a position where I can help the survivors, especially the kids who were devastated by this tragedy," Rose says.

## After the Storm, CWLA Answers Members' Calls for Help

Serving the needs of vulnerable children and their families is not an easy job. Throw a hurricane into the picture, and the job becomes even tougher.

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita dealt a severe blow to the work of CWLA member agencies in Louisiana and Mississippi last September. The storm disrupted essential services for children and left them traumatized. Many staff lost their homes, relocated during the evacuation, and could not return to work immediately. Wind, rain, and floods battered the offices, group homes, and shelters serving these children and staff, causing costly damage.

"Systems of care are already stretched and struggling to meet the needs of vulnerable children and their families," Keith Liederman, CEO of Kingsley House in New Orleans, told CWLA last fall. "The aftermath of hurricanes Katrina and Rita could easily overwhelm these already challenged safety nets."

CWLA immediately stepped in to provide support not only to agencies directly affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, but also to dozens of agencies in surrounding states that have lent assistance. During the storm's immediate aftermath, CWLA national and regional staff facilitated communication among public and private members to quickly identify needs and access offers of support.

Responding to the enormity of the situation, CWLA established three funds to funnel support directly to these agencies:

- CWLA's Katrina Kids Fund will help the children and families from the regions affected by Hurricane Katrina by supporting certified CWLA member agencies in their efforts to respond to the most urgent needs and as they rebuild their capacity to meet the long-term recovery needs of children and families in the affected areas. To contribute to the Katrina Kids Fund, visit <https://www.cwla.org/sec/donate/donateKATRINA.htm>.
- Thanks to generous support from the Freddie Mac Foundation, the Katrina Fund for Foster Children is being conducted in partnership with CWLA's Katrina Kids Fund to



provide necessary services and supports for children in foster care recovering from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The fund will provide both immediate disaster relief, as well as longer-term recovery needs for community-based agencies.

- Last October, the online auction site uBid.com hosted the largest celebrity auction to date to benefit hurricane victims. uBid kicked off the online auction with a live event in Las Vegas on October 15. (Read more about this event, above left.) One hundred percent of the proceeds from the uBid for Hurricane Relief fund will be split evenly between CWLA, the Brett Favre Fourward Mississippi Relief Fund, and RockWorks (in association with Ashton Kutcher).

To learn more about these funds, go to [www.cwla.org/katrina/fundingcriteria.htm](http://www.cwla.org/katrina/fundingcriteria.htm).

CWLA members are already beginning to use the funds for temporary housing while rebuilding their facilities, to secure and train new employees, to provide counseling for post-traumatic stress, and to reunite families who became separated during the storms.

"Thankfully, in this time of extreme hardship, there is also hope," says CWLA President and CEO Shay Bilchik. "We have heard from many of our 800 member agencies with an outpouring of offers of support for their colleagues and the children and families they serve."

In addition to fundraising, CWLA dedicated an information portal on its website ([www.cwla.org/katrina](http://www.cwla.org/katrina)) to the Katrina relief efforts. Users can make donations directly on the site and access an extensive list of resource links.

# Technology Growth in Youth-Serving Organizations



**It's a bumpy road, but the journey will make you stronger.**

By Alexandra Krasne

**A**ny youth-serving nonprofit that attempts to grow so that it can serve more young people should be prepared for a roller coaster ride that at times might lead management to question why they started down this path.” So says a recent Bridgespan ([www.bridgespangroup.org](http://www.bridgespangroup.org)) study of 20 youth-serving organizations. The study concludes that although the road may be bumpy, organizations willing to navigate the path of growth will emerge stronger and better equipped to achieve their missions.

To most people's dismay, technology doesn't just spring forth and start working. For effective technology growth, an organization needs a clear vision of its goals, an understanding of its constituents, and, most importantly, a technology plan.

A technology plan provides a roadmap for growth, but unless that plan is represented in your organization's budget, it doesn't stand a chance of being implemented. A budget that includes technology also helps to codify buy-in from your organization's executive management and your board.

Smooth growth means having all the pieces in place. It means your desktops run properly, your servers don't crash, and your databases don't spit out cryptic error messages. But getting to that point is another matter entirely.

Now that you're sufficiently scared, know that with proper planning, budgeting, and a little creativity, your organization can come out of the growth process stronger and relatively unscathed.

## Budgeting for Growth

Technology growth typically happens in three different stages: *tactical*, *mid-term*, and *long-term*. What's involved in each stage varies depending on your budget, staff, and organization size.

*Tactical planning* is designed to meet immediate organizational needs and responds to direct problems you're experiencing.<sup>1</sup> *Mid-term planning* spans around 18 months of growth. *Long-term planning* includes the overall long-term vision of your organization and the technology you'll need to support that.<sup>2</sup>

Although it's impossible to know which operating system, productivity software, and database or online tools you'll be using in five years, it is possible to invest in a strong infrastructure, training, systems, and other set-ups that will allow you to position yourself to take advantage of what will be available to you later. Typically, all of this involves robust documentation and training—items frequently left out of nonprofit technology budgets.

By developing your technology plan and breaking down your technology needs into bite-sized pieces, you can move forward with the fluidity of a ballerina instead of lumbering along like a hippo with indigestion.

To start your planning process, decide which technology components you want to upgrade, identify ways to improve programs, set goals and costs, and create a grand vision for technology use in your organization. If you have long-term funding, plan to build out as far as your funding will stretch, and keep a longer timeline in mind.

Most nonprofits don't have the money to fund their own growth, but fundraising software can help keep track of donations and manage your relationship with funders.<sup>3</sup> To help map your growth, TechSoup offers an assortment of Technology Planning worksheets as well as articles on the subject at [www.techsoup.org/howto/worksheets/techplan/index.cfm](http://www.techsoup.org/howto/worksheets/techplan/index.cfm).

NPower ([www.npower.org](http://www.npower.org)), a national network of independent local nonprofits that provide technology assistance to other nonprofits, offers technology-planning resources on its TechAtlas site as well ([www.techatlas.org/tools](http://www.techatlas.org/tools)).

## Hardware Costs

Whether your organization has two employees or 200, dedicate your first steps to fixing and replacing existing computers and swapping out old parts that don't work with new ones that do. Whether your IT department is in-house or consists of paid consultants, budget staff time for upgrades and maintenance, or budget the cost of an outside consultant to do the work.

Typically, Windows desktop systems need to be replaced every three years. Many computer manufacturers sell entry-level Windows PCs for as little as \$300–\$400, not including a monitor. Apple sells inexpensive, all-in-one machines that include a monitor starting at \$500. On the other end of the spectrum, Apple's more advanced workstations include a tower and flat-panel monitor and cost about \$2,000; these machines are geared more for multimedia applications. Remember, too, that depending on your needs, you may be able to find recycled hardware that works for some situations. (See *TechSoup's Recycling and Reuse section at [www.techsoup.org/products/recycle/index.cfm?cg=nav&sg=recycled](http://www.techsoup.org/products/recycle/index.cfm?cg=nav&sg=recycled)*.)

Whether you're a Mac or a PC shop, you'll need to budget for regular upgrades and maintenance.<sup>4</sup> For each workstation, set aside either 20% of its cost for maintenance and repairs annually, or set a total amount—say \$1,000—over a system's lifetime.

Another thing to remember when purchasing new systems is that your software needs will dictate your hardware requirements. If all you're doing is word processing, you can purchase inexpensive machines and use the same systems for five or six years. If you regularly use your computers for video editing, Photoshop, database work, or other memory-intensive tasks, you'll need more memory, a faster processor, and a powerful graphics card.

## Software, Media, and Web-Related Expenses

Software costs can creep up on you if you're not careful. You'll need to budget for the cost of antivirus software (with subscriptions that let you download updates for the latest virus fixes), accounting software (at about \$200 per license), web-site and e-mail hosting (which starts around \$20–\$30 per month), an Internet connection (\$65 or so per month for DSL), domain name registration renewal (\$25–\$100 for the year), printer supplies (toner, ink jet cartridges, and so on), and back-up media (tapes, CDs, and DVD-rewritable discs).

Luckily, software discounts for nonprofits are common, and you can find great deals on the Web. TechSoup Stock ([www.techsoup.org/stock](http://www.techsoup.org/stock)) offers plenty of titles for small administrative fees. On the site, qualifying organizations can acquire an upgrade to Windows XP for an administrative fee of \$8, the Windows edition of *Office 2003* for \$19, or the *Office 2004* Mac version for \$20. Many other deals are available, too.

If you're looking for free software, OpenOffice ([www.openoffice.org](http://www.openoffice.org)) doesn't cost a thing to download. Another place to

look for free software is TechSoup's free downloads section ([www.techsoup.org/products/downloads.cfm](http://www.techsoup.org/products/downloads.cfm)).

More specific to youth-serving organizations is client management and outcomes tracking software, sometimes referred to as analytics. This software can go a long way toward managing information, but be prepared to set aside a good chunk of your budget for it. Small organizations can expect to spend \$10,000 to \$50,000 for basic packages—and that's without customization.<sup>5</sup>

The bottom line when it comes to software and hardware is to budget for what you can afford.

"Smaller organizations should focus on tools that are relatively inexpensive and easy to deploy within their organizations," says Simon Moloney, Director of Services at NPower New York ([www.npowerny.org](http://www.npowerny.org)). "Medium and larger organizations should think about more sophisticated applications that may merge a number of different functions or integrate with other systems or databases."

For medium to large organizations, the range of applications is much broader, as they're looking for solutions that will integrate with their operations and are flexible enough to be tweaked and configured to their needs. Moloney says organizations of this size should expect to spend between \$100,000 to \$200,000 for case management and client tracking software.

## Building Infrastructure

Consider your organization's plans for growth, and accommodate that in your technology planning and budgeting. Concentrate on providing a strong, supportive infrastructure. Without training, adequate equipment, and support, staff can't achieve their potential and meet their goals. Plan not only for today, but also for three years from now.

For instance, you could spend \$5,000 on a new network for 20 people, or install a network that supports 30 people and spend \$6,000. The marginal increase in initial cost is worthwhile, because it's easier to plan for growth than to proactively grow after you've already installed everything.

It's unwise, from an organizational perspective, to begin to work on intense back-office applications—such as databases for case management or fundraising—without a strong core infrastructure in place.

It's much better to build a reliable system that won't soon need to be replaced than to daisy-chain systems, creating an infrastructure by cobbling together a variety of small components. Look beyond sticker-shock to consider your organization's long-term costs rather than the immediate out-of-pocket expenses.

For complex programs such as databases, plan for regular improvement cycles, as your needs, partners, and funders will likely change over time.


## Budget Black Holes to Avoid

One common budget hole organizations fall into is budgeting staff time and training. Do you have a new content management system that you need to train your staff to use? Maybe you've just installed some new client management software, and staff members are scratching their heads as they try to

figure out how to input data. Whatever the case, be sure to build hours into your budget for staff training. For new systems, allot at least \$1,000 per person for training. You may want to budget more, though, depending on the complexity of your systems and software.

Another key element that's largely overlooked is the overall cost to the organization as it adopts a new solution. For example, factor in lost staff productivity, time rewriting procedures, and time in training. Small organizations can be more flexible about training, but be sure to take into account time to implement process changes. Medium to large organizations may need to spend more—up to two or three times the cost of the system. Any support services that are outside the scope of your IT department should be budgeted for as well.

## Making IT Happen

Navigating growth and arriving at your final destination doesn't have to be painful. An organization's growth can only be as strong as your plan for growth. With a little help and a lot of hard work, youth-serving organizations dedicated to growth can reach their goals—one step at a time. 

*Alexandra Krasne is Associate Editor of TechSoup.org. Additional information for this article was provided by Simon Moloney, Director of Services, NPower New York. Adapted by permission from an article originally published on TechSoup, August 19, 2005, at [www.techsoup.org/howto/articles/techplan/page2239.cfm](http://www.techsoup.org/howto/articles/techplan/page2239.cfm). As originally published, this article was supported by a grant from the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation. © 2005 CompuMentor. All Rights Reserved.*

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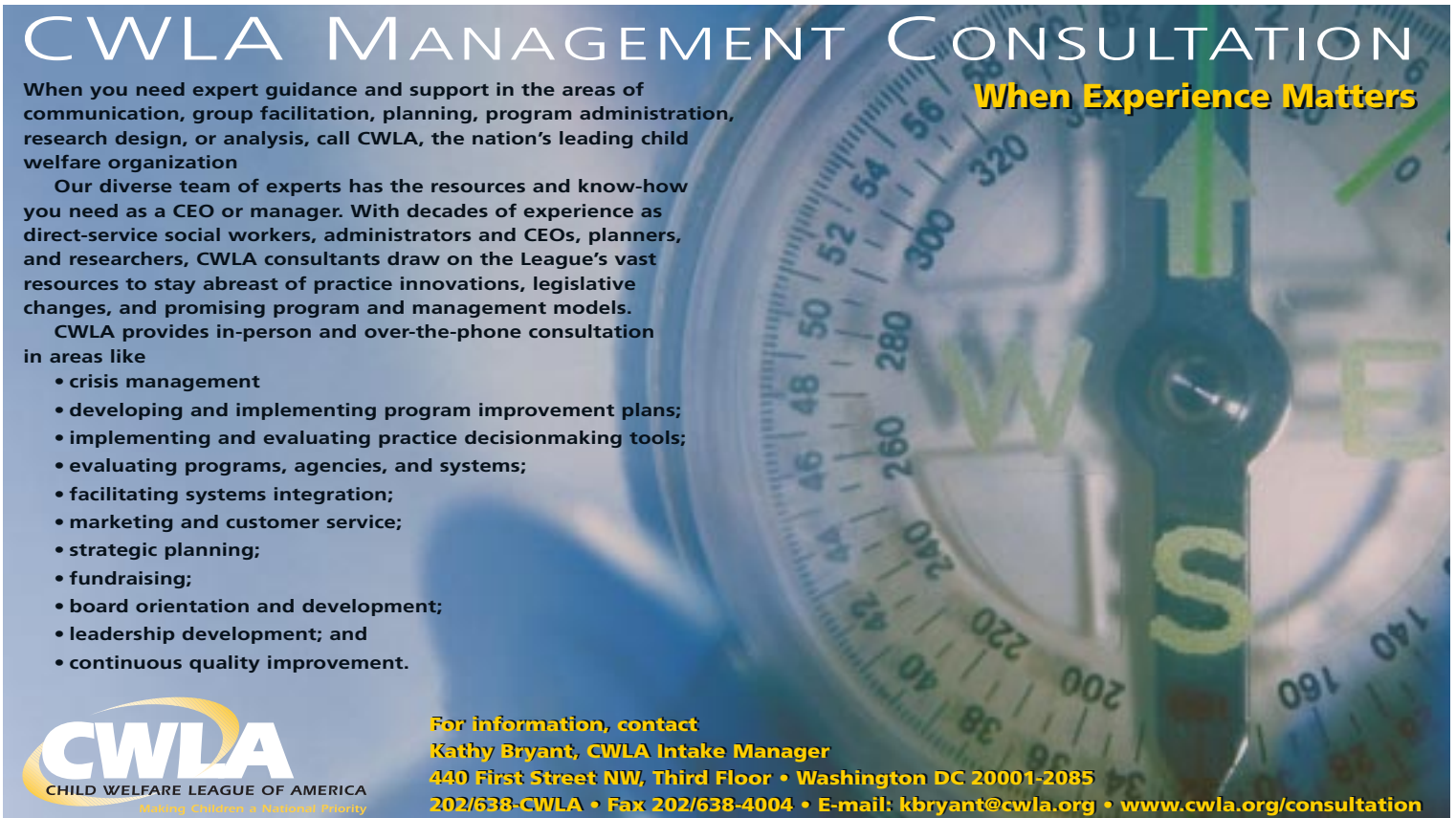
See the online resources referenced in this article:

1. For more details on addressing your immediate technology needs, read TechSoup's article, "Technology Triage," at [www.techsoup.org/howto/articles/techplan/page1335.cfm](http://www.techsoup.org/howto/articles/techplan/page1335.cfm).
2. Read more about the planning process in TechSoup's Technology Planning section at [www.techsoup.org/howto/articles/techplan/index.cfm](http://www.techsoup.org/howto/articles/techplan/index.cfm).
3. For more information on fundraising software, see "Donor Management Software" at [www.techsoup.org/howto/articles/databases/page2190.cfm](http://www.techsoup.org/howto/articles/databases/page2190.cfm).
4. To learn more about upgrading your IT equipment read "Upgrading Your Computer Components" at [www.techsoup.org/howto/articles/hardware/page1455.cfm](http://www.techsoup.org/howto/articles/hardware/page1455.cfm).
5. For more about "Client Management and Outcomes Tracking Databases," read the article online at [www.techsoup.org/howto/articles/databases/page2204.cfm](http://www.techsoup.org/howto/articles/databases/page2204.cfm).

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## Survey Finds State Definitions for Reunification Vary

Reunification with parents or primary caregivers is the goal for most children in foster care, but many children wait a long time before this happens. To address this concern on the national level, the federal government has developed an outcome measure for the how long it takes to reunify children and their caregivers, and a standard that states should meet as part of the Child and Family Services Reviews.

State child welfare agencies and others, however, have become concerned that methodological issues plague the federal measure, including a lack of definitional consistency among states' data. To address the issue, CWLA's National Working Group to Improve Child Welfare Data (NWG) implemented a survey to identify the variations and consistencies among states in their reporting of reunification data. State child welfare agency representatives were actively involved in developing the survey, and 41 states responded about their data reported as of October 2004.

The survey results indicate similarities and differences in states' reporting practices, and suggest areas that need further federal guidance and state practice considerations. For example, states showed considerable variation in reporting of children discharged to relatives and other caregivers from whom they were removed. Seventy one percent of the states include children discharged to legal guardians in the "reunification" category; 61% percent include relatives from whom the child was removed under "reunification," whereas 41.5% count these children as "living with other relatives."

The results also reveal that states don't share a common definition of discharge date. The discharge date marks the end of a child's placement in state care; it provides the length of time the

child was in foster care and, in most cases, the length of time until reunification with parents or other primary caregivers.

The survey found, for example:

- Half the states define the discharge date as the date legal custody is returned to parents.
- More than one-fifth use the date legal custody is returned, or the date six months after the child physically goes home if the child is home on a trial basis more than six months and the end date is not specified.
- One state reports the discharge date as six months from the date physical or legal custody of the child is returned, or the date the court relieves the department from responsibility for placement and care, whichever is earlier.
- One-fifth of the states report the discharge date as the date the child physically returns home to the parent or caregiver.

NWG released a bulletin last fall, *Defining Reunification for Consistent Performance Measurement*, highlighting the survey results and recommendations for improving the language used to discuss reunification. Among its recommendations: "Use of more specific descriptors, aligned with common definitions, may promote our ability to communicate, measure, and improve reunification outcomes."

In the bulletin, CWLA also recommends "that the [U.S.] Children Bureau convene an active advisory group, consisting primarily of state representatives, and including researchers and other child welfare professionals, to identify and implement modifications needed to support better outcome measurement."

The entire bulletin is on CWLA's National Data Analysis System website at <http://ndas.cwla.org>.

## "Army of Miracle Workers" Rallies Behind Kinship Care

Traveling from more than 40 states, hundreds of grandparents gathered on Capitol Hill last September for the GrandRally—a celebration of the work relative caregivers do for children and a push for Congress to increase support of policies and funding for extended family members who take care of children.

During the two-day event, grandparents and other relatives attended advocacy training and met with members of Congress. They also rallied on the lawn of the U.S. Capitol, wearing brightly colored T-shirts and hats and listening to musical performances and a variety of speakers, including child advocates, grandparents, children of grandparents, and legislators.

AARP, CWLA, the Children's Defense Fund, Generations United, and

Grandparents for Children's Rights organized the event.

"You really are an Army of miracle workers," Representative Jim McDermott (D-WA) told the crowd. Joining McDermott onstage were Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-NY) and Representatives Danny Davis (D-IL) and Thelma Drake (R-VA), all of whom expressed their support for pending legislation to benefit kinship caregivers.

McDermott, the ranking Democrat on the House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Resources, has introduced the Leave No Abused or Neglected Child Behind Act, which would expand Title IV-E funding for kinship placements. Davis has introduced the Guardianship Assistance

Promotion and Kinship Support Act, and Clinton is sponsoring the Kinship Caregiver Support Act. All would extend funding to kinship placements and provide other supports for kinship caregivers.

CWLA President and CEO Shay Bilchik, along with other child advocacy leaders, also rallied the crowd. "People like you need effective and timely support," Bilchik said. "Ask your Senators and Congressmen to act in your best interest and to support your families."

Read more about the GrandRally and the Kinship Caregiver Support Act from the Executive Directors of Generations United and Grandparents for Children's Rights in "Other Voices," on page 10.

## Mental Illness: Acquired Young, Diagnosed Late

Half of lifetime cases of mental illness begin by age 14, and despite effective treatments, there are long delays—sometimes decades—between the onset of symptoms and when people seek and receive treatment, according to research supported by the National Institute of Mental Health.

The National Comorbidity Survey Replication study, published last year in the *Archives of General Psychiatry*, also reveals that untreated mental disorders can lead to more-severe and difficult-to-treat illnesses, and to the development of co-occurring mental illnesses.

Unlike heart disease or most cancers, young people with mental disorders suffer disability when they are in the prime of their lives and normally most productive. For example, the study found that anxiety disorders often begin in late childhood, mood disorders in late adolescence, and substance abuse in the early 20s.

Pervasive delays in treatment tend to occur in nearly all mental disorders, according to the study. The median delay across disorders is nearly a decade; the longest delays are 20–23 years for social phobia and separation anxiety disorders, possibly due to the relatively early age of onset and fears of therapy that involve social interactions.

The study notes that delays in treatment can have many public health implications, including frequent, more-severe episodes and resistance to treatment. Moreover, untreated mental illnesses are associated with school failure, teenage childbearing, unstable employment, early marriage, and marital instability and violence.

Unfortunately, the researchers say, 45% of those with one mental disorder meet the criteria for two or more. And the study indicates the U.S. mental health care system is not keeping up with consumers' needs. Over a 12-month period, 60% of people with mental health disorders received no treatment.

The good news is that the proportion of people who reported 12-month use of mental health services is higher today, at 17%, compared with 13% a decade ago. People with mental or substance abuse disorders were more likely to get treatment from a primary care physician, nurse, or other general medical doctor (23%), or from a nonpsychiatrist mental health specialist (16%), such as a psychologist, social worker, or counselor, than from a psychiatrist (12%).

## Issue Brief Highlights Ups and Downs in Childhood Poverty

A recent issue brief from CWLA's National Data Analysis System (NDAS) outlines how the number of children under age 18 who are living in poverty has fluctuated widely since 1969, even though the overall poverty rate for the general population has remained fairly stable.

Two out of every five young children in the United States are at risk for living in poor or low-income families. According to the brief, *Child Poverty*, in 2003, 19.8% of children under age 6 were living in poverty, compared with 17.6% of children under 18 the same year. The worst year was 1992, when 25.7% of children under age 6 were in poverty. The best year was 1969, when 15.3% of children under 6 lived in poverty.

The issue brief also examines how children are more likely to live in impoverished homes when no male is present in the household. In 2003, 35.5% of female-headed households with children younger than 18 were in poverty, 41.7% of children in families headed by a single female lived below 200% of the poverty threshold. Also that year, 17.2% of children under 18 were living in low-income households.

Children who grow up in poverty have poorer health, nutrition, housing, and education outcomes and are more likely to remain in poverty as adults.

In 2002, households with incomes below the poverty line and female-headed households with children had much higher rates of food insecurity than the national average. In 2001, 7% of households with children had inadequate housing, compared with 9% in 1978, and 31% of very low-income renter households with children reported severe housing problems.

The issue brief is available on the NDAS website at <http://ndas.cwla.org>, under "Publications."

## Depression's Side Effects for Black Teens

A range of adverse health consequences may accompany depression in black adolescent females. Doctors need to be alert to the coexistence of depression and low self-esteem; emotional, physical, and verbal abuse; poor body image; and antisocial behaviors among these youth, according to data published in the July 2005 issue of *Pediatrics*.

The study that produced the data recruited 460 black female adolescents from high-risk neighborhoods in Birmingham, Alabama. Within this group, depressed adolescents were compared with peers who were not depressed regarding low self-esteem; emotional, physical, and verbal abuse; poor body image; and antisocial behavior.

Depressed adolescents were 5.3 times more likely to report low self-esteem than were nondepressed adolescents, 4.3 times more likely to report emotional abuse, 3.7 times more likely to report being physically abused, and almost 3 times as likely to report being verbally abused. Depressed adolescents were more than twice as likely to report poor body image and nearly twice as likely to report engaging in antisocial behaviors.

## Reading, Writing, and Computer Technology

The use of computers and the Internet by students is commonplace and begins early, according to an issue brief by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). In fact, even before kindergarten, most nursery school children use computers, and about one-quarter use the Internet.

The brief, *Rates of Computer and Internet Use by Children in Nursery School and Students in Kindergarten Through Twelfth Grade: 2003*, analyzes data gathered during the October 2003 Computer and Internet User Supplement to the Current Population Survey, which collected information from 29,075 children, from nursery school through 12th grade.

Overall, the survey found that 91% of students used computers, and 59% used the Internet. Broken down by age group, 67% of nursery school students used computers, and 23% used the Internet. Among kindergartners, 80% used computers, and 32% used the Internet. By high school, almost all students used computers (97%), and most used the Internet (80%).

Although most students are computer savvy, the data revealed that students from low-income families with limited education used computers and the Internet less—differences in computer use were as much as 13 percentage points, and differences in Internet use were as high as 36 percentage points between students from low-income families and other students.

Characteristics of students with lower computer and Internet use included being from families with annual incomes less than \$20,000, parents lacking a high school diploma, being black or Hispanic, and living in households where Spanish was the only language spoken.

The report can be downloaded from the NCES website at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2005/2005111.pdf>.

## It's Dinnertime...Where Is Your Child?

Research has shown links between frequent family dinners and positive teen outcomes. Teens who regularly eat with their families are less likely to get into fights, think about suicide, smoke, drink, and use drugs, and are more likely to delay sexual activity and do better academically. Are American families paying attention to these factors and gathering around the dinner table?

Child Trends, a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization dedicated to improving the lives of children, has found that in 2003, 42% of adolescents ages 12–17 ate a meal with their family six to seven days a week, 27% ate a meal as a family four to five days a week, and 31% ate meals with family three days a week or less.

Children ages 6–11 were more likely to sit down to family meals—56% ate a meal as a family six to seven days a week, 25% did so four to five days a week, and 20% three days a week or less.

In its report, *Family Meals*, Child Trends notes a number of factors affecting family mealtime:

- Foreign-born adolescents are more likely than their native-born peers with native-born parents to eat meals together six to seven times a week—62% versus 40%.
- Hispanic adolescents and children are more likely than both non-Hispanic whites and non-Hispanic blacks to eat meals together six or seven days a week.
- Of adolescents living in households at 100% of the poverty level, 55% ate meals six to seven days a week together, compared with 44% of those living at 100%–200% of the poverty level, and 37% of those living at 200% or more of the poverty level.

The report is available on the Child Trends DataBank website at [www.childtrendsdatabank.org/indicators/96FamilyMeals.cfm](http://www.childtrendsdatabank.org/indicators/96FamilyMeals.cfm).

## Future Implications for Girls Growing Up Poor

The link between childhood poverty and poor health in old age is well established. But a recent study by Duke University sociologists examines the issue further and finds that women with disadvantaged childhoods are more likely to have heart attacks in old age, but men who grow up under similar conditions are not.

Researchers examined specifically the risk of heart attack, because the link between childhood poverty and cardiovascular disease in later life is strong, and because heart attacks are so common. Heart attacks and cardiovascular disease have been the leading cause of death among American men and women since 1919.

Looking at data from the Health and Retirement study, a national study of nearly 10,000 people born between 1931 and 1941, researchers found that women who grew up in poor homes were 15% more likely to have had a heart attack in their 50s than were women who did not experience such disadvantages. The study found no such link for men.

Additionally, women who grew up without fathers were 12% more likely to have had a heart attack in their 50s; men who grew up in fatherless homes did not have an increased risk of heart attack.

# Friday, April 28 is National Children's Memorial Flag Day.

## THE CWLA CHILDREN'S MEMORIAL FLAG INITIATIVE

The centerpiece is simple. A red flag depicting blue, paper-doll-like figures of children holding hands. In the center, the white chalk outline of a missing child symbolizes the children lost to violence. Created by a 16-year-old student in Alameda County, California, and flown on the fourth Friday in April, the Children's Memorial Flag honors each lost child and raises public awareness about the continuing problem of violence against children.

Join the nearly 300 organizations, 101 cities, and all 50 states that support the Children's Memorial Flag Day campaign. Fly your flag on April 28. Or fly it all month long, and support CWLA's efforts to protect every child from harm.

Visit [www.cwla.org](http://www.cwla.org) for additional information.

## Show your support

with a flag, pin, bumper sticker, or magnet.

All proceeds from the sale of these items support CWLA's efforts to make children a national priority. Help make every day a healthy day for America's children.



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