

Children's Trust Fund Council

Nurturing Children Strengthening Families Supporting Communities

Campaign Newsletter

January 2011

A Society Without Child Abuse...Getting There

The Children's Trust Fund Council is launching a campaign to raise public awareness, and perhaps more importantly, to garner ideas, insight, and information that can shape the state's agenda for preventing child abuse and neglect.

The campaign is focused on issues facing families and children, problems related to child abuse and neglect and the value of prevention. The campaign begins with small group discussions, leads to a round table event in the spring and a large public forum on this topic next fall.

The goal of the campaign is to build a sense of urgency for this cause and to further community awareness, program development, and research efforts to prevent child abuse and neglect.

Preventing child abuse and neglect is a complex task. It requires the best ideas and the most current information to solve problems and make progress. The Children's Trust Fund Council is looking forward to the opportunity this campaign provides to talk with and learn from members of our community. The Council is excited about the new perspectives, strategies and partners this campaign will bring to its work.

The Children's Trust Fund Council is pleased to be working with The Connecticut Forum on this effort. The CT Forum will moderate the roundtable event and spearhead efforts for the fall forum. The round table will be held on April 13, 2011 from 9:30 to 11:00 AM in the Old Judiciary Room at the State Capitol. The fall forum will be held September 14, 2011. The forum will focus on the themes and priorities that emerge from the small group discussions and the round table event.

The purpose of this newsletter is to provide background information that might be helpful for the small group discussions. Included is:

- Brief information on child abuse and neglect – causes and affects.
- An opinion piece highlighting the development of the child abuse field from intervention to prevention.
- A description of the Children's Trust Fund and its programs.
- The value of investing in prevention programs.

The Connecticut Children's Trust Fund was established as a part of a national movement to establish prevention focused organizations in every state. The movement was championed by U.S. Senator Christopher Dodd who introduced federal legislation to encourage all 50 states to establish Children's Trust Funds. In response to this legislation, the Connecticut General Assembly created the Children's Trust in 1983.

The Children's Trust Fund, a division of the state Department of Social Services, is the state's lead organization for preventing child abuse and neglect *before* a crisis occurs. It does this through a number of programs that reach parents at risk of child abuse and neglect before a crisis occurs – to actually keep abuse from ever occurring. Last year the Trust Fund programs reached 17,000 people.

The Trust Funds programs are a vital part of the state's safety net. They help parents to become effective caregivers and to develop nurturing relationships with their children. They help communities to be responsive to the needs of children and ensure their positive growth and development.



A Division of the Department of Social Services

25 Sigourney Street, Hartford, CT 06106

Child Abuse and Neglect.....

There are 70,000 reports of child abuse and neglect reported in Connecticut each year. Of these, 20,000 are substantiated, the majority being classified as neglect, which includes physical, emotional, and educational neglect.

The single best predictor of child abuse and neglect is a high poverty rate. According to national studies, children who live in families with an annual income of less than \$15,000 are 22 times more likely to be abused or neglected. Stressors that contribute to this abuse and neglect include unemployment, single parenthood, limited access to health care, housing instability, and exposure to environmental hazards.

During recessions, unemployment rates go up, putting more children at increased risk for child abuse and neglect. A recent study found that every one percent increase in unemployment was associated with an increase in confirmed child maltreatment reports one year later, according to a report by Dr. Robert Sege, Boston University School of Medicine.

Since 2007, the poverty rate in the United States has increased from 4.5 percent to almost 10 percent. “When times are bad, children suffer,” Sege said after presenting his findings to the American Academy of Pediatrics in October. “These results suggest that programs to strengthen families and prevent maltreatment should be expanded during economic downturns.”

A paper on the effect of economic recession on child well-being by the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia Research Institute found noticeable spikes in neglect following the 1990-1991 and 2001 recessions. This latest recession is no exception.

“Representatives of child welfare agencies and hospitals across the country are reporting considerable increases in cases of child maltreatment,” according to the paper.

The National Research Council associated abuse and neglect with depression, post-traumatic stress disorders, conduct disorders, low academic achievement, drug use, teen pregnancy, juvenile delinquency and adult criminal behavior. It has become increasingly evident that maltreatment in the early years of a child’s life has a profound influence on the adult they become.

States pay the costs associated with abuse and neglect in their education, criminal justice, mental health and social services systems.

People Have the Power to Prevent.....

A multiple choice about our chances of preventing child abuse and neglect:

- A. Not much can be done to prevent child abuse and neglect.
- B. The best we can hope for is to keep abuse and neglect from happening again after maltreatment of a child has been identified.
- C. We can literally, prevent abuse and neglect—that is, we can keep it from ever happening in the first place.

Up until the 1960s, most people believed A was the correct answer. At that time, society barely recognized that child abuse and neglect was an important issue, and little was being done to help children in these situations. Few cases were ever reported and, when they were, there were few agencies in place to respond appropriately.

Police often viewed household violence as a matter of private and not public concern. Abuse was ill-defined and in most cases occurred behind closed doors. Children who did disclose were rarely believed. Runaways were looked upon as bad kids and either sent home or to detention centers. No one seemed concerned with what they might be running from.

In 1961, the American Academy of Pediatrics held a conference to discuss, for the first time in this century, the “battered child syndrome.” Presentations at the conference made the connection between abuse and certain types of childhood injuries—such as scars, fractures, burns and bruises—seen by pediatricians.

This conference raised public awareness. People began to understand the insidious problem of severe neglect and its damaging impact on physical and mental development.

Protecting children became a public responsibility. Professionals began to believe that once a child was on the protective services caseload the abuse could be stopped.

Protective services such as Connecticut’s Department of Children and Families became symbols of hope. People began to report suspected abuse to the new agencies as never before. Between 1968 and 1972 reports of abuse in California went from 400 to 4,000.

Yet in time these growing caseloads began to tax resources, and complex issues began to emerge. Child-protective services are working with the most challenging and troubled families and children. Tough decisions are made by workers every day. Keeping children safe 24 hours a day is not a simple task.

Abusive parents are often ordered to undergo treatment in an attempt to prevent the recurrence of maltreatment. Children struggle to cope with the disruption in their lives, and many need ongoing help to overcome physical and social developmental delays.

Protective services can stop the abuse, but the pain these children feel can go on for a life-time. Neglected children are more likely to drop out of school and become involved in crime. These children show up as adults on the caseloads of the departments of mental health or social services, or in our prisons. They are apt to grow up to live in poverty.

So if you selected choice B on the quiz, you would be right — child protective services can keep abuse and neglect from happening again after maltreatment of a child has been identified. But the social and financial cost of waiting until after the fact is extremely high.

The best answer is C. New research shows that we can keep abuse and neglect from happening in the first place.

In Connecticut, we’ve been testing out this strategy with a number of programs. Chief among them is

Healthy Families (now Nurturing Families), a voluntary prevention program that supports vulnerable parents at critical points in their lives—when their first baby is born.

With Healthy Families, support workers become involved during the mother’s pregnancy and continue working with the mother, her baby and her family for at least one year.

They spend time with the new parents and the baby and provide information about child development. They help the family to bond with their new child and take hold of their new responsibility. They help new parents who may be dealing with difficult and potentially overwhelming circumstances, like a difficult birth, a colicky or sick child, lack of support or financial stress.

When appropriate, the program encourages the parents to finish school, to secure jobs and to find and utilize the services of a pediatrician. The results of Healthy Families? Among participants in the program:

- The rate of child abuse and neglect has been significantly reduced while immunizations and the use of pediatric care have become routine.
- Parents are more sensitive to their children's needs and have more realistic attitudes about their responsibilities.
- Parents make significant gains in education, employment and self-sufficiency.

Children who get off to a good start and have positive relationships with their parents and a stable family life are more likely to succeed in school and less inclined to act out in self-destructive ways when they enter adolescence. These kids have a shot at a bright future.

Article by Karen Foley-Schain, executive director of the Children's Trust Fund, first appeared on the Other Opinion page of the Hartford Courant, May 19, 1999.

The Developing Brain: A Great Investment

There's a reason we were all born with fat heads, and it's not so we qualify to be Fox News commentators before we are out of diapers. We need those disproportionately hefty heads because the human brain is the fastest growing thing in the body for the first eight years of life. It makes some sense, then, that if we are looking for a good place to invest, we should look at the developing brains of our young. Opportunities that pay off well for the long haul do not get any better than the pile of progressively networked neurons that help make us who we are.

That's why parents should give quality time together to their children for Christmas instead of video games, and why states should invest in infants and children as a matter of good economic policy. And that's why, as Maine and other states struggle in 2011 to balance their state budgets, the impact of cuts on early childhood development should be a lens through which potential cuts are examined. Indeed, as we disinvest in social and health programs through massive state budget cuts in these tight times, we should consider spending more—not less—of the money that remains on this and other areas where the social payback for money spent has the biggest bang for the buck.

A rapidly growing body of evidence suggests that community and government investment in early childhood interventions such as good parenting support, early access to health care, and early child development programs can save more money down the road. Returns on investment in the form of reduced crime, reduced special education needs, lower health costs, lower social welfare costs, more productive workforce, etc. may be as high as \$9 for every \$1 invested in good, proven child development support programs. For more information, see the website of the Harvard University Center for the Developing Child at:

www.developingchild.harvard.edu

For this to make sense we need a brief seminar in brain development, which will not be painful. The human brain is forming about 700 new connections per minute between its cells during the early years of life, when most of the connection wiring gets done. In general, the more connected our cells are, the smarter and more functional we are. The higher cognitive functions of the brain are largely wired by age 6. Language is largely wired in by 12 months of age. All of this means everything that messes with the brain in those early years—malnutrition, stress, abuse, lack of attention and good stimulation, lack of a loving and safe environment, etc.—can mess up brain wiring, normal brain cell gene expression, and other crucial areas of the brain development. Then we live with the faulty wiring repercussions for the rest of our lives.

That is why so-called Adverse Child Experiences (ACEs equals loss of a parent, abuse of parent or child in the home, mental illness in a parent, substance abuse in the home, and give other adverse experiences) during our early years increase the risk that we will struggle socially, mentally, and/or physically as adults. Every added ACE a child suffers increases the risk of difficulty holding a job, getting pregnant as a teenager, committing a crime, getting hooked on alcohol or pills, smoking cigarettes, or developing mental illness and other chronic diseases. Calculate your own ACE score at:

www.acestudy.org/files/ACE_Score_Calculator.pdf

Bottom line—the child’s brain is plastic waiting to be molded by parents and communities. Handled one way, chances are good the molding produces a functional adult who can make his or her own way in society, and be a contributor. Molding another way it is much more likely to produce a dysfunctional adolescent or adult who will struggle to make his or her way in society, and is much more likely to be expensive for the rest of us.

As Maine and other states plow state budgets roads clear of the snow of accumulating deficits, they need to avoid plowing the interests of our youngest children into the ditch. A life put there at an early age may never get back on track.

Article by Dr. Erik Steel, vice president and chief medical officer of Eastern Maine Healthcare System, first appeared in the Journal Inquirer on December 14, 2010.

Connecticut’s Efforts to Prevent Child Abuse and Neglect.....

The Children’s Trust Fund has been a catalyst for increasing the state's efforts to prevent child abuse and neglect. The Trust Fund has raised awareness of the need to prevent child abuse and neglect and to enlist the support of many in this cause. It has provided the state with the opportunity to show that prevention programs make a real difference in the lives of children and families and to make the case that those prevention efforts must be supported.

The Trust Fund effort grew out of recognition that the courts, the Department of Children and Families, school and other helping agencies are stretched beyond the limits in attempting to deal with the wide variety of issues facing children and families. Policy makers saw more and more resources and more and more funding being directed to addressing children and families after a crisis has occurred - when it much more difficult and costly to intervene. This led many policy makers to ask if more can be done to avoid these problems.

The search for this type of solution led to the establishment of the Trust Fund and informed its mission. It helped create a real momentum for the development of additional programs to support children and families.

The Trust Fund is focused on finding the most effective means of assisting and strengthening families in order to prevent child abuse and neglect, funding a broad range of organizations to implement these programs, conducting research to assess their effectiveness and developing strategies for improving our efforts.

The state of Connecticut has been making steady progress in its efforts to prevent child abuse and neglect through the work of the Children's Trust Fund. The state has increased its investment in the Trust Fund's child abuse and neglect prevention program from less than \$1 million a decade ago to more than \$ 16 million today. National and local foundations and individual donors have also supported this cause by contributing more than \$1 million dollars in the just the past few years.

The funding for these is an investment that is paying real dividends. These dividends come in the form of reduced numbers of new cases of child abuse and neglect, and better outcomes for children and families.

The Trust Fund is a division within the Department of Social Services (DSS). The legislature has made DSS the state's lead agency for community-based, prevention-focused programs and activities designed to strengthen and support families in order to prevent child abuse and neglect.

The Trust Fund is the division primarily responsible for fulfilling this mandate. The Trust Fund carries out its responsibilities with the guidance of the Children's Trust Fund Council, an interdisciplinary, collaborative, public - private partnership. The members of the Council include the Commissioners of the Departments of Social Services, Children and Families, Public Health, and Education or their designees. The leadership of the Connecticut General Assembly appoints three representatives from the business community, three from the child abuse prevention field, as well as three parents and one pediatrician.

The programs under the Trust Fund include several major efforts that prevent child abuse and neglect by helping families and communities to be responsive to children, ensuring their healthy growth and development. In addition, the Trust Fund is responsible for the administration of the Community-Based Program to Prevent Child Abuse (CBCAP), a federal program to support innovative community-based prevention efforts. As a part of the CBCAP program the Trust Fund has launched several important initiatives.

The Nurturing Families Network (NFN)

Chief among the efforts of the Children's Trust Fund has been the development of *Nurturing Families Network*. The program's focus is on providing intensive home visiting services to high risk families at a critical time in their lives - when their first child is born.

Why home visiting?

The Trust Fund choose to focus on home visiting because this approach has been shown to reduce the incidence of child abuse and neglect, to improve parent child relationships and lead to better outcomes for both parents and children.

A number of evaluations have found that children whose parents participate in a home visiting program have better birth outcomes, stronger literacy skills, more social competence, and higher levels of school readiness than their peers whose parents were not enrolled in this type of program.

Evaluations have also shown significant achievements for parents who participate in home visiting programs. These include gains in employment and education, stable households, and access to health care.

The *Nurturing Families Network* is providing services to families giving birth at all of the twenty-nine birthing hospitals in the state. Services are offered at forty-one locations with expanded programs in the cities of Hartford and New Haven.

The *Nurturing Families Network* provides parent education and support for 5,000 new parents each year, including *Nurturing Parenting* groups that are open to the community.

The program offers intensive home visiting for 2,000 high risk and hard to reach families living in poverty each year. The program connects high-risk parents with a home visitor who meets with the family on a weekly basis for up to five years. Roughly thirteen hundred new parents are receiving home visits under this program.

The home visitors work against a backdrop of unwanted babies, domestic violence and the high potential for child abuse or neglect to assist the parents to address many issues and to help break the family's social isolation. Through ongoing contact a trusting and meaningful professional relationship is formed. This relationship is at the core of the program's success.

The *Nurturing Families Network* has been rigorously researched and evaluated by the University of Hartford Center for Social Research. The results have been consistently strong.

Among the positive outcomes for this program are:

- The rate of child abuse and neglect is far lower for high-risk NFN participants than for similar families not in this type of program.
- Program participants experienced a significant decrease in parental frustration, sadness and loneliness and an increase in coping and stress management skills, developed more realistic expectations of their children, and had fewer difficulties in relationships.
- Program participants made statistically significant gains in education and employment.

We will continue to offer and study this program. The *Nurturing Families Network* is a program that can help more families and more children have a better life.

Next Steps.....

While Trust Fund efforts to prevent child abuse and neglect have made significant strides over the past decade, we recognize that there is still much to be done. Through this campaign, "A Society without Abuse" the Trust Fund is interested in learning about new ways it can help to improve the lives of more children and families all across the state of Connecticut. It is interested in strategies that allow each of it to build upon its efforts and allow all of us to make a unique and important contribution to preventing child abuse and neglect.