

# Children's Trust Fund

Nurturing Children. Strengthening Families.

Supporting Communities.

## Annual Report 2008 - 2009

Working to Prevent Child Abuse and Neglect

*Before it Happens.*

July 2009

Pursuant to CGS Sec. 17a-50(d).

### Depression Improvement Study Started

*"They know what they are feeling. They know what they are struggling with. But they have no idea that it's called something and that something can be done about it."*

#### *– Observation from home visitor on depression in first-time mothers*

Depression is a devastating disease. When the person suffering from depression is an unmarried 16-year-old girl with a baby, the effects can be life-altering for both mother and child.

That's why the Connecticut Children's Trust Fund is administering a federally funded clinical study across the state that treats new mothers identified as having major depression. The two-year Depression Improvement Study is being conducted through the Trust Fund's Nurturing Families Network, the agency's well-established home visiting program for first-time families. In addition to caring for a new baby, the families in the home visiting program face many challenges including single parenting, limited family support, and poverty.

Common symptoms of depression include feelings of sadness, low energy, changes in appetite, sleep problems, crying, memory problems and irritability.

Almost 19 million Americans suffer from depression yearly and women are twice as likely as men to experience depression, according to the American Psychological Association.

Depressed mothers often don't have the energy to be involved parents; they feel overwhelmed and often don't know where to turn for help or support. Children of depressed mothers are at greater risk of having delays in learning, behavior problems, and becoming depressed themselves.

"Our initial research in Hartford shows that almost 50 percent of the mothers in the home visiting program have symptoms of depression when they enroll," said Karen Foley-Schain, executive director of the Connecticut Children's Trust Fund.



Children's Trust Fund

The Connecticut Children's Trust Fund is the state's lead agency for the prevention of child abuse and neglect. The Trust Fund invests in several major initiatives that help ensure the positive growth and development of children by helping to support and strengthen families – especially those for whom the risk of abuse and neglect is very real. Trust Fund programs reach more than 10,000 families every year.

Given the state budget crisis, we have condensed this annual report to use less paper – while still reporting the agency's major initiatives and highlights for the year.

For a PDF version of our annual report – and more information on our agency, its programs and program evaluations -- please visit our website at [www.CT.gov/ctf](http://www.CT.gov/ctf)

**Children's Trust Fund**  
An agency of the State of Connecticut

**410 Capitol Avenue, 3<sup>rd</sup> floor**  
**Hartford, CT 06106**

**860-418-8765**

The Depression Improvement Study – being conducted in collaboration with the University of Connecticut Health Center, the Cincinnati Children’s Medical Center, and the University of Hartford Center for Social Research – will involve 100 volunteers in the Nurturing Families Network program diagnosed with major depression.

The two-year study is modeled after a clinical trial done in Cincinnati by Dr. Frank Putnam, a child psychiatrist.

Studies have shown that children of depressed mothers, particularly boys, have a significant loss of IQ points, much like lead paint when it is ingested by children, Dr. Putnam said.

“Look at the millions of dollars we spend on lead abatement,” he said. “If it's the same outcome, why are we spending so much more on one and not the other?”

As part of the study, 50 women in Connecticut will receive in-home cognitive behavioral therapy from a licensed therapist in addition to regular home visits through the Nurturing Families Network. Cognitive behavioral therapy – also known as “talk” therapy – is based on the idea that *thoughts* cause feelings and behaviors. The therapy has been shown to be effective by teaching people to change the way they think, feel, and act. Cognitive behavioral therapy has been shown to have a lasting effect that prevents subsequent onset or return of symptoms. Studies by Putnam have also shown that cognitive therapy is more effective than antidepressants in serving this population.

The other 50 women – a “control group” – will continue to receive home visits without therapy. Home visitors will refer them to treatment currently available in the community.

Putnam said the original study in Cincinnati found that the women who received in-home cognitive behavioral therapy reported much less depression during the second year of the study than those who did not receive therapy.

“What we’re showing is that basically somewhere better than 70 percent of the people in therapy improved relative to about 12 percent of our control subjects,” he said.

“We hope to replicate the results of the Cincinnati study,” said Foley-Schain.

If Connecticut’s findings are similar, Foley-Schain said she would seek Medicaid funding for in-home therapy for depression – something not covered now by the federal program.

## **New Fatherhood Pilot Program**

What about the fathers?

For the most part, prevention services have targeted high-risk first-time mothers. But fathers, and non-related men significant in the lives of children, play a huge role in child development.

That’s the reason the Connecticut Children’s Trust Fund enhanced its services for men this year with a new program to provide home visiting and parenting groups. The effort – among the first in the nation – is designed to provide home visiting to biological fathers who do and don’t live in the same household as their children as well as unrelated men who come into the life of a child.

The catalyst for the statewide program was considerable research that shows the negative effects of fatherless households. Further evidence suggests that there is a higher risk of physical abuse of children by unmarried men and non-biological fathers – adoptive fathers or step-parents. Research has also documented the positive impact of nurturing father-child relationships.

The male involvement program is administered through the Trust Fund’s Nurturing Families Network. Most of its participants are young single mothers. While 70 percent of the fathers are involved at the time of the child's birth, the

involvement of the fathers usually tapers off over time. Only about 30 percent of the fathers live in the same household with their children.

A recent review of father involvement in the Nurturing Families Network home visiting program by the University of Hartford Center for Social Research found that while the program had positive – even transformative – effects on some of the fathers involved, there were still a number of obstacles to getting men into the program.

Responding to report findings – which were based on more than 70 interviews with men – the Trust Fund started a pilot program to have male home visitors work with men on their specific needs. These home visitors – four men have been hired and four more will be hired – have flexible hours so they can meet with fathers after work hours if necessary.

“We’ve taken steps to make home visiting more tailored to the needs of fathers and men,” said Karen Foley-Schain.

As part of the pilot program, researchers at the University of Hartford will interview up to 50 men over a three-year period to learn about their specific needs and experiences as fathers.

In addition to the new program, for the past year the Nurturing Families Network has provided 26 parenting groups just for fathers. And, for the past decade, the Trust Fund has offered parenting programs for fathers at the Osborn Correctional Institution in Somers and at Madonna Place in Norwich.

## **Family School Connection Program Expands**

The Family School Connection program – an intensive home visiting program that helps parents with children experiencing behavioral or academic problems who are excessively tardy or truant from school – has expanded from one elementary school in Hartford to four others across the state.

Launched by the Children’s Trust Fund and the Junior League of Greater Hartford, the program began as a pilot at Ramon E. Betances School in Hartford. Because of the pilot program's success, in February it was expanded to elementary schools in Middletown, New Haven, Windham and Norwich. The schools are: Bielefield School in Middletown, Fair Haven School in New Haven, Wequonnoc School in Taftville, a section of Norwich, and W.B. Sweeney School in Willimantic.

School principals, social workers, psychologists, teachers, resource officers and family resource aides work together to identify children in need of the program. Through home visits, they encourage parents to become involved in their child’s schooling and help them to improve their relationship with their child.

An evaluation of the pilot program found that:

- The participants had healthier parenting attitudes and experienced less parenting stress.
- The participants were more accepting and had more realistic expectations of their children.
- The participants were more involved in their children’s academic lives.

## **“The Stranger You Know” Program Presented at the National Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect**

*“Stranger danger is not the main threat to your child. It’s the stranger you know.”*

*– former police commander Robert Kenary in a presentation on “The Stranger You Know”*

Stranger danger.

Every parent instructs their children to stay away from strangers who might molest them and for years prevention programs have been based on teaching children about stranger danger.

But several years ago, a Children's Trust Fund study conducted in Connecticut found that people who sexually abuse children are almost never strangers. In fact, in more than 95 percent of the cases, the child knows the suspect well or is related to him.

Those findings shattered the myth that most sexual abuse against children is done by strangers and spurred the Children's Trust Fund to create a new prevention program: "The Stranger You Know."

The Connecticut program, which was started by the Trust Fund in 2006, was selected for presentation at the 2009 National Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect, held in Atlanta, Ga., in March.

The program places the responsibility on adults to be vigilant about people they know – including family members – to prevent sexual abuse before it occurs.

Former police commander Robert Kenary has given presentations on "The Stranger You Know" to over 2,200 people across the state, including parents, foster parents, athletic leagues and members of the clergy. As a police officer, he investigated more than a hundred sexual abuse cases.

The program also gives adults information about how child molesters successfully offend against children, helps them identify patterns of behavior that represent danger, and provides them with steps to take to keep their children safe.

## **'Help Me Grow' Expands Nationally**

***"There was a 26 percent increase in referrals to community-based services."***

***– study on Help Me Grow program***

The Connecticut Children's Trust Fund's Help Me Grow program is being replicated nationally.

Through the program, parents, pediatricians and other providers are trained to recognize the early signs of developmental problems and contact Help Me Grow when they have a concern.

The program has helped thousands of children in Connecticut since it was started in 2001 by the Children's Trust Fund.

Research on the program has found:

- Help Me Grow received 2,500 calls this past year. The program staff connected these callers to almost 4,000 services – a 26 percent increase from the previous year and a more than 100 percent increase from three years ago.
- Over the past year, pediatrician calls to the program have grown by 14 percent.
- There is a high level of success in connecting families to services. Research shows that about 80 percent of the families referred to the program during the past year were connected to needed/referred services and that connections to services were pending for 16 percent more.
- Participation rates in the Help Me Grow "Ages & Stages Child Development Monitoring Program" are steadily growing.

As a result of the success of the Trust Fund's Help Me Grow program, other states have become interested in replicating it. The Commonwealth Fund, a national foundation based in New York City, has awarded a grant of almost \$350,000 for this purpose. Efforts are underway to establish Help Me Grow programs in five states, including Oregon,

South Carolina, Colorado, Kentucky and New York. Dr. Paul Dworkin of the Connecticut Children's Medical Center is leading the replication effort.

## **Pilot Program Helps Hard-To-Reach Families**

*"That's amazing."*

*– a young mother reacting to information learned in a class on child development and behavior*

A pilot program to identify hard-to-reach families in Hartford's North End was operated through the City's Maternal and Infant Outreach Program. The program, funded with a grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, identified and connected hard-to-reach families with programs and services to help them cope with the stresses in their lives and with their children.

Hard-to-reach families often do not have access to phones, and have transportation or other problems following up on initial contacts made by community support programs. Some need in-home assessments to identify complex needs.

Fifty-one hard-to-reach families were identified and recruited to participate in the Trust Fund's program. This effort was administered through the Trust Fund's Help Me Grow program.

After identifying hard-to-reach families through health-care and other community services, outreach workers followed up and assessed the needs of the families, connected them with community services, or provided face-to-face information on child development and parenting.

The key to the success of the program was gaining the trust of families. During home visits, young parents more readily expressed their concerns, discussed options and accepted suggestions, a study of the pilot program found.

Of particular importance was that many of the young mothers in the program said they understood child-rearing better after talking with home visitors from the program about what constituted normal child development and behavior at different ages.

"I didn't know that" and "That's amazing" were some of the comments home visitors heard after the sessions.

In one instance, as reported by a home visitor, a parent clearly saw her child "in a new light" after learning that the child's high motor activity was "not misbehavior" but normal for his age.

"It was like a light bulb switch," the home visitor reported. "The parent became observably more patient and less rigid with their child during the visit."

## **Kinship Fund and Grandparents' Respite Fund**

*"It's not easy.... but it does my heart good knowing I'm doing right by them."*

*– a grandparent raising her grandchildren*

The Children's Trust Fund Kinship Fund and Grandparents' Respite Fund award small grants of up to \$500 to children living in the care of a relative guardian for clothing, extracurricular activities or other expenses that enrich a child's development. Grants of \$2,000 are also available to grandparents and relative guardians who struggle financially to meet the needs of their grandchildren.

To help support the work of the Kinship and Respite Funds, the New Haven Probate Court raised \$20,000 during its annual fall fundraising dinner. The event has grown from a small gathering to a standing-room-only event. Hundreds of

families and community members attended. Special guests included state Sens. Toni Harp and Martin Looney, who presented awards to several of the children.

The money helps to fill in the gaps and gives grandparents the opportunity to do some of the things for their grandchild that they might not otherwise be able to do.

The funds are administered through 13 probate courts. This year 1,800 children and 1,200 families received funds from the Kinship and Respite Funds.

## **Parent Leadership Helps Parents Advocate**

***"I used to be called an angry parent, but after attending parent leadership training that changed. Now they call me a confident parent."***

***– parent leadership training participant***

Training parents to be leaders means that they will be better advocates for their children and have the skills to make a positive difference in their community. At times, parents don't feel that their voices are heard. Through parent leadership training, the Children's Trust Fund is trying to change that.

This year the Children's Trust Fund worked closely with the Commission on Children and others to fund parent leadership training across Connecticut. The William Casper Graustein Memorial Fund and the State's Early Childhood Cabinet each contributed \$100,000 for this effort. As a result, 29 organizations received funds to offer this training.

The training helped 452 parents, and the results of these efforts have been very positive. Parents report a high rate of satisfaction with the training. They tell us that they are using the skills they have learned at home, at work and in their communities, and that the training has boosted their confidence. They also report that their children are doing better in school.

## **Ensuring Children's Rights**

***"The Children's Law Center offers legal assistance to children whose parents are involved in visitation or custody disputes. It's an invaluable resource."***

***– a community provider looking for legal advice for a young client***

The Children's Law Center's Legal Representation Program provides court-appointed attorneys to indigent children involved in high-conflict custody and visitation cases. In 70 percent of these cases, at least one parent is representing him or herself, which can lead to frustration and tension that make parental conflict worse. The cases are often further exacerbated by risk factors such as mental illness, child abuse or neglect, substance abuse, domestic violence and/or chronic conflict.

The Legal Representation Program operates in four judicial districts and serves 52 towns and cities in Connecticut.

In addition to legal services, the Children's Law Center offers a Children's Law Line. For those with family law questions or concerns about a child, the Children's Law Line is an easily accessible, statewide resource. The Law Line provides legal information to callers regarding child support, custody, visitation, children's rights, divorce and other relevant topics.

Families in Transition (FIT) is a child-centered mediation and parenting education program serving low-income and no-income families involved in parental conflict. Co-mediation teams consisting of a mental health professional and attorney assist separated parents in reaching amicable agreements out of court and provide them with the tools to resolve co-parenting issues that may arise in the future.