

# Keeping children safe

## Four Sites Launch Community Partnerships

### PROTECTING CHILDREN

- ▶ A mother calls the child abuse hotline, after conferring with her family therapist, because in a heated argument with her 12-year-old son, she lost her temper, picked up a dish towel, and snapped it at him—leaving a mark on his face.
- ▶ A teacher reports a preschooler with a severe ear infection. The child's mother has not been able to take her to the doctor. A visit to the home reveals that a disabled infant is not being fed properly and is losing weight.
- ▶ A report of a bruise on a seven-year-old boy is added to a case record that reads like an encyclopedia of child maltreatment—reports of a cigarette burn and other marks, children getting hold of a knife and prescription drugs. The record also documents an array of services, tried and failed, from homemakers to foster care.

THESE THREE CASES illustrate the range of situations reported to the child protective service (CPS) system. From the "There but for the grace of God go I" to the "I can't sleep at night worrying about this family" cases, CPS is expected to keep children safe.

We've come a long way since 1875 when a neighbor in New York City had to call the American Society to Prevent Cruelty to Animals to get someone to intervene on behalf of an abused child. Awareness of child abuse has grown dramatically, and there is universal access to child protective services. But there is a growing consensus across the country that CPS isn't effective enough, that we need to change the way we protect children.

CPS agencies are flooded with reports. In 1994, over three million children were reported nationally; one million of these reports were confirmed. More than 1,200 children died as a result of maltreatment. Few systems have the capacity to respond appropriately to the variety of situations they see. CPS is often viewed as adversarial towards families and isolated from other community resources. The system is criticized for being overzealous—investigating and labeling parents for minor transgressions. And, at the same time, it is criticized for being callous—leaving children in jeopardy.

### COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

In 1995, The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation awarded grants to four cities to fundamentally change the way they address the problem of child abuse and neglect. The four sites—Cedar Rapids, Iowa; Jacksonville, Florida; Louisville, Kentucky; and St. Louis, Missouri—are committed to developing Community Partnerships for Protecting Children. The mission of the Partnerships is to keep children safe, strengthen families, and increase community participation in child protection. (CONTINUED ON 4)

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# From Investigation to Assessment in Iowa

IOWA IS CHANGING the way it responds to reports of child abuse and neglect. The state is piloting an assessment approach that places less emphasis on a specific incident and more on the family's situation.

The change was prompted by criticism from a variety of voices. Outspoken parents felt victimized by a system that labeled them perpetrators. Mandatory reporters felt that after making the report they were left out of efforts to ensure a child's safety. Child protective services workers, supervisors, and policy makers found it difficult to defend the traditional system.

Diane Wyckoff, a CPS supervisor with 25 years experience, says, "Many workers were frustrated by the intense attention to whether the case was founded or unfounded. In some situations, you can address the incident, but miss what is going on with the family overall. If we look at the needs of families more broadly, we can do more to make sure children are safe."

Iowa's new approach is one of several efforts by states to move towards a more flexible response to child maltreatment. Florida and Missouri have already implemented changes in child protection investigations. In Missouri, five areas of the state are using a dual track system: investigations for high risk cases requiring court or police involvement, and a less intrusive assessment for the majority of lower-risk families. Florida established a statewide dual track system in 1993. In October 1995, Florida implemented new CPS reform legislation, moving from a dual track response to an assessment and service response for all families. And, Florida no longer classifies cases or maintains a registry.

## NEW LEGISLATION IN IOWA

In 1994, Iowa's legislators set up a Child Protection Task Force to review and revise the system. Based on the Task Force's recommendations, the legislature passed a law in 1995 requiring that a new assessment approach be tried. The law also narrowed the criteria for placing parents on the central registry, limiting the registry's use to "significant" incidents of maltreatment.

On December 1, 1995, Iowa's assessment program began in five sites, including Cedar Rapids. "Our goal," says Marno Cook, state CPS program manager, "is to de-emphasize the reported incident, though we will still identify who did what to whom. But now there will be greater emphasis on identifying the family's

strengths and concerns, and developing a plan of action with the family."

"These plans," explains Cook, "will range from nothing needed to development of informal supports, to community services, to public agency services, to family court involvement, to criminal court cases. For many families there will be a mix of responses at several different levels."

## A TOOLBOX OF ASSESSMENTS

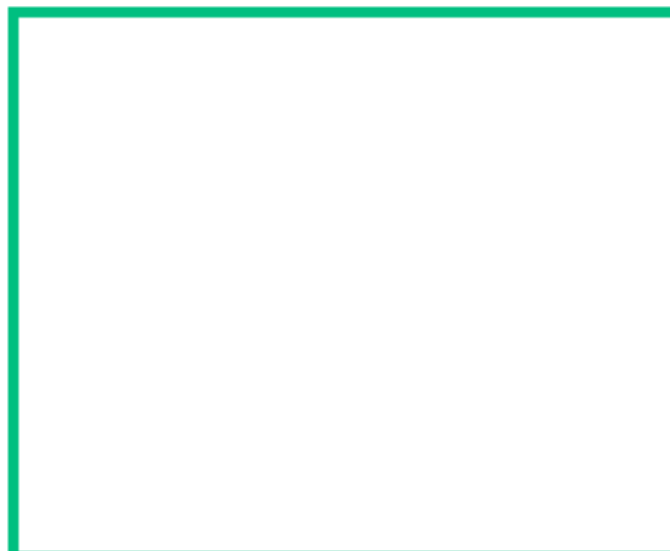
Ensuring child safety continues to be the paramount concern of assessors, and they still address the specific allegation of maltreatment that prompted the report. However, assessors also work with families to evaluate their overall situation. In Cedar Rapids, child protection assessors are trained to use various types of assessments. The idea is that each assessor has a "toolbox" and can use those tools that are appropriate for the situation. This approach builds on Iowa's long-standing commitment to using family-centered services throughout its child welfare system.

What's in the assessors' toolbox? One tool called **Sequencing of Behavior** asks families to examine what started the problem, what happened next, then next, to identify patterns and opportunities to intervene in the chain of events. The **Hierarchy of Power** is a family systems assessment that looks at who has the power to do what in a specific family. In some cases, assessors

may work with families to draw **Genograms** (family trees) and **Eco-maps** (networks that show sources of support and stress). And, there are a variety of **checklists** addressing topics related to child safety such as the physical condition of the home, drug and alcohol use, parental relationships, and so on.

## NEW PARTNERSHIPS

Dan Ciha, protective services specialist, is particularly excited about plans for Cedar Rapids' assessors to meet daily to discuss select cases. "In the past, investigators had to hold information very close to their vests, often to their detriment. This regular review process will open up the assessment for other staff to give input, ideas, and suggestions." For example, assessors are using the meeting to discuss families who have been reported to CPS before. Ciha hopes that eventually such reviews will include com-



Children play at the Brownstone Family Resource Center in Cedar Rapids.

## Key differences between investigations and assessments of child abuse allegations in Iowa:

INVESTIGATIONS	ASSESSMENTS
Required observation of the child within one hour of report if an immediate threat to the child exists.	Same.
Required observation of the child within 24 hours of report unless the perpetrator clearly did not have access to the child, in which case observation had to occur in four days.	In most cases, there must be an observation of the child within 72 hours of receipt of the report but generally observation will occur within 24 hours.
Main focus was on the alleged incident of a abuse or neglect.	Focus is on assessment of the family situation, including the alleged incident.
Two written reports were required — one due in four workdays, the other in ten workdays.	One written report is required, due in 21 calendar days.
If abuse has occurred based on a preponderance of evidence, the information is placed on the central child abuse registry.	Only cases in which the abuse is considered to be significant result in placement on the central child abuse registry.
All founded reports remain on the registry for ten years.	Significant incidents that are placed on the registry remain for ten years.
Unfounded cases are expunged. Undetermined cases remain on the registry for 1 year.	All cases that are not placed immediately on the registry are maintained as open or closed service files.
All written reports are sent to the county attorney and juvenile court.	Only written summaries in which the county attorney's or juvenile court's assistance is sought are sent.

Source: Iowa Department of Human Services

informed about the new legislation, the Department of Human Services held public forums, distributed brochures, and is developing additional public education materials. Linn County sent out a newsletter, *Mandatory Voices*, to answer questions about the assessment approach. CPS staff plan to work more closely with mandatory reporters, enlisting their help and advice, and building relationships that recognize and capitalize on the role reporters can play in supporting families and safeguarding chil-

team and will work in collaboration with local providers and community representatives.

But, what folks in Iowa are most excited about is "the opportunity to work **with** families, instead of 'doing to them'." says Wyckoff. "We don't expect families to look forward to having us come to their door," says Ciha, "but we do hope that the process will not be fraught with negative emotions and that families will feel that there are people who can help them solve their problems." ©

## Other Work on Assessment

*ASSESSMENT IS A COMPLICATED AND CRITICAL PART of providing community-based services and supports to families. There are a number of other activities, related to assessment, already underway including:*

**The Child Welfare League of America** is documenting the kinds of assessment tools currently in use and is analyzing what's useful and what's needed to make assessment more effective.

**Home, Safe**, a new organization founded by Jill Kinney is developing training materials and workshops on the interaction between the helper and the family, including ways to use the assessment process to enhance people's motivation to change.

**The Family Violence Prevention Fund** is designing a training curriculum for CPS workers that helps them recognize, assess, and respond to families experiencing domestic violence and child abuse.

## Four Sites Launch Community Partnerships

(CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE)

### PROFILES OF THE FOUR SITES

	Total Population	Population of Target Neighborhoods	Percent of Child Abuse/Neglect Reports from Target Neighborhoods	Problematic Indicators in Target Neighborhoods	Neighborhood-based Services
<b>Jacksonville, Florida</b>	700,000	108,000	24%	Accounts for one-third of city's births to teen mothers and half of newborns exposed to drugs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full-Service Schools</li> <li>• Healthy Families home visiting program</li> </ul>
<b>Jefferson County, (Louisville) Kentucky</b>	685,000	35,000	12%	One-third of families, and more than half of children live below poverty level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Neighborhood Place Ujiri</li> <li>• School-based resource and referral centers</li> </ul>
<b>St. Louis, Missouri</b>	400,000	24,000	8.6% of children are reported to CPS (compared to 3.3% for St. Louis)	Thirty-six percent of the population live below the poverty line	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sigel Education Center designated by state as a C Community site with funds to develop school-linked services</li> </ul>
<b>Cedar Rapids, Iowa</b>	175,000	10,000	27%	Half of the population has an income below \$10,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family Resource Centers</li> <li>• Patch Program</li> </ul>

TO ACHIEVE SUCH AMBITIOUS GOALS, THE SITES ARE WORKING TO:

- ▶ Change the CPS response to families, moving away from a "one-size-fits all" investigation to a response that is appropriate to the variety of situations that CPS sees.
- ▶ Develop and expand neighborhood-based resources to help families keep their children safe in their own homes and to make sure that support is available before a problem turns into a crisis.
- ▶ Involve more people and create new ways for government, nonprofits, and citizens to work together so local organizations, community leaders, and neighbors share responsibility for children's safety, instead of the CPS agency alone.

In each city, specific neighborhoods have been selected as the initial site for the Community Partnership. All of the sites are linking their Partnerships to other, even more comprehensive efforts to improve community services for families and children. And each site has established a steering committee with responsibility for oversight of the Partnership. The make-up of the committees varies somewhat from site to site, but generally includes representatives from local nonprofits, schools, health providers, law enforcement, neighborhood organizations, and state and local government.

**Warm hugs at a Head Start Center in Iowa**

### JACKSONVILLE (DUVAL COUNTY), FLORIDA

Florida has been in the forefront nationally in its efforts to reform CPS. It was the first state to pass legislation creating a dual track system with a **family service response** for lower-risk cases as an alternative to investigation. After two years of experience, Florida has revised its law and is now using assessments for all reports. Florida has also **eliminated its classification system** and will no longer label perpetrators or maintain a registry. Jacksonville's Community Partnership builds on a variety of activities already underway to improve outcomes for children including full-services schools that provide a range of supports and resources for families and a newly created Children's Commission that coordinates city-funded family services and spearheads prevention efforts. To make child protection more community-based, CPS workers will be outstationed in full-services schools. Families screened out as inappropriate for CPS will now be referred to a 24-hour **resource and referral hotline** so they can access help for problems before they require a formal CPS response. To increase community involvement in child protection, Jacksonville will expand the use of the **Community Support Agreement**, a contract that asks concerned individuals to assist families reported to CPS. And through public education strategies, Jacksonville's Partnership intends to spread the word about voluntary services available to families.

### CEDAR RAPIDS (LINN COUNTY), IOWA

For the past several years, public and private agencies in Cedar Rapids have been working together to develop neighborhood-based supports for families, including **family resource centers** and community-based child protection services. As part of the state's Decategorization effort, the county is able to pool categorical funding for child and family services and use the funds more flexibly to support innovative, early intervention services. Cedar Rapids' Partnership will expand the **Patch project**, which targets CPS to a specific neighborhood and stations CPS staff in family resource centers where they work in a team with other local resources. Through frequent and informal contact with families, the Patch team can more closely monitor the safety of children known to CPS and can help other families solve problems that if left unresolved could put children at risk of abuse or neglect. In accordance with recent legislation, Cedar Rapids is one of five sites to pilot an **assessment approach** that changes the way public agency staff respond to families reported to CPS. As part of the Partnership, newly hired **family support workers** will assist families on a range of issues—parenting and child development, housing, health, education, employment—to improve their well-being and increase child safety. These workers will also recruit mentor families, called neighborhood partners, to provide support and advice to other families and promote community activities. Cedar Rapids will hire a new **data analyst** who will work with program and policy staff to establish outcomes, track progress, and make use of new technologies.

### LOUISVILLE (JEFFERSON COUNTY), KENTUCKY

In Louisville, education reform and a commitment to improving family services have galvanized changes in the human services system. A collaboration of 20 public and private agencies have developed **Neighborhood Places**, community-based centers that house staff from income support, child protection, health, employment, and other services for local families. Neighborhood Place Ujima, the second of eight planned sites, opened its doors in December 1995 and is the hub for the Community Partnership. At Neighborhood Place Ujima, the Department of Social Services (DSS) will develop **safety strategies specifically for children under five** years old to be used in investigating and serving families whose cases involve serious injuries or neglect. DSS staff will provide training to local agencies on child protection and will identify mentor families who can provide support to others. To **reduce educational neglect cases** referred to DSS, the Education Connection project will be implemented at Ujima. Targeting elementary school children with high rates of absenteeism, school and DSS staff will conduct joint home visits, complete an assessment, and devise a service plan. Jefferson County will implement a **court diversion project** that will involve prosecutors, attorneys, DSS workers, law guardians, service providers, and families in developing plans to ensure safety and connect families to neighborhood supports that meet their needs.

### ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI

In St. Louis, the Community Partnership will bring together state efforts to reform CPS and local efforts to increase child safety. Missouri, the second state in the country to pass CPS reform legislation, **limits investigations** to cases requiring police involvement and conducts family assessments for all other situations in select sights. The law also mandates that the state's Division of Family Services (DFS) partner with communities to develop a local response to families' needs. St. Louis' Community Partnership site is the **Sigel Education Center**, a school-based community center governed by a local council made up of parents, students, service providers, and public officials. DFS, Sigel center, and its community partners will work together to target sections of the neighborhood that require a **heightened protective response**. This will include stationing DFS staff at Sigel, creating common data collection and tracking systems, and providing a rapid response when a family shows signs of needing additional help to ensure a child's safety. Other local agencies, such as day care centers, will **conduct joint assessments** with CPS staff, thus bringing the resources, expertise, and commitment of other community resources to the task of protecting children. A CPS worker at Sigel will focus on area schools to **divert educational neglect** and truancy cases from becoming CPS reports. Sigel will **expand community resources** in a number of ways—hiring Neighborhood Resource Specialists to conduct outreach activities, mapping formal and informal community resources, and converting a distressed building into a family resource center. To encourage neighborhood associations, churches, and other groups to become more involved in child safety, a **Community Innovation Fund** will provide seed money to grassroots efforts that increase informal supports and activities for neighborhood families. ©

# Florida Creates a Community Compact

TWO BROTHERS, AGE 12 and 13, are reported to Florida's child protective services. Their mother hit them with an extension cord leaving welt marks on their buttocks and upper thighs. During the assessment conducted by the Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services (HRS), the mother acknowledges that her discipline of the boys was excessive and agrees to attend parenting classes, with her husband, to learn better ways to manage the boys' behavior.

But HRS's intervention with this family is not limited to formal classes and supervision. HRS has created a "Community Support Agreement" to enlist the help of relatives, neighbors, and friends to ensure children's safety and reduce reliance on the formal CPS system. In this situation, the mother's brother is close to the family and concerned about the boys. This uncle and parents agree to sign a Community Support Agreement stating that the uncle will visit the boys frequently, check on the parents' progress with parenting classes, monitor the family's situation, and report any problems to HRS.

The Community Support Agreement is signed by the parents or legal guardian and the community volunteer.

Here's what it says:

## COMMUNITY SUPPORT AGREEMENT

This Community Support Agreement is an understanding between the Children and Family Services Program, the community volunteer and the child or children and their family. The purpose of this agreement is to encourage and foster creative community involvement with children and families in need of services, while providing community volunteers involved with a child or family an outline of the limitations both legally and morally necessary to protect the interest of the child and the family. It is hoped that community involvement will provide an opportunity for this family to receive information and services in the community which will be beneficial. This agreement will allow for minimal involvement by the Children and Family Program and increased responsibility on the parent or legal guardian to ensure the on-going safety of the child or children with support from the community.

The following is an outline of the legal and moral acknowledgments that \_\_\_\_\_ community volunteer for the \_\_\_\_\_ family agrees shall be followed:

1. To abide by and be governed by the Florida Statutes chapters 39.411 and 415.51 which relate to confidentiality. I will not reveal information about this family to anyone other than an appropriate representative of the Children and Family Services Program and I understand that failure to keep this information confidential is against the law of the State of Florida.
2. To see the child or children face to face at least \_\_\_\_\_ to make sure the child or children are safe.
3. To see or contact the parent or legal guardian at least \_\_\_\_\_ to see if they have any concerns or need specific assistance.
4. To provide feedback on the progress of services received or services which may be needed and to be supportive of this family in their efforts to meet their goals.
5. To obey the laws of the State of Florida and to report to the Florida Abuse Hotline Information System (1-800-962-2873) any suspicions that a child is at risk of harm due to abuse, neglect or abandonment.

As a party to this agreement, this family will abide by the conditions spelled out in this document and we will cooperate with the community volunteer and the Children and Family Services representative. We understand that this agreement is an attempt to minimize government involvement in our lives and that the Children and Family Services Program will do their best to support and help us to meet the goals we have identified. This family also understands that no one can force us to receive services and there is no assurance that specific services we may need as a family will be available.

# T.A. notes

TO INSPIRE, GUIDE, AND CHANGE the way children are protected from maltreatment, a variety of organizations have received Edna McConnell Clark Foundation support to develop new knowledge and provide technical assistance to various constituents and communities. Coordinated by the Center for the Study of Social Policy, technical assistance (TA) efforts have been organized into six "domains": strategy and accountability; frontline practice; community engagement and governance; child welfare policy and administration; financing; and communications. In each issue of *SafeKeeping*, we will provide brief information on one aspect of this work.

## ON THE FRONT LINES

### What's the Issue?

If you want to change the way children are protected from abuse and neglect, you have to change the way child protective services staff and other community workers interact directly with families. There is a need for much more information on innovative "frontline practice" for working with families in the child protective services (CPS) system. Information about innovations must reach not only public agencies, but also new partners—community organizations and citizen groups—that want to understand the nuts and bolts of new approaches to protecting children.

### Who's Doing the Work?

The **American Humane Association (AHA)**, the nation's oldest agency dedicated to protecting children from abuse and neglect, is identifying and studying frontline practices that link families, communities, and agencies together to protect children. "It has long been AHA's philosophy that communities are an essential partner in supporting families along with public and private agencies," says project director Karen Farestad. "This project builds on other work by AHA to help develop tools for communities which are working to make a collaborative philosophy a reality for their children and families."

### What's the Project?

Currently, AHA is examining two models: the **Patch program** and **Family Group Conference**. Both Patch and Family Group Conference recognize informal sources of support—extended family, neighbors, and local organizations such as churches, schools, and parent groups—and build on these resources that have often been overlooked by traditional CPS activity. The inspiration for both programs came from overseas. Patch originated in England. Family Group Conference began in New Zealand. Sites in Iowa and Pennsylvania are using the Patch model. Oregon uses family conferences, and counties within many states, including Vermont, Illinois, and California, are now preparing to implement them.

In the **Patch program**, CPS staff are assigned to a specific, small neighborhood (called a "patch" in England) that has a population of about 10,000 people. The Patch team is made up of workers from various agencies—including CPS, social services, health, housing—whatever combination best meets the needs of the patch area. The team works in partnership with local schools, churches, and other neighborhood organizations. Because Patch workers are out in the neighborhood, talking with residents, and involved in community activities, they can pick up signs of trouble early and more informally. So families can get help when they need it, without having to wait until there is a crisis that requires a formal report to the child protection system.

The **Family Group Conference** gives families the responsibility to make decisions about how to safeguard their children. When a child is identified as needing protection, all family members, professionals, and other people who are important to that family are invited to come together and share information regarding the child's situation. Then the family is left alone to discuss and decide on a plan that will keep the child safe. CPS workers coordinate the conference and work with the family to put the plan into action.

To learn about Patch and Family Group Conferences, AHA staff are visiting sites where these programs are in place, observing staff in action, talking with families, sitting in on training, meeting with public agency managers, and reading whatever written materials are available. Once the field research is complete, AHA will write a monograph describing and analyzing these new frontline practices and will develop training and technical assistance on each model.

### Want to Know More?

To find out what is happening in CPS reform across the country, AHA surveyed all fifty states and several national organizations to find out where Patch and Family Group Conference are being used and to uncover other innovative frontline practices. The results of the survey are now available.

*For more information on AHA's project or for copies of the survey contact: Nancy Coburn, Project Manager, American Humane Association, 63 Inverness Drive East, Englewood, CO 80112-5117, telephone number (303) 792-9900. ●*

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# Outlook

FROM THE EDNA MCCONNELL CLARK FOUNDATION

WE ARE DELIGHTED to present the first edition of *SafeKeeping*, the newsletter of the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation's initiative "Community Partnerships for Protecting Children." This quarterly newsletter, prepared by the Center for the Study of Social Policy, will be one way to share information about the exciting reforms occurring around the country—vital reforms in how we go about keeping children safe and strengthening families.

For the past dozen years, the Children's Program of the Clark Foundation has promoted intensive family preservation services as a necessary component of the child welfare continuum. We have sought to ensure that child protection staff have a full array of options and resources—beyond out-of-home placement and basic counseling—when making the often tough decisions involved in their work. We wanted families, too, to know that services existed to support their interest in staying intact and their efforts to learn, cope, and cohere. We have tried, more generally, to remind those involved in child protection and society at large that most parents want to be effective in caring for their children and can learn how to do so with the help of a range of services. In all of this, the Children's Program strives to counter a more recent trend that pits "child protection" against "family preservation," as if these were mutually exclusive categories with contrary goals. In fact, they make up the mutually necessary dual objectives of our common work in child welfare: very often (though of course not always) the best way to keep children safe is precisely by preserving and fortifying their families.

The appeal and efficacy of intensive family preservation can be read in the fact that today such services are available in more than 35 states, and 15 of these have statewide programs. We at the Foundation feel that intensive family preservation services are well established as a part of the continuum of essential services for families. We have therefore begun shifting our attention to a new, but closely related arena: reform of the child protective services system. In September 1994, the Board of Trustees approved development of a grant making strategy aimed at enhancing the ways in which professional protective services can be redesigned and elements of the community—public leadership, the private sector, local social organizations, interested citizens—can work together in partnership to protect children from abuse and neglect.

We are well aware of the difficult challenges of this agenda, but are approaching it with both carefully established goals and expectations and energetic enthusiasm. The Foundation has recently funded four local jurisdictions that we expect to pioneer new methods of child protection: Jacksonville, Florida; Cedar Rapids, Iowa; Louisville, Kentucky; St. Louis, Missouri. In each community, a "partnership for protecting children" will be developed, with a focus on: 1) assuring child safety through strong, flexible child protective practice; 2) providing a thoughtful, comprehensive, "customized" response to all reports of child abuse and neglect; and 3) wherever possible, diverting families from involvement with child protective services by securing community-based alternatives and by improving an early-stage helping capacity for at-risk families. This strategy is clearly in the formative stage, and we are approaching it very much in the spirit of learning—learning from the field, from the children and families, from the past endeavors of the Children's Program itself. We look forward to your continued interest, guidance, and support as we proceed with this important new direction.

Susan J. Notkin  
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