



PARTNERS IN ACTION

SAFE CHILDREN HEALTHY FAMILIES STRONG COMMUNITIES

COMMUNITY NEWS : WINTER 2007-2008

Foster Youth Age Out of the System...and Then What

Nationwide and locally the statistics can be grim...when foster youth age out of the system they are often unprepared to live on their own. In a national study, half of them report substance abuse, 32% had involvement with the legal system, and 38% have mental health problems. At age 18 only one-third have a high school diploma or equivalent and in studies two to four years later only 38% remained employed. Of the 48% having held a full time job during this same period, the median salary was \$205.

In 2005, a St. Louis Aging Out Work Group estimated that 80% of all females graduating from Independent Living classes had children, half of the youth who aged out at 21 or earlier became homeless, and less than half graduate from high school. In 3/07 there were 9,818 children in the state's foster care system and 22% of them are estimated to be age 16 or over.

We all know that if we look at our own children, few of them "age out" of our homes fully prepared to support themselves financially and emotionally without some help from family and friends.

The St. Louis Area Aging Out Initiative is designed to change the outcomes of youth exiting care. A group of nine funders along with local service providers spent 18 months studying the issues facing youth exiting foster care. This Initiative is designed to address these needs by connecting youth to existing support networks, focusing on self-sustainability by age 25, emphasizing working within existing systems, not supplanting them, and focusing on data collection to ensure that strategies are achieving desired outcomes.

For more information about this exciting initiative call Terri Fox at 314-222-4877 or tfox@epworth.org.

Number of Children in Foster Care By Age Group as of November 30, 2007

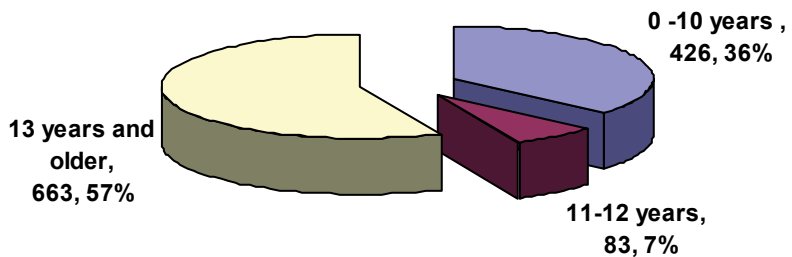


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Know Your Board...

and

St. James Center Offers a Place Where families Can Be Themselves



Prepared by
Betty Teal Quality Assurance Specialist

Data Source: Lesley Pettit
Research and Evaluation
N=1172

MISSION

The St. Louis Family and Community Partnership is a partnership of parents, families, schools, faith communities, the St. Louis City Family Court, the Children's Division, public and private agencies, neighborhood organizations, businesses and city and state government working together to support families, prevent child abuse and neglect, and help ensure that children have permanent relationships that help them safely thrive with families in their own communities.



Disproportionality and Disparities of African American Children Within our Child Welfare System

By Allen Duckworth & Elaine Smith

Disproportionality is the over or under representation of minority children in the Child Welfare System as compared to their representation in the general population. Disparity is the inequality or difference in treatment for children of color in the Child Welfare System. On the last day of fiscal year 2004, African American children totaled 162,911 or 34% of the 482,541 children in foster care. According to the Health and Human Services (HHS) data, this is about twice their proportions in the general population. As of November 30, 2007, St. Louis City Children's Division has 1,172 children in foster care, 1044 or 89% of these children are African American. The over representation of African American children within the Child Welfare system has been a major concern for decades. Major influencing factors include poverty, accessing housing, mental health issues, drug abuse and addiction, and bias or cultural misunderstandings and distrust. The affects of disproportionality for African American children in the child welfare system are devastating. These children tend to stay in foster care longer, they are less likely to be reunified or adopted, and they tend to age out of the system without supports. The St. Louis City Children's Division is taking the lead in addressing this issue.

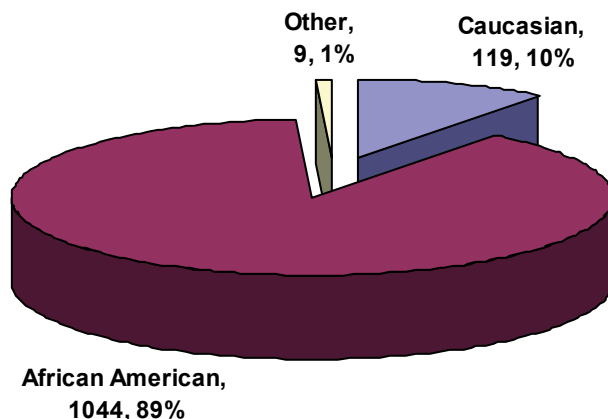
The first step in addressing this issue is acknowledging there is a problem. There is no quick fix to eliminating this matter. A workgroup composed of CD staff, court personnel and community partners, has begun addressing this issue by asking the question, **does our practice support or contribute to the level of disproportionality and disparity?** Our first Disproportionality Roundtable Discussion was held on October 10, 2007. There was a rich discussion and exchange of ideas. Next steps identified by the forum participants are as follows:

**Education on the topic of disparity and disproportionality,
Gathering of data,**

Participants were charged with the mission of making the issue of Disproportionality the new BUZZ word – think about it, talk about it and keep the issue on the front burner.

The Disproportionality Workgroup will meet again in January 2008, details to be announced. Those interested in being a part of this workgroup can contact chairpersons, Allen Duckworth at 877-2311 or Elaine Smith at 301-7825.

**Number of Children in Foster Care By Race
as of November 30, 2007**



Prepared by
Betty Teal Quality Assurance Specialist

Data Source: Lesley Pettit
Research and Evaluation
N=1172



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Helping Teens Access Substance Abuse Treatment

Consumers between the ages of 12-17 with substance abuse issues may access treatment services from any of the three area treatment providers operating Comprehensive Substance Treatment and Rehabilitation (CSTAR) programs.

New Beginnings is located in North St. Louis City and can be accessed by calling 314-367-8989. Preferred Family Healthcare has locations in South St. Louis City (314-773-3670) and St. Charles (636-946-6376). Comtrea is located in Jefferson County (636-296-6206).

The CSTAR program offers several levels of outpatient services, family therapy, educational/vocational access, community support services, and residential care as necessary. Consumers are assessed to determine the level of treatment necessary.



Please and Thank You

By Mary Mogg, MSW
Older Youth Transition Specialist
St. Louis City Children's Division

Please and thank you. These common phrases are repeated daily by the mother teaching her young child about manners. We use them everyday as we work, run errands, and go about daily life. These phrases are uttered to me daily as I go about my business. Yet, it is not very often that foster parents hear this from children in their own home or the Children's Division; especially the teenagers. The teenage population is one of a kind. The youth are often self centered, self absorbed, confused, hormonal, and think they are much smarter than any adult. Workers will then ask foster parents to care for these children in their homes. It is expected that foster parents feed them, clothe them, teach them manners, teach daily living skills, help with 10th grade algebra, and make sure this youth is ready to be an independent adult by 18 years old. I never thought that parenting was an easy job, but the above tasks would be impossible without foster parents. I am just as guilty as the teenagers for not saying thank you enough. The job foster parents do to help our children is amazing and is not forgotten. It takes a special person to care for someone else's child and foster parents do it without the recognition they deserve. For those of you who care for our children, "Thank you". Thank you for watching over our children, thank you for giving them everything you have to offer, thank you for being part of a bureaucracy that often forgets to say thanks, and thank you for not giving up on us or on the children.

Little children, headache; big children, heartache. ~Italian Proverb

Know Your Board...

Meet your St. Louis Family and Community Council Board Member ...

Name: Pastor Keith Kisart

Title: Pastor of Hope Community Worship Center in South St. Louis City.

Job: Pastor Kisart is the Senior Pastor in charge of revitalizing the initial church plan, which focuses on mission, membership, and awareness. Keith is also a trainer for the Children's Division Foster Parent In-Service Training.

Schools Attended: Soldan HS, Forest Park Community College, Rankin College, St. Louis U., Church on the Rock Bible College, Global University. (Keith is a wonderful role model for continuous adult learning.)

Why on the SLFCP Board: Keith wants to be a voice, to represent the Faith Community and perspective in the partnership. He feels strongly the need for the Faith Community to be involved.

Family: Keith has sons ages 18 and 11 and a daughter age 9. He and his wife Rosalan have been married for 28 years. Theirs is truly a ministering family, understanding the concept of God, particularly in light of the world and other people's behaviors. They are proud that their son has picked out a Christian College, Evangelical University in Springfield, Mo to attend this Fall.

A Favorite Book: The Bible because it covers the spectrum of life, loneliness, divorce, sex, greed, and power.

He also likes a book called "Make Me Want to Hollar" by Nathan Call. It's about his experiences in growing up and doing things that he shouldn't have done. He goes to jail for a felony. It shows that even children who grow up with two parents in the home can go to jail for a felony. Nathan is now successful and works for the Washington Times.

Best Vacation: A road trip that he and his wife took in 1990 before they had any children. They drove through Colorado and down to the Grand Canyon, stopping along the way. They could stop when they wanted and they had time to think and just talk between the two of them.

Wish for the Children of St. Louis: He wishes that they would have the best opportunity to realize their potential and didn't have the distractions of abuse and neglect, which keep them from fully realizing their potential.

One Achievement that He Would Like to See the SLFCP realize: He would like to see a partnership of businesses and citizens who would embrace the vision of protecting children in their own way. Counselors could reduce their fees so all children could receive the services that they need. Food Pantries would see that no child is hungry, etc.

Favorite Quote: "I know the plans that I have for you, not to harm you or cause you evil but to give you a successful, expected end." Jeremiah 29th chapter, 11th verse. There is an end result planned for you that you cannot see.

Thank you Pastor Keith Kisart for being on our Board.

St. James Center Offers a Place Where families Can Be Themselves

It's Christmas and children are excited about gifts, Christmas lights, food and the other festivities surrounding the holidays. However, the children in foster care who visit their parents at the **Visitation Center at St. James Neighborhood Houses** were more excited to be seeing their parents than seeing the Christmas gifts that they may have brought, according to Larry Shockley, Coordinator of Family Services at St. James Visitation Center. And even though they may celebrate Christmas with their parents the week before Christmas or the week after Christmas it's still their Christmas Celebration with their parents.

Just a year ago Neighborhood Houses held the Grand Opening of the St. James Visitation Center where families whose children were in foster care could visit their children in the neighborhood in a home-like setting where they could share food and affection and rebuild their lives, learning to once again trust in each other..

Mr. Shockley, who coordinates use of the center says that the room is utilized every day, for visits with parents or as a place where siblings can meet when they are placed in separate foster homes. Ann Prendergast, Children's Service Worker says the popularity of the St. James Center comes as no surprise.

"The Visitation Center offers so much more than office visits," she says. "The Center offers a safe place for people to come, whether it be parents or children, and just be themselves. They are able to interact, have fun, and not feel like someone is watching or judging them You just don't get that in an office or a restaurant like McDonald's."

According to studies, families who were referred to supervised visitation centers visited three times more often than families who did not use a visitation center. Prendergast has several families who use the center regularly, often visiting once or twice a month. Her families enjoy the comfortable atmosphere of the Center, which features couches, toys, games, a television, and full use of the center's kitchen.

The Visitation Center at St. James was developed as a cooperative effort between Neighborhood Houses, Family to Family, the Mo. Department of Social Services Children's Division-St. Louis City office with generous funding from the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Visitation Centers housed in the community have become a proven vehicle to help reunite families where their children are in foster care.

The success of the Visitation Center has encouraged Neighborhood Houses to provide more services to children in foster care. Last February they offered Respite Care to foster parents. The foster parents had four well-deserved hours of "me" time while their foster children had dinner, games, crafts, and karaoke at the Visitation Center.

Neighborhood Houses continues to look for new and innovative ways to work with families in foster care and partner with agencies to help lower the number of children in out-of-home placement. For information on Neighborhood houses' programs, please contact Roxanne Crawford, Director of Programs, at 314-383-1733.



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Children Enjoy Christmas Visitation with Parents at NaNa's House

The toys were a dream come true for any youngster, Hana Montana dolls, computers, new clothes, you name it. The Safety Department of St. Louis University made this year's Christmas gifts spectacular for foster children visiting their parents at the Family Visitation Center at NaNas House in the Dutchtown/Gravois Park Neighborhoods. Despite the wonderful gifts, the smiles on childrens' faces were just as bright for their parents who came to visit them.

The Visitation Center at NaNas House (Not Alone-Not Afraid) began just a year ago in the Dutchtown and Gravois Park neighborhoods. Children who are in foster care can meet their parents and visit with them in a private, comfortable, and non-threatening setting. This is a partnership between Family to Family, the St. Louis City Office of the Children's Division, the St. Louis Family and Community Partnership, with funding provided by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

When Magnificat Center opened NaNas House in 2002 it provided a special place for children to come after school to participate in after school programs or to receive respite care when their families were in crisis. Founder Erin Weyerich met children in the neighborhood who woke up alone in the morning, dressed themselves in whatever clothing was available and cried when they arrived late at school. They cried because they were hungry and they had missed the free breakfast that many schools serve.

For many of the neighborhood children the only nourishing food they would receive that day would be eaten at school. Children weary from the stress of a chaotic home life were falling asleep at their desks and on the school playgrounds. Punishing them for arriving late or falling asleep only added to their pent up anger and rage.

Erin believes and research shows that communities with high rates of poverty have significantly higher rates of neglect. Mothers caught in this cycle suffer from low self-esteem, are less able to communicate lovingly and warmly with their children and they are less knowledgeable about appropriate child development. They report more bad conduct, socialized aggression and attention problems in their children.

NaNas House provides a warm, safe place for children both those who reside in their parents homes and those in foster care. Volunteers are there to welcome and support children and their parents and help the parents locate resources they need to provide a safe and loving home. For more information or to volunteer visit the website at www.nanashouse.org or call 314-771-6506.

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Articles appreciated and welcome.

Officers:

Dr. Jerry Dunn and Rev. Keith Kisart, Co-Chairs
Joan Garrison...Secretary
Mike Fitzgerald...Treasurer
Tena Thompson...Nominating Committee Chair

Many thanks to Kids Hope United for postage and printing for the newsletter for the year 2008. A Big Thank You to pastor Kathleen Wilder for her generous contribution.



St. Louis Children's Agenda

The St. Louis Family & Community Partnership is an initiative of the St. Louis Metropolitan Children's Agenda.

Here's something you should know:

The majority of sudden, unexpected infant deaths are preventable.

The Problem:

In Missouri and the United States, the majority of sudden, unexpected infant deaths from SIDS, suffocation and cause undetermined are related to an unsafe sleep environment.

For example, from 2002-2004, 93% of sudden, unexpected infant deaths in the St. Louis Region were related to an unsafe sleep environment. (St. Louis Safe Sleep Task Force)

What are "unsafe sleep arrangements?"

Unsafe sleep arrangements include any sleep surface not designed for infants, sleeping with head or face covered, and bedsharing with adults or children.

What is "safe sleep?"

Infants should be placed on their back for every sleep.

Use only a firm sleep surface in a safety approved crib, bassinet or cradle (no adult beds, couches, waterbeds, or any surface not designed for infants).

Remove all fluffy and loose bedding from the sleep area; use a bottom sheet and no blanket; no pillows or wedges.

Bedsharing during sleep is hazardous for infants.

A separate but proximate sleeping environment is recommended, such as a separate crib in the parents' bedroom.

Assure that all others caring for the infant (child care providers, relatives, friends, babysitters) are aware of these recommendations.

What groups are at higher risk?

- Prematurity (less than 37 weeks gestation)
- Low birth weight (< 5 lbs.)
- Less than 18 months between births
- Mother younger than 18
- African American infants (2x greater risk)
- Prenatal smoking/exposure to second-hand smoke
- Multiples birth
- Male gender
- No prenatal care

How can this be prevented? What are the resources?

Safe Sleep brochure: "Six steps to make your baby's crib safe" from

Children's Trust Fund www.ctf4kids.org

Referrals for a crib from The Safe Crib Project or more information, contact:

SIDS Resources, Inc.....Call: 314-822-2323 or 800-421-3511

Visit www.sidsresources.org for an order form for safe sleep

resources.

Referrals to the St. Louis Crisis Nursery for cribs and other crisis services, call Central Nursery Helpline: 314-768-3201. Visit:

www.crisisnurserykids.com





The Link between Animal Cruelty & Violence against Humans

By: Suzanne K. Gassner
Director of Education
Humane Society of Missouri

Cruelty to animals is never a harmless act. Margaret Mead, the noted anthropologist made the statement “The worse thing that can happen to a child is to be cruel to an animal and get away with it.” How wise, for if the cruelty is not addressed it becomes an accepted behavior and will be repeated. This repetition can lead to a path of cruelty that escalates to people as well.

Evidence of the Link:

Study after study proves that there is a link between animal cruelty and violence against humans. It has been documented that young people who are cruel to animals are 5 times more likely to be aggressive toward humans. Most violent offenders in prisons showed signs of aggression when they were young – and often their first victims were animals. These young people practice with animals and progress to violence against people, and sometimes they are practicing their own suicides.

Well-respected organizations agree that the link exists as well. The FBI identifies animal cruelty as a juvenile behavior associated with increasingly violent behavior. The American Psychiatric Association identifies animal cruelty as one of the diagnostic criteria of conduct disorder in children as young as age 8. As children age, conduct disorder typically develops into antisocial personality disorder, a disorder that is a characteristic of serial killers.

Animal cruelty, whether it's committed by an adult or child in the home, often means that violence is occurring in that family. In a survey of pet-owning families who were clients of New Jersey's Division of Youth and Family Services for child abuse, animal abuse occurred in 88% of the families. In two-thirds of these cases, the abusive parent had injured or killed a pet; in the remaining cases, children were the animal abusers.

Reasons that People are Cruel to Animals:

Animal abuse is used by adults in violent families to intimidate, silence, and punish people. It is also used to prevent people from leaving, coerce people to return, or as revenge for leaving.

If children are the abusers, animal abuse is used to mimic abuse that the child has suffered; to spare oneself or gain the respect of the abusive adult or to practice future violence against others or themselves.

The bottom line is that people who are cruel to animals all have one thing in common – they are cruel to animals in order to hurt, control, or influence other people in some way.

Intervention & Prevention - Humane Society of Missouri Programs:

The Humane Society of Missouri recognizes that animal cruelty is a community problem that is linked to violence against humans. The Education Department and Rescues and Investigations Department have teamed up to offer several programs to inform the community about the link, including:

Web of Cruelty: This program is offered to case workers from Children's Services, social workers, staff of the Family Court, police officers, attorneys, and first responders. It educates participants about the link and offers suggestions about ways that community agencies can work together to report and combat this problem.

Power of Compassion: This program is designed for police officers. It educates them about the link, reasons that it is important to investigate complaints of animal cruelty, and how to respond to acts of animal cruelty.

Animal Welfare & the Law: This program is designed for law enforcement and offers an in-depth discussion of Animal Care and Control laws in the state of Missouri.

Canine CPR & First Aid: This program offers an introductory look at animal cruelty and human violence. It teaches basic first aid and life support for injured animals.

The Humane Society of Missouri will continue to address the issues related to animal cruelty in our community and tirelessly works toward the day that everyone recognizes the importance of this issue.

UPCOMING EVENTS

SLFCP Council Meetings...9:00am...VCR

1/16/08
2/20/08
3/19/08
4/16/09

Executive Committee...9:00am...VCR

2/13/08
3/12/08
4/9/09

Building Community Partnerships Work Group-1:30-3:00pm...VCR

1/11/08
2/08/08
3/14/08

Strengthening Families Work Group: Tuesday, 1/22, 9:15 am at CDCA

Team Practice Review Work Group

2/1/08
3/7/08
4/4/08

Recruitment –Training and Support...9-11-Harris-Stowe University SWB Library

1/28/08
2/25/08
3/17/08

Self-Evaluation-Prince Hall, Conference Rm. #1, CD, 2nd Floor-9:00am

1/18/08

Communication Work Group:

1/15/08...1-2:30pm...VCR
2/21/08...2:00pm-S.Broadway
3/20/08...2:00pm-S.Broadway
4/17/08...2:00pm-S.Broadway



ST LOUIS FAMILY AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

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