The State of Child Welfare in Arizona - A System on Overload

In Arizona, the factors that increase families’ risk for child abuse and neglect continue to rise. There is an ever-growing number of children living in poverty; family and domestic violence are on the rise; and more and more parents succumb to substance abuse as they try to cope with the stresses of daily life. All of these trends directly contribute to the disintegration of the family and the consequent intervention of Child Protective Services (CPS)/Foster Care into the lives of many Arizona children and families. The families involved in the CPS/Foster Care system are a microcosm of society in which these risk factors are frighteningly prevalent, and children are the most vulnerable victims in these tragic circumstances. The headlines tell the tale:

- two children found dead in a sewer after their mother had been referred to the state Child Protective Services six times;
- two toddlers, taken from their substance abusing natural parents and placed in the state’s custody, found beaten to death;
- four young boys, removed from the home of their neglectful parents, “molested” in foster care;
- an entire family burned to death, because they used candles to light their home after electric service had been disconnected for nonpayment.

These sad cases, and numerous other real life tragedies that never make the news except as cold statistics, confirm that the child welfare system in Arizona is in disarray and unable to protect the lives of many of the children under its authority.

Over the past four years, funding for Children’s Services - the CPS/Foster Care budget — has decreased by 13%. At the same time, children are removed from their homes and languish in shelter placements far longer than they have in the past, and far longer than diagnostic or treatment processes require, because there are not enough foster homes. Children are bounced into, out of, and around the foster care system. Caseworkers carry twice the case load recommended by nationally recognized child welfare experts. The incredible 24% annual rate of caseworker turnover in Maricopa County alone causes frequent discontinuity in care, a permanently inexperienced work force, and recurring training expenses. Foster care reimbursement rates have fallen further and further below the actual cost of raising a child. (It is encouraging that the Governor recommended and the legislature has approved an increase).

Yet, despite a plethora of problems, there are positive influences of committed individuals who keep the CPS/Foster Care system operating even under the most adverse conditions:

- Court-appointed special advocates diligently volunteer their time and energy to be the face-to-face advocates for abused and neglected children.
- Foster parents selflessly spend their own time and money to raise and nurture children whose own parents cannot or will not.
- Dedicated workers persevere in their low-paying, high-stress jobs, knowing their decisions can mean life or death for the vulnerable children they serve.
- Dedicated professionals in the medical, educational, social services and law enforcement communities, become the caretakers of these children.

These are the people who, despite an overwhelmed system, persist in working for the best interests of the children and families unfortunate enough to be involved in it. The CPS/Foster Care system is broken, but not hopelessly so, and it can be fixed with the right tools and commitment to get the job done. CAA, under the auspices of the Child Welfare Committee, chaired by former state senator, Jacque Steiner, has undertaken the task of developing and advocating for the blueprint by which systemic “fixes” can — and must — be made.

Child Welfare Action Agenda - 1995
CAA’s Child Welfare Committee has identified the following areas as this year’s focus.

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Commentary

For children's sake, let's find the common ground

The following is reprinted from the Phoenix Gazette 2/21/85

The November election clearly communicated the desire of Americans for a government that works for them, not on them; for a government that is close to their problems and concerns and not insulated on the banks of the Potomac. Listening only to well-heeled lobbyists; and for a government that can demonstrate that their hard earned tax dollars are put to use strengthening the country's human and financial capital, and not lining the pockets of the rich and influential.

The November election did not say that the federal budget should be used as a weapon to slash the foundation of child investments built painstakingly and incrementally over decades. Nor was the election a mandate to repeal assurances that government will continue to provide the help they need when threatened by severe deprivation, hunger, homelessness, abuse or neglect, illness, and disability.

The November election did not change the appalling reality that American children are more likely to be poor, drug-dependent, pregnant, murdered, or incarcerated than children in any other industrialized country.

The election did not change Arizona's shame that on critical indicators of child well-being such as childhood poverty, child death rates, incidence of teen pregnancies, juvenile crime arrest rates, and teen violent deaths, Arizona's children are in far worse shape than children in 36 other states.

And the election did not alter the trend that an increasing proportion of our children's lives will be empty, shunted, and distorted and they will lack the opportunity, knowledge and skills to be productive members of our communities.

And it is an illusion if we think that those in affluent communities can separate themselves physically and geographically, and insulate themselves, from the devastating results of these children's damaged lives.) In the words of a father who lost his son to a drive by shooting, "I raised my son right - I forgot about other people's sons.

To reverse these trends will be the toughest moral and political struggle of our lifetimes. It will require enormous commitment from political leaders in the private sector.

And, most important, it will require everyone of us to abandon ideologies and to forge the arrogance of power that extends far beyond Washington, so we can consider alternative points of view and meaningful compromise. For while the political winds have shifted, the survival of our future—our children—must remain our paramount concern.

No one will deny that strong, capable, resourceful families are the "sine qua non" of improving outcomes for children.

There is no institution, program, or policy that can successfully rear kids in the absence of strong families. We must remember that every abused child, juvenile delinquent, gang member, and drive by shooter, grown up in someone's house, in someone's neighborhood, and as parents and adults each are responsible for them.

However, we must also remember the reality of a large and growing number of today's families - single parent families in which one-quarter of our children live; families of school-age children in which three-quarters of mothers work outside the home; families that (unlike those in every other Western industrialized nation) are not guaranteed health care for their children and sufficient income supports to prevent them from falling into poverty; families struggling to make ends meet in the new "global economy," and families that are living in devastated neighborhoods plagued with drugs, unemployment and violence.

To dismantle child survival programs (AFDC, food stamps, childcare, foster care and adoption assistance, child nutrition, SS, and child support enforcement) that help such families stay afloat—as Congress is currently considering—is irresponsible and will happen only at our collective peril.

Neither state nor local governments, nor private charities have shown the ability or inclination to adequately address the problems these programs deal with. And to think that the Arizona legislature will be able to make up for withdrawn federal family supports with state dollars is completely naive. Poor children and families have never won in the competition with powerful interests.

Change is necessary. A thoughtful debate about the role of government at all levels is long overdue. The deficit should be cut — carefully and deliberately. We know, though, that this will not happen with the political landscape, and bumper sticker solutions will not work.

We must engage our political leaders in a responsible and not reckless process of change. Republican and Democratic leaders have worked together for over fifty years to weave a safety net that offers children and struggling families a lifetime of support and protection. We must challenge them to provide solid evidence that the new proposals currently being debated will result in more children growing up healthy, educated, and prepared and able to work and contribute to the future.

And finally, we must impress upon them that we appreciate that in the months ahead there will be a lot of honest disagreement, and despite the enormous temptation to revert to ideological purity, that the real winners are going to be the ones who find and ride the common ground.

Carol Tapani, Executive Director
Children's Action Alliance

Board Profiles

Since its beginning in 1988, the Board of Directors of Children's Action Alliance has played a vital role in supporting and defining CAA's mission and work. We want you to know our Board members as well and continue this feature to introduce them to you.

Eldon Kramer
Eldon Kramer, President of the Board of Directors of Children's Action Alliance for the past three years, strives to make a difference for children, and encourages other business leaders to do the same.

Eldon is director of communications and community affairs for Honeywell Space and Aviation Control Organization, and has been with them since 1986. Eldon heads the communications division, with responsibilities for advertising and sales promotion, trade show and special events, employee communications, public relations, and public affairs.

In addition to his involvement with CAA, Eldon is a member of the Phoenix Communications Alliance, past chair of the Valley Forward Association, and president emeritus of Arizona Women's Education and Employment.

Further expanding his commitment to children, Eldon in 1994 chaired the United Way's Kids Plus Campaign Committee and was awarded Honeywell's Community Service Award.

Eldon Kramer did not miss the words about the need for investment in children, and believes children's issues ought to be a top priority for the Legislature and policy makers.

His quality of leadership on the CAA board has been unparalleled and we are deeply grateful for his work on our behalf.

Jacque Steiner
Jacque Steiner has extensive experience in education and public service, and brings leadership energy and a far-reaching vision for children to the CAA Board of Directors.

Jacque is presently Executive Director of Arizona School-to-Work Partnership. She served fourteen years in the Arizona State Legislature where she chaired the Senate Education and Human Resources Committees.

As a member of the CAA board, Jacque chairs the Child Welfare Committee and was former chair of the Advisory Task Force on Runaway and Homeless Youth. In 1991 Jacque was honored with the Florence Scovel Child Advocacy Award, given annually to an outstanding individual who has demonstrated leadership in advocacy for children.

Jacque is involved in numerous civic organizations and committees. She is a member of the Arizona Historical Society, Arizona Women's Forum and Arizona Caution-Pave Golf Scott's Board.

A graduate of Stanford University, Jacque's passion for children's issues has led her to a distinguished career dedicated to improving the lives of Arizona's children and families.

New CAA Staff Members

Jannah Scott joined the staff of CAA in September 1999 as Senior Program Associate for Child Welfare. Jannah comes to CAA with a background in planning, policy and administration in public health and education. She brings professional skills in communication, research, policy analysis and planning to her position. She has been known to be "quick study," and in this position, that has been her saving grace.

Mark Barnes has come to CAA as a research analyst in conjunction with our "Fiscal Project." He recently completed a master's degree in economics at the University of Arizona. In 1993 he participated in the Governor's internship program and worked with the Arizona Department of Water Resources. Mark grew up in Phoenix and is delighted to be working on public policy issues that affect his home state.
Casino Night

The Phoenix Chapter of the American Marketing Association (AMA) held its 1995 Casino Night fundraiser on February 25, 1995 to benefit Children's Action Alliance. Held at Robb's & Stucky Furniture Store, the evening included jazz entertainment, casino games, and silent auction. Period costumes and great music set the mood for a fun-filled evening. Our deepest thanks to AMA for sponsoring this event for the benefit of Arizona's children.

Balancing Taxes

(This article appeared in the March 1995 issue of Strengthening Families, a publication of CAA's Fiscal Project Funded by a grant from the Ford Foundation)

We hear a lot about balancing government budgets, but we rarely hear about the need to balance our taxes. In fact, the kind of balance that's possible can have as much impact on Arizona's families as balancing budgets.

Government revenues come from three major sources: income taxes, property taxes, and sales taxes. Each of these has advantages and each has serious flaws. That's why most public finance experts are inclined to use all three — to keep the flaws from running out of control. Each tax tends to balance the others as part of a system.

As you listen to public testimony, radio talk shows, and academic arguments, it becomes clear that each major tax has different strengths and different weaknesses. Income taxes can be complicated. Low-income families have an equal or greater impact on the rich as on the poor, but they also get complicated over time with high compliance costs for taxpayers and the potential to distort earnings and investment decisions.

Property taxes tend to be relatively stable with low compliance costs for individual taxpayers, but they may be an unfair burden for people whose property value grows faster than their income and they tend to be more complicated for businesses.

Sales taxes are spread out so that the pain of taxation isn't quite so visible and they may be paid by consumers as well as businesses. The trouble is that they don't keep up with a changing economy and they take a bigger proportion of income from low and middle income families; a tax system without income taxes is much harder on low and middle income families; a tax system without property taxes is much more volatile; and a tax system without sales taxes gives visitors a free ride.

If we don't pay attention to balancing our taxes, Arizona families will surely bear the negative consequences.

CHILDREN FIRST: Health Care for Arizona's Children and Families

In November 1994, the people of Arizona passed an initiative measure entitled "Tobacco Tax and Health Care Act." According to the initiative, 70% of the revenues, estimated to equal about $65 billion over 20 years, was to go to the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS) be used for "health care services to persons who cannot afford the services and for whom there would otherwise be no coverage." The initiative specifically mentioned low-income children.

Since the passage of the initiative, there has been much discussion about how the funds designated for AHCCCS should be used. We believe that these funds should be devoted to providing health care coverage for all Arizona's children of working families whose incomes fall below 140% of federal poverty ($17,256 for a family of 3).

This would require $3.1 billion of the tobacco tax funds and provide services for 88,336 additional children, 0-18 years of age.

Given the present debate over welfare reform, the need for preventive and primary health care coverage is greater than ever. There is no more important contribution to ensuring that parents can work than health care coverage for all Arizona's children.

By the time you read this, decisions about the use of the tobacco tax monies may have been made. However, CAA is committed to continue, for however long it takes, to work toward health care coverage for all of Arizona's children.

Rationales for Children First...

According to a report from the United States Department of the Treasury in 1994, 117,000 of Arizona's children were uninsured in 1994. Spending the new tobacco tax revenues to extend AHCCCS coverage to uninsured pregnant women and children would assure that the children of the working poor are linked to a continuous source of primary and preventive health care services, including immunizations, well-child care, and early intervention services that prevent them from becoming major and expensive.

The current AHCCCS system is a hedgehog of varying eligibility levels, with different criteria set for each level. It is confusing for families, and it provides very poor coverage for our children.

CHILDREN FIRST would simply and rationally solve this system.

A Penny Wise and a Pound Foolish...

Children are inexpensive—a bargain to insure. Based on AHCCCS capitation rates developed by the Joint Legislative Budget Committee (JLBC), the average cost of covering a child for one year is $1,093. This is only about 1/4 of the cost of covering an adult.

The benefits of providing preventive and primary health care for children far exceed the cost. Every $1 spent on childhood immunizations saves $10 in costs related to preventable diseases. The lifetime cost of caring for one infant who has been affected by German measles can run as high as $20,000. This year it is estimated that, based on national averages, Arizona's uninsured children 0-18 years of age will experience the following serious health problems which could require potentially expensive medical attention and follow-up:

- 3,510 will have asthma
- 9,345 will experience repeated ear infections.
- 11,270 will experience chronic health problems, including curvature of the spine, hearing problems, vision problems as well as bone and muscle problems.
- 6,100 will experience chronic medical conditions including epilepsy, diabetes and juvenile arthritis.
- 4,680 will experience acute, self-limited conditions including urinary tract infections.
- 2,730 children will develop diabetes at a higher level in their bones.
- 75 children will become infected with tuberculosis.
- 31,673 uninsured children will be treated for the first time.

CHILDREN FIRST is consistent with the purpose and spirit of Arizona's tobacco tax initiative, and it is the right thing to do for our children. For more information on CHILDREN FIRST, call Susan McClure Helmers at 266-0707.
CAA convenes network to respond to federal proposals

The U.S. Congress is now engaged in a historic debate about government's responsibility for the needs of our nation's poorest children and families and the role it plays in the health and well-being of their parents and others. Federal proposals being debated include those outlined in the "Contract With America" including the "Personal Responsibility Act," the defeated Balanced Budget Amendment, eliminating prior-vention funds in the already enacted federal crime bill, as well as proposals not in the initial "Contract" to block grant and cut AFDC, nutrition, child care and child abuse and neglect protection.

Leaders of the House of Representatives says over and over again that they want to move families from dependency to work and to cut bureaucracy. We agree with them. However, how will cutting child care assistance that enables parents to go to work every day help end dependency? How will children who are denied promised abuse or severe neglect grow up to contribute to the economy? How does leaving children unable to attend preschool or school because they have empty bellies improve the nation's future productivity?

In 1993, just 2 years before Arizona was 11% higher than the U.S. average. Other indicators of family crisis, such as violent deaths of nearly two percent of births to single teens, rank Arizona for worse than most states. Dismantling federal protections and safety net programs could result in even worse conditions.

As Congress debates the Personal Responsibility Act and proposals to block grant and reduce funding for AFDC, nutrition, child care and Foster Care, we are told by the Child Protection, we have asked our U.S. Representatives and Senators to keep the following front and center:

Children should not be punished for the actions of their parents. More than 333,000 Arizona children currently rely on AFDC. And 332,000 of them are Dependent Children (AFDC), the primary welfare program for poor children. Federal proposals currently being discussed would withdraw federal child care assistance to more than half of these children. It makes no sense for Arizona's poorest children to be denied their most basic needs solely because they were born out-of-wedlock, because their mother does not have an official paternity order (an Arizona Auditor General's report two years ago found that because the system was overwhelmed, there was a large backlog of cases waiting for a paternity to be established), because their mother needs more than 24 months of assistance over her lifetime, or because their mother was in prison assistance when they were conceived.

We must work to discourage children from being born out-of-wedlock. However, we do not believe that withdrawing the most basic subsistence to more than 50,000 Arizona children is an answer.

Hungry children cannot learn. More than 260,000 children in Arizona get their nutrition through food stamp programs. Since 243,000 low income children are fed or reduced-price school lunches in an amount that healthy and alert in school. More than 70,000 low income pregnant women, infants and young children receive WIC nutrition benefits to help children develop healthy and live. Almost 35,000 children are fed nutrition food every day while in child care during the Child and Adult Food Program. Black-granting and capping child nutrition programs will deprive many of these children the food and nutrition they need to learn, grow and thrive.

No reform of welfare programs will achieve its goals without good child care. Quality care helps families work, helps more families off welfare, and helps children start school ready to learn. While consolidating various federal child care programs may simplify eligibility and reduce bureaucracy, it makes no sense to reduce child care benefits for AFDC families while at the same time imposing additional work requirements. Families on AFDC, or working to move off of AFDC, need quality child care to become self sufficient. For low income working families, as child care subsidies are the key to their being able to continue to work.

Executive Branch' not making moves from welfare to work, and ensuring they continue to work, is critical that quality child care be increased rather than reduced. Block granting and reducing funding for child care will result in thousands of children losing access to child care and many parents therefore being forced to leave their jobs. Because entitlement programs are eliminated under the block grant proposals, child care for low income working families will most likely vanish.

Children need safe and constructive activities during non-school hours. We have learned through experience in both Phoenix and Tucson that after-school, weekend, recess and summer opportunities of children for children and youth help prevent youth crime and reduce school drop-out rates. Existing youth service programs in our communities do not reach thousands of young adolescents who live in low-income and rural areas. The youth crime prevention funding authorized by the federal crime bill will support such programs and should not be eliminated. Proposals in the Rescissions bill to completely eliminate summer jobs should be rejected.

We must not abandon abused and neglected children. The child welfare system in Arizona is already severely underfunded. Tragically, the unfortunate victims are those same vulnerable children the system is intended to serve. Proposals to cut funding for these programs should be defeated.

Over the past several years, state funding for services to abused and neglected children has declined by 13%. Meanwhile, the risk factors for child abuse and neglect, families in poverty, substance-abusing parents and family stressors continue to increase. The proposed Child Protection Block Grant would eliminate funding for services to abused and neglected children by 10%. In addition, proposals to increase the number of children with increased needs would be capped at specific spending levels. The proposal also calls for the repeal of federal assurances of adequate levels of child safety, protection and permanency assurance. Legal immigrants who follow the rules should not be abandoned. Most immigrants in Arizona pay taxes, work hard and give back more to our state and country than they receive in benefits. Federal proposals now being debated would cut legal immigrant families off from nutrition, income support, health, training programs and scores of other vital human services programs including those that help abused and neglected children.

CAA convenes Arizona Network for Fiscal Responsibility

CAA works primarily at the state level to improve the lives of children and families. However, given the potential impact of federal proposals, CAA called together more than 30 organizations and individuals with a history of addressing the needs of our state's vulnerable children and families to form Arizona Network for Fiscal Responsibility.

The group was formed as a "network" rather than a "committee" to be action-oriented concerning federal proposals. As a result of our first meeting, the Network is planning to find support for a professional poll to determine citizen opinions on these critical issues.

We have developed fact sheets on each of the proposals and established a fax alert system, so that information can be disseminated to organizations in a matter of minutes. CAA agreed to continue in the role of convenor while the Network devises an action plan. For further information about the Arizona Network for Fiscal Responsibility, please call Irene Jacobs at 266-0707.

Continued from cover

• Advocate for adequate appropriations in the State Budget for Children's Services.

The 1995-96 Governor's Budget Proposal, submitted earlier this month, called for a $4.7 million increase in the DES budget for Children's Services. Recommendations from the Joint Legislative Budget Committee was for $1 million, or $3.7 million less than what the Governor requested. CAA will advocate for passage of the proposals outlined in the Governor's budget and for other measures to reduce times of economic surplus, to shrinkage funding for services to children is not prudent.

• Advocate for increased oversight and accountability in the child protective services/foster care system by legislators and policy makers.

The sponsors Arizona State Representatives Scott Garrett and Freddie Hershberger and Senator Gary Richardson, HB2028 was introduced to consistently provide state policy makers with concise, meaningful data about the agency's performance. By monitoring trends in CPS/foster care, policy makers will be able to anticipate problems and craft solutions before they have tragic results and become too difficult and costly to handle.

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Yes, I want to support the work of Children's Action Alliance to improve the lives of children in Arizona.

Enclosed is my tax deductible contribution in the amount indicated. Please use it to ensure that all Arizona's children have access to good early care and education, health care, family support, and enter school ready to learn.

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Children’s Action Alliance (CAA), is a private, nonpartisan organization that works to make children's issues the subject of intense thought, debate and action by all policy and decision makers, the news media and the public. Through research, publications, media campaigns, public education, and advocacy, we focus attention on the need to build broad-based support for public and private investment in successful policies and programs that improve the lives of Arizona's children and families.

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