

Eye on Washington

What Are the Watchdogs for Children Planning for 2007? Part II

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In 2007, the people who advocate for children, their health and mental health are still at it. Interesting and important initiatives are underway. As mentioned in the last issue, it has actually taken two *Eye on Washington* columns to describe them for you. This is part II. At home, we have the Creating Parenting-Rich Communities Initiative, the Cradle to Prison Pipeline® Initiative, Services for Younger Grandparents Legislation, the new AFCARS Reports, and the new *Journal of Public Child Welfare* just to name a few.

Creating Parenting-Rich Communities Initiative

In 2003, the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) expanded on its 6-year successful partnership with the Prudential Foundation to form the Prudential Positive Parenting Initiative and launched a new 3-year, three-phase initiative to strengthen parents, children, and communities. Continued funding by the Prudential Foundation has extended this initiative through June 2007. Creating Parenting-Rich Communities is a multi-year project of CWLA, designed to develop resources, tools, and information parents and other leaders can use to assess their communities and bring about changes to improve the lives of children by supporting parents and caregivers. The parents may be birth-parents, adoptive parents, foster parents, or relatives raising young family members. Outcomes include a body of evidence-based tools and resources, including themes and messages and commitments from CWLA membership and national partners to help with implementation. National partners include the National Association of Counties, the National League of Cities, United Way of America, and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

With funding from the Prudential Foundation, the CWLA will work with parents, community leaders, and member agencies in pilot communities, providing both seed money and technical assistance. The messaging will help to develop public support for positive action steps. CWLA members will convene community partnerships, including key stakeholders, and prioritize

an action plan tailored to each community's assessed strengths and needs. The assessment process will identify the need for resources to help parents strengthen their social support networks as they parent children and youth of all ages.

According to CWLA, community efforts to become parenting-rich will vary nationwide. While one community may choose to address the needs of parents raising adolescents, another may focus on the needs of parents with infants or young children. In neighborhoods with more active child and youth services, the focus may shift to engaging the business community to generate financial support for local efforts or to sensitize political leaders to the needs and strengths of parents and the effect of their decisions on children and families. Creating parenting-rich communities will be an ongoing process that continues beyond Prudential's 3-year grant, resulting in new community norms that support a parenting-rich environment.

Additional copies of the parenting education curriculum materials will be printed and distributed, free of charge, to child care, Head Start, and other early childhood programs during the 3-year grant program. If you have any questions or would like more information about the Prudential Positive Parenting Program, contact 202/942-0324 or parenting@cwla.org.

Cradle to Prison Pipeline® Initiative

Poor and minority children face risks and disadvantages that often pull them into a "Cradle to Prison Pipeline." This Pipeline leads children to marginalized lives and premature deaths. Advocacy agencies like CDF work to break the Cradle to Prison Pipeline crisis by focusing resources to:

- Pull families out of *poverty*
- Get families *prenatal and health care*
- Expand access to and use of *early childhood education and development programs*
- Prevent *child abuse and neglect*

- Provide all children needed *mental health care*
- Improve low-income and minority children's access to quality *education*
- Prevent youth from entering the *juvenile justice system or incarceration*
- Protect children from *community violence*

This work is directed to intervene in the lives of those trapped in the Cradle to Prison Pipeline crisis so all children can get a well-deserved start in life. This year, the Children's Defense Fund will release a report describing this shameful tragedy that is growing and continues to shatter the lives of American children, the Cradle to Prison Pipeline. You can sign up for email updates or order your copy of the report *Movement to Dismantle the Cradle to Prison Pipeline* at <http://www.childrensdefense.org/site/PageServer?pagename=homepage>.

Services for Younger Grandparent Caregivers Legislation

Grandparents who are caregivers for grandchildren will now be eligible for supportive services at an earlier age. On October 17, 2006, President Bush signed the *Older Americans Act Amendments of 2006* (P.L. 109-365), which amended the Caregivers Support Program of the *Social Security Act* (42 U.S.C. 3030s) to lower the age limit for these grandparent caregiver programs from 60 to 55 years. The program provides federal monetary support for state programs that help older caregivers with such services as caregiver training, respite care, and other supplemental services through the National Family Caregiver Support Program (NFCSP). The new law also gives priority to caregivers who provide care for children with severe disabilities.

The text of the Act is available online: http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=109_cong_bills&docid=f:h6197enr.txt.pdf. For more information about the Act and about the NFCSP, visit the Generations United Web site.

Children's Literature Roundtable

A roundtable focused on the inclusion of African American cultural history in quality literature selections for children and young adults was held on April 20-27, 2007, at CDF Haley Farm in Clinton, Tennessee. The mission of the Roundtable was to generate interest in outstanding literature where African American children appear as protagonists or as heroes. The planners believe that exposing children to positive literary characters who look like them helps to foster self-esteem, build character, develop a sense of heritage and pride, and initiate a love for reading.

An objective of the Roundtable was to provide a gathering place allowing parents, grandparents, teachers, librarians, childcare providers, and all child advocates to meet award-winning authors, illustrators, and educators. The discussions gave participants opportunities to be introduced to quality literature, to share favorites, and to promote ideas about reading exceptional literature to children. Advocacy groups want to ensure that every child has a successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities. Making sure that children are exposed to sound literature that mirrors their cultural heritage and in which they can see reflections of themselves can aid in helping children make successful transitions into adulthood. For more information about the Roundtable, call Ericka Wright at (865) 457-6466 or e-mail her at ewright@childrensdefense.org.

New AFCARS Reports

The Children's Bureau Web site has recently posted several new reports on national adoption and foster care statistics as part of its ongoing Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS).

- **AFCARS Report #12** provides final estimates on national adoption and foster care numbers for fiscal year (FY) 1998-FY 2002. This replaces AFCARS Reports #1-9.

- **AFCARS Report #13** provides preliminary estimates of adoption and foster care statistics for FY 2005, based on data available in September 2006.
- **Trends in Foster Care and Adoption** presents a graphic representation of trends for the period FY 2000–FY 2005. The data indicate that the number of children in foster care and the number awaiting adoption have decreased, while the number achieving adoption has remained relatively steady.

Using case data submitted by all states, AFCARS provides the most comprehensive national statistics on adoption and foster care. To view the latest reports, visit the Children's Bureau webpage on statistics and research: www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats_research/index.htm#afcars.

Journal of Public Child Welfare Debuts

Child welfare professionals employed in public agencies now have a periodical to call their own: the *Journal of Public Child Welfare*, which debuted in fall of 2006. In their opening the editors introduce the charter

issue and discuss the journal's goal, which is to inform the field of findings and issues in public child welfare research, practice, and policy. Articles in the quarterly journal will include research, literature reviews, policy analyses, and program evaluations focusing on child safety, permanence, and well-being. The first issue provides a good sampling of the topics that will be covered (Children's Express: <http://cbexpress.acf.hhs.gov>). This is also an excellent site for News and Notices from the federal Children's Bureau Training and Technical Assistance Network.

So here you have a menu of advocacy initiatives to let you know who, where, and when advocacy efforts are happening for children and their families. Check out the Web sites for information and updates from the sources included. The intention is to give you a variety of ways you can focus your actions for our youth. Remember a mountain can be formed by moving a stone at a time. One answer to the daily overwhelming needs of children is effective, informed nursing efforts.

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