



## The Issue:

# SAFETY ISSUES FOR CHILDREN

### Children's Bureau, Inc Position:

We support efforts to decrease violence in families, schools and communities which affects the well-being of children. We support policies that ensure adequate provision of services to protect children and prevent abuse and neglect. Our focus is bullying, child abuse and neglect, domestic violence, and community violence.

## We support Legislative and/or Policy Initiatives that:

### Bullying

- Create community-wide efforts to engage school-aged children and parents in bullying awareness education that includes cyber bullying.
- Require school corporations to develop enforceable policies that prohibit bullying in school and all school related activities, and require that records are kept on all reports.

### Child Abuse and Neglect

- Ensure that appropriate therapeutic services for families are available, accessible and adequately funded.
- Establish a standing interim study committee of the Indiana General Assembly with responsibility to study issues of service gaps and disparities in services for children of color in the state.
- Expand investment in primary prevention efforts throughout the State.
- Engage children, families and communities in all planning of program services and initiatives.
- Sustain efforts that eliminate barriers for reporting and investigating child abuse and neglect, such as anonymous reporting of suspected abuse and/or neglect.
- Ensure the consistent availability of current, accurate child welfare data by race/ethnicity to determine trends, causal factors and successful interventions.
- Monitor services for accountability to children, families and taxpayers.

### Community Violence

- Support efforts that require law enforcement officers to secure training on appropriate interactions with youth and alternatives to arrests.
- Promote community collaborative and partnerships that provide youth access to activities that will keep them engaged and reduce gang activities/violence.
- Support legislation regarding Child Access Prevention (CAP) laws, Trigger Lock laws, and gun safety features for Indiana.
- Support efforts to eliminate access to illegal guns.

### Domestic Violence

- Expand prevention, intervention and support services directed towards the elimination of domestic violence.
- Support educational programs that address personal/family safety and instruct the public about accessing assistance when confronted with family violence.
- Increase intervention services for all family members involved in domestic violence - including housing, support groups, counseling, employment and emergency services.
- Support legislation that protects victims and holds violent perpetrators accountable for their actions.
- Eliminate barriers for victims of domestic violence in securing protective orders.
- Support programs that aim to educate teens about dating violence and programs that work toward prevention of dating violence.

## Background Information:

### Bullying

Children have a right to feel safe in school and in their community. However, news reports and national surveys document that bullying is a growing problem in our country. In a 2009 nationally-representative sample of youth grades 9-12, 19.9% reported being bullied on school property in the 12 months preceding the survey<sup>1</sup>. More often than not these incidents go unreported to school personnel.

Bullying is basically a form of intimidation or domination toward someone who is perceived as weaker<sup>2</sup>. It often uses force or coercion and is a way of a person establishing some perceived superiority over another. Bullying can be verbal, physical sexual or cyber. Whatever the method of bullying, it is a complex problem that has long term effects on the person being bullied, the person bullying and the observers. It is a form of violence that has physical and mental health consequences such as depression, low self-esteem, poor grades, suicides and health problems.

Indiana passed a law in 2005 that requires schools to prohibit bullying<sup>3</sup>. However, most schools are just beginning to develop ways to implement anti-bullying programs on a consistent basis. This growing problem requires more than school curriculum and policies. To be successful, it requires a coordinated, community collaborative to educate youth, parents and school personnel on recognizing bullying, making it safe for youth to report it when it happens to them and creating interventions that address the needs of all the youth involved.

### Abuse and Neglect

As our country faces enormous issues such as economic recovery, war, and homeland security, services for our most vulnerable citizens cannot be cast aside. Children and their families must remain a top priority in order to decrease child abuse and neglect.

In 2009, an estimated 702,000 children were determined to be victims of child abuse or neglect- which is a victimization rate of 10.1 per 1,000 children<sup>4</sup>. Children between 0-1 years of age continue to have the highest rate of victimization per 1,000 children at 20.6. An estimated 1,770 children died in the United States due to child abuse and neglect in 2009<sup>4</sup>.

80.8 percent of the children who died were younger than four years old. 35.8 percent of all child fatalities in 2009 were attributed to neglect<sup>4</sup>.

This national trend is reflected in Indiana with substantiated cases of child abuse and neglect reaching 24,754 during State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2009<sup>5</sup>. There were 14,931 children classified as Children in Need of Services (CHINS) in a count conducted in SFY 2009<sup>5</sup>. In SFY 2009, there were a total of 38 abuse and neglect fatalities. Of the 38 fatalities, 24 of the fatalities were caused by abuse and 14 were due to neglect. As was true in past years, fatalities from both abuse and neglect occurred most often in young children, with 79 percent occurring in children under the age of 3 and 92 percent occurring in children under the age of 8<sup>6</sup>.

When addressing the issue of child maltreatment, and especially child fatalities, prevention is a recurring theme. Prevention programs need to be comprehensive and family-directed to ensure maximum success with decreasing abuse and neglect of children. Prevention programs need to disseminate information and increase awareness regarding these issues and available prevention strategies in the community. Prevention programs also need to partner with families on developing positive coping skills and addressing needs as identified by the family. Prevention programs should also have a component of community connection and social support creation to ensure changes can be long lasting for a family in need<sup>7</sup>.

Child abuse and neglect has detrimental impact on the functioning of children, which in turn has direct impact on the health of the community. Children are impacted in numerous aspects of their life, such as physical health, psychological functioning, exhibiting negative behaviors and societal consequences. Brain development can directly be impacted by abuse and neglect causing regions of the brain not to develop appropriately and causes the brain to remain in a hyper arousal state. It has also been found that children experiencing abuse and neglect have an increased likelihood of developing health concerns, such as heart disease, cancer, and liver disease. Psychological

functioning is directly impacted by poor mental health, cognitive difficulties, and social difficulties related to attachment and interaction with peers. Child abuse and neglect can be linked with delinquent behaviors, use of a controlled substance, and abuse toward peers and their own children in adulthood<sup>8</sup>. All of these personal consequences of child abuse and neglect directly impact the community by the direct costs associated with providing services to this population and the indirect cost of crime, mental health, substance abuse, etc. on citizens estimated nationally to be 103.8 billion per year<sup>9</sup>.

Child safety and permanency are also top priorities for state child welfare systems across the country. Since the establishment of the Department of Child Services (DCS), Indiana has initiated “practice reform” across the state in an effort to achieve increased success on all levels. DCS’s new structure emphasizes prevention, preservation, placement and permanency in its service model. The practice reform stresses the importance of partnering with and engaging families and communities. Indiana, as in other states, continues to face many challenges to ensuring the safety of their youngest citizens. Combining practice reforms, reducing caseload size and insuring that case managers are adequately trained and supervised, Indiana shows promise of a promising future for children and families.

### *Domestic Violence*

In state fiscal year (SFY) 2010, there were 62 deaths in Indiana due to domestic violence. Of those deaths, 50% were caused by gunshot wounds<sup>10</sup>. On a national scale, it is estimated that there are 16,800 homicides per year related to intimate partner violence<sup>11</sup>. This is alarming, based upon the statistics that an estimated 30 to 60 percent of batterers who abuse their partner also abuse their children<sup>11</sup>. Child abuse is 15 times more likely to occur in families where domestic violence is present<sup>12</sup>.

Domestic violence occurs regardless of race, sexual orientation or financial status - and it impacts the entire family. It is estimated that 15.5 million children are exposed to parental violence each year<sup>13</sup>. Young girls who witness domestic abuse in the home are 6.5 times more likely to be sexually abused<sup>14</sup>. Seventy-five percent of young boys who witness domestic abuse demonstrate extreme behavioral problems<sup>14</sup>. In addition, statistics illustrate that boys are ten times more likely to abuse their

female partners as adults<sup>14</sup>. Both girls and boys are six times more likely to use drugs and/or alcohol, and are at a higher risk of running away<sup>14</sup>.

The statistics demonstrate that domestic violence is physically and psychologically damaging to children. Children who witness abuse in the home display emotional and behavioral disturbances as diverse as withdrawal, low self-esteem, worthlessness, nightmares, self blame, regressive behavior, and aggression against peers, family members and property. Domestic violence sometimes causes developmental delays, and learning disabilities tend to be more common for children who live or have lived in a violent environment<sup>14</sup>.

### *Teen Dating Violence*

Violence in teen dating relationships is becoming increasingly more prevalent in the United States. As in adult domestic violence, teen dating violence occurs regardless of race, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status<sup>15</sup>. One in five teens in a serious relationship reports having been physically abused by his/her partner<sup>16</sup>. One in three teens reports knowing a friend or peer who has been punched, slapped, choked, or physically hurt by his/her partner. A 2005 study found that one in five high school girls report having been physically and/or sexually abused by a dating partner<sup>17</sup>. Furthermore, abused girls are more likely to engage in risky behaviors, are 4 to 6 times more likely to become pregnant, and 8 to 9 times more likely to attempt suicide<sup>18</sup>.

Emotional abuse is also being reported at high levels among teens<sup>15</sup>. More than 1 in 4 high school girls report repeated verbal abuse from a serious dating partner<sup>15</sup>. One third of teens report being in a relationship where their partner frequently asks where they are or who they are with and 1 in 4 teens report being in a relationship with a partner who tries to prevent him/her from spending time with friends and family<sup>16</sup>.

Education for teens about dating violence particularly before high school is essential to preventing a pattern of lifelong, unhealthy relationships. State laws that ensure the development of teen dating violence curriculum in schools can motivate youth to take a stand against dating violence and risky behaviors and urge communities, organizations, and other systems to be responsive to the needs of teen victims<sup>19</sup>.

### Community and Gun Violence

The rate of American gun violence has significantly increased in the last 15 years, with children having paid the price. Although there has been a lot of media attention regarding the reduced rate of deaths attributed to gun violence, the number is on the rise. For 2007, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show that 3,042 children and teens died from gunfire. Every day, an average of eight children are killed by firearms. One child is killed every three hours- which is approximately 58 children per week<sup>20</sup>. Indiana experienced 50 gun related fatalities of children in 2007, which resulted in a child being killed by gunfire every week<sup>20</sup>.

For every child killed by a gun, six more are wounded<sup>20</sup>. Even with these alarming facts, Congress allowed the Assault Weapons Ban to expire in 2004, permitting the existence of military style, semi-automatic weapons within our communities<sup>20</sup>. Gun violence is not only a problem for government, but also requires

community involvement to deter crime and ensure youth and adults are offered positive alternatives to crime and violence. A survey of Clients receiving child care vouchers through the Child Care Development Fund indicated that violence/crimes were the major issue impacting their community. The list of concerns included killings, drugs, break-ins, stealing, gun violence by kids, kids selling drugs and police officers breaking the law. One respondent said, "people see police not doing right, then they don't want to do right which makes it hard to report crimes<sup>21</sup>."

Most CBI clients live in communities that are disproportionately affected by violence, especially, gun violence. Violence, drugs, and crime were identified as the top issues facing youth by Children's Bureau teen interns during the summer of 2006. More shocking is that 100% of the young interns surveyed in 2005 indicated that they have personally lost a family or friend to murder or suicide<sup>22</sup>.

#### **CBI Program Impact and Participation:**

Many of Children's Bureau Inc. (CBI) clients are directly or indirectly involved in violence as either victims, living in communities with high incidence of violence or perpetrators of abuse and/or neglect. Various CBI programs deal with preventing abuse and neglect. Some programs, such as Retreat, Evan's House, foster care, adoption, and transitional living deal with the children leaving an abusive home and needing to heal from the effects of violence in the home. Therapeutic interventions with families and children focus on breaking the cycle. In addition, community violence also impacts CBI clients, staff, and affiliates. CBI is engaged in Marion County Model Court efforts to address disproportionality and disparities in services for children of color.

#### **For more information, contact:**

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<sup>1</sup> Find Youth Info (2010). How Widespread is the Bullying Problem? Retrieved from, [http://www.findyouthinfo.gov/topic\\_bullying\\_widespread.shtml/](http://www.findyouthinfo.gov/topic_bullying_widespread.shtml/).

<sup>2</sup> Bullying Statistics (Retrieved 10/30/2010). [www.bullyingstatistics.org/content/child-bullying.html](http://www.bullyingstatistics.org/content/child-bullying.html)

<sup>3</sup> Indiana State Government. (2005). *Senate Enrolled Act No. 285*. Retrieved from, [www.in.gov/legislative/bills/2005/pdf/SE0285.1.pdf](http://www.in.gov/legislative/bills/2005/pdf/SE0285.1.pdf).

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<sup>5</sup> Indiana Department of Child Services. (2011). *Demographics trending report state fiscal year 2009*. Retrieved from, <http://www.in.gov/dcs/files/DraftDemographicsTrendingReportSFY2009.pdf>

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