



The Issue:

PREVENTION OF CHILD ABUSE & NEGLECT

Children's Bureau, Inc. Position:

We support initiatives to strengthen and benefit families and children by expanding and enhancing education, resources, and assistance. Children's Bureau believes that the well-being of children is directly connected to the stability and strength of families, and that by supporting families, the risk for abuse and neglect will be reduced.

We support the following Legislative and/or Policy Initiatives:

- Ensure that preventive services are family-centered, culturally-competent, strength-based and developmentally appropriate.
- Promote continuous financial investment in Community Partners for Child Safety and other prevention programs that increases the availability of supportive resources for parents/caregivers.
- Promote legislation, policies, and funding that support the well-being of Indiana children by supporting and strengthening families.
- Support Statewide public outreach campaigns designed to increase awareness of the risks for child abuse/neglect and of methods for preventing the maltreatment of children.
- Adequately finance and advertise successful prevention programs and services to increase family participation in such programs.
- Expand and strengthen both parenting and life skills curriculum in public schools, targeting middle and high school students.
- Make pre-natal health services more readily available for low-income and poor mothers.
- Encourage the development of more community resources and housing subsidies to assist families and young adults in obtaining safe and adequate housing.
- Increase Federal and State funding for the CCDF voucher program to alleviate child care costs for working, low-income parents.
- Expand education and vocational training programs to allow the working poor an opportunity to develop skills that will allow them to earn higher incomes, receive health benefits, and advance to higher level positions.

Background Information:

Statistics for child abuse and neglect continue to be alarmingly high both nationally and in Indiana. Too frequently, stories of children being horribly mistreated are reported by the media - often with tragic endings. Unfortunately, by the time authorities are able to identify a need for services or intervene on behalf of children, serious problems already exist within some families. To effectively combat abuse and neglect, communities must offer not only efficient interventions but also programs and services designed to prevent problems from developing within families.

Prevention requires a commitment from all members of society, so that families are able to access resources to help them be strong, healthy, and successful. Indiana's Department of Child Services (DCS) has undergone remarkable improvements recently, with promising practices continuously being developed and implemented. Prevention has become a priority of DCS, as supportive services are increasingly more available throughout the State. The expansion of prevention services is encouraging and reflects an overall commitment to addressing child abuse and neglect on the front end. Unfortunately, the number of victimized children continues to rise and the limited number of existing prevention services doesn't allow access for all families. Both issues emphasize the necessity for even greater prevention efforts by all communities, leaders, and organizations.

Nationally, it was estimated that 772,000 children were victims of abuse or neglect in 2008¹. In Indiana, 114,907 reports of abuse and neglect were made during SFY 2009². In 2009, the rate of substantiated reports of child maltreatment was 15.6 per 1,000 children ages 0-17². During SFY 2009, Indiana saw a drop in the number of child fatalities from 54 in 2005 to 38 in 2009³. The highest percent of these were the result of abuse - specifically abusive head trauma³.

Costs of treatment and services are also escalating. The most recent estimate of the costs of child abuse and neglect completed in 2007 is \$103.8 billion nationally⁴. Direct costs are child welfare services, hospitalization, mental health treatment, and the prosecution

of adult offenders, among others⁴. Indirect costs are substance abuse treatment, ongoing medical care, domestic violence intervention, victims' adult criminality, and their lost productivity to society⁴.

The best way to prevent abuse and neglect from occurring is to ensure that parents are provided adequate resources and support, and understand ways to keep their children safe. Ultimately, children are most safe when their families are healthy and strong. Families most often are at risk when they are threatened by domestic violence, marital issues, lack of parenting skills, drug and/or alcohol dependency, insufficient child care funds, poor housing, and poverty⁵.

The causes of poverty are complex, influenced by both a fluctuating economy and by individual and family issues⁶. A poor economy, high unemployment rates, insufficient public education, or a lack of adequate work opportunities - all of these things can contribute to an individual experiencing poverty⁷. In the same respect, substance abuse, poor physical or mental health, or family violence can play a role for some, as well. Research indicates, however, that the most important factor in reducing poverty is the number or available jobs paying livable wages⁸.

Housing assistance can make a difference between stable housing and homelessness for thousands of families. It has been shown that families who have been homeless and receive a housing subsidy are 21 times more likely to remain in a stable home environment in comparison to families that do not receive a housing subsidy⁹. Families are eligible to receive the federal Section 8 rent subsidy if their income is below 50 percent of the area's median income¹. In Indiana, 34,977 families received Section 8 vouchers between May 2009 and August 2010¹. While thousands of families are receiving assistance through this needed program, statistics show that the number of available vouchers is not adequate in meeting the needs of all families that are eligible. Nationally, one in five income-eligible households obtains a Section-8 voucher¹⁰.

Parenting education, life skills training, and academic resources should be made readily

available for families, individuals, and for youth to insure that every child has access to K–16 educational experiences to help achieve success by 25. In Indiana, attendance is necessary and mandatory according to IC 20-8.1-3. Therefore, we must stand firmly to support educational services that accommodate children with exceptional challenges and advance the learning process. Inconsistent school attendance can lead to decreased school performance and eventually lead to a student dropping out of the educational environment. During the 2010 school year, 21.9 percent of students did not graduate high school¹¹. Individuals who drop out of school have several consequences in adulthood, such as less income, unemployment, engaging in high-risk behaviors, and incarceration¹². It is estimated that over the span of 25 to 30 years, an individual who dropped out of high school will cost \$500,000 due to public assistance, health care, and incarceration costs¹².

Due to the inability of many families being able to afford child care to enter the workforce, federal and state funds have been provided through the Child Care Development Fund (CCDF). A family can get on the program if they make 127 percent or below of the poverty level (\$23,532 for a family of three) and can remain on the program until they make over 170 percent of the poverty level if they are working or enrolled in school¹³. 55,360 children were served in 2009 with the average monthly waitlist including 8,488 children¹.

Despite thousands of Hoosier children receiving assistance, income eligibility requirements and lack of sufficient income continue to leave thousands of Hoosier families without assistance and struggling to remain employed and fund child care expenses. Investing in child care assistance funding would assist Indiana in expanding economic and workforce development initiatives across the state. It is estimated that due to the availability of child care Hoosier parents are able to earn nearly \$4 billion in wages¹⁴. It has been estimated that for every \$1 spent on improving the quality and availability of early childhood programs \$7 are saved from future spending of mental health, substance abuse, special education, and imprisonment¹⁴.

Within a comprehensive plan to prevent child maltreatment, three types of prevention programs or services are involved¹⁵. Primary Prevention activities are designed to educate

the community as a whole about child abuse, before families become involved in the child welfare system¹⁵. Secondary Prevention is more direct in audience; families at a higher risk for abuse or neglect are the focus of these programs¹⁵. Teen parents, families with substance abuse issues, parents of special needs children, and low-income families are targeted for services¹⁵. The third type is Tertiary Prevention, which involves activities and services for families who have had substantiated incidents of abuse or neglect or who are involved in protective services¹⁵.

Specific prevention programs have been identified as being crucial for families at risk for abuse or neglect. Quality, accessible, and affordable child care would be a vital support for all families.

Home-based counseling, referrals to community services, and support groups could also prove beneficial to families both before and after they have become involved in the child welfare system. In order to understand what prevention services and supports would benefit families at risk for abuse; significant dialogue needs to take place between child advocates and the families in question. Prevention services must be strength-based, culturally-competent, family-focused and accessible for all community members.

Undoubtedly, prevention programs will reduce the likelihood of child maltreatment. Recipients of prevention services have demonstrated a reduced rate of child abuse when compared to caregivers not receiving any form of prevention services⁴. Parents also report a reduction in personal and family stress, improved social functioning, and improved overall health upon participation in prevention services¹⁵. Research has demonstrated a connection between abuse and/or neglect in childhood with many adult issues, such as substance abuse, crime, and continued abusive behaviors⁴. If abuse can be prevented during childhood, the risk of these issues occurring later could then also be reduced, benefiting the community as a whole.

The costs of providing prevention services are quite minimal in comparison to traditional interventions. One Michigan study found that the estimated cost of addressing abuse and neglect was roughly \$825 million annually; this included costs connected with low birth weights, foster care, criminal prosecution, and medical treatment¹⁶. In contrast, they found

that the annual cost of providing prevention services to every first time parent in the state would be around \$43 million¹⁶. In Colorado, a similar report was released; estimating current child abuse/neglect costs at roughly \$400 million per year while providing home based services for families at risk would cost under \$25 million¹⁶. In addition to significant financial savings, prevention would have other benefits for taxpayers, including reduced medical and mental health care usage, lower incidences of violence, and improved educational and vocational outcomes of both parents and children¹⁶.

Indiana currently invests in prevention services through programs such as Community Partners for Child Safety, Healthy Families, Youth Service Bureaus, and Project Safe Place. In addition to these State supported programs; several private non-profit agencies also offer

prevention to families in need. Non-profit agencies are limited however, as funding determines the capacity, accessibility and continuity of such programs.

As a society, we must do all that we can to ensure every child grows up in a safe and healthy environment. This requires not only action from elected officials, but also an overall commitment from every member of the community. Social service agencies, educators, faith-based groups, health care workers, neighborhoods, and businesses each have a role to play in the prevention of child abuse and neglect. Parenting is one of the most important responsibilities any individual can undertake. In order to best serve children, we must support and assist families in becoming healthy, strong, and flourishing. By supporting an expansion of prevention services, we will be on our way.

CBI Program Impact and Participation:

Children's Bureau, Inc provided preventative services to the following numbers of children and families in 2010: Parents as Teachers 29 families, Access Coordination Team 42 children, Child Care Development Fund vouchers 15,469 children, Project Safe Place 28 children, Community Partners for Child Safety 1,465 families, Pro-100 Summer Employment Program 92 children, NACS 611 families, and Family Support Center Children's Shelter 803 children.

For More Information Contact:

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¹ Indiana Youth Institute. (2010). *Kids count in Indiana: 2010 data book: A profile in child well-being*. Retrieved from, <http://iyi.org/resources/pdf/2010-Kids-Count-in-Indiana-Data-Book.pdf>

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⁴ Prevent Child Abuse America. (2007). *Total estimated cost of child abuse and neglect in the United States*. Retrieved from, http://www.preventchildabuse.org/about_us/media_releases/pcaa_pew_economic_impact_study_final.pdf

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⁷ Indianapolis Star. (9/17/2006). *The poor among us: Poverty in Indiana*.

⁸ Coalition on Human Needs. (2006). *Four years of unshared recovery*. Retrieved from, <http://www.chn.org/pdf/2006/2005CensusPressRelease.pdf>

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