

## Code Adam

By MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

Every year in this country, there are about 4,600 child abductions by non-family members. No one who hasn't lived through this tragedy can even imagine what it must be like to lose a child in this way. So many times the children are found dead, or never found at all. You've seen the posters and the reports on the nightly news. And perhaps this year when you were doing your Christmas, Hanukkah, or kwanzaa shopping, you turned around in a store and didn't see your child where he or she was just a second ago. Most likely you found him or her down at the end of the aisle looking at the latest toy on the shelves, and you breathed again. But what if your child hadn't been just a few steps away? What would you have done?

Happily, there are people doing something to keep our children safe. Perhaps you've heard of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, a private, nonprofit organization established by Congressional mandate in 1984 to locate and recover missing children and raise public awareness about ways to prevent child abduction, molestation, and sexual exploitation. The Center works in conjunction with the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention in their efforts to find children missing nationwide. Last month, the Center released information about a program begun by Walmart stores to help in this battle.

The program, "Code Adam," was created and promoted by Walmart and has spread to other stores including Shop Rite, a major retail market chain, and shopping malls, including 26 in Louisville, Kentucky. And last November, New Jersey's state legislature passed a resolution making it the "first Code Adam" state," encouraging all stores in the state to institute the program.

It all started with a Walmart employee, Bill Burns, who created and named the program as a tribute to 6-year-old Adam Walsh whose 1981 abduction from a Florida shopping mall and subsequent murder brought

the horror of child abduction to national attention. When a store customer reports a missing child to an employee, Burns' program calls for a "Code Adam" alert to be announced over the public address system. A brief description of the child is obtained and provided to all employees, who immediately stop their normal work to search for the child, including monitoring all exits to ensure the child does not leave the store alone or accompanied by someone. Parking lots are also checked, as well as restrooms, stairwells, offices, and other non-public spaces. If the child is not found immediately, or if the child is seen accompanied by someone other than a parent or guardian, store personnel notify the local police department for assistance.

Since the program was initiated in 1994, 6 child abductions have been stopped while they were in progress at Wal-Mart stores and two have been thwarted in Shop Rite stores.

In partnership with Walmart, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children has been taking "Code Adam" nationwide through their Project Alert. Project Alert is the Center's innovative idea of establishing a national corps of retired law enforcement officials who volunteer to make presentations and train store owners, managers, and personnel on "Code Adam" procedures, and otherwise offer assistance to state and local child safety officials. "These dedicated private citizens act to ensure the reduction of crimes against children and especially abductions of children," says Ann Scofield, the Center's Director of Project Alert.

What can you do? Talk to the store managers in your community and encourage them to institute "Code Adam" procedures in their establishments. You can find out more about "Code Adam" and Project Alert by calling the National Center's 24-hour hotline at 1-800-TheLost. And remember that number. It's also the number to use for assistance when a child is missing anywhere in the country.

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## State Reports Urgent Need For Teen Foster Care Homes

Oregon's lack of foster care resources for teens has reached a crisis level, according to the state's child protective services director.

In Marion County\* for example, 800 children are in foster care. Of those, 12 percent are teen-agers but only 4 percent of homes, or six, are designated for this population.

"The adolescent years are a turning point in the development of a human being," says Kay Toran, director of the State Office for Services to Children and Families. "A stable, safe and caring environment can mean the difference between success and failure. This is an issue for our

communities and we need Oregonians to respond."

Potential foster care parents are sometimes hesitant to open their homes to teen-agers because they think it's too late to help or influence. In reality, says Toran, there are some advantages to caring for teens rather than younger children.

"Because teens are growing so rapidly - emotionally, physically, and socially - you see the results of your work very quickly," she says. "This is an ideal time in a teen's life for adults to teach, model and communicate."

Research indicates that adolescence is a critical time for

brain development because during the mid- to late-teen years and into early adulthood, the brain experiences growth spurts. "This growth period is an opportunity to decrease an adolescent's risk and maximize his or her potential," says Paul Eslinger, a Penn State University neurology professor who spoke recently in Salem.

Because of past abuse and neglect, children in foster care often have problems and behaviors that require love and work by the foster parents. Certified foster care parents receive special instruction and training to parent these children and no child is placed without the fos-

ter parent's consent. SCF also recognizes that caring for teens is a challenging job and compensates foster families for teens accordingly.

"As a parent, you face no greater challenge - and no greater opportunity - than to guide a child through the teen years toward a productive, happy and responsible adulthood," said Toran. "For this vulnerable population, family support can be a powerful immunization, giving teens the strength to blossom and the stamina to persevere."

For more information about becoming a foster care parent, contact your local SCF branch or call 1-800-331-0503.

## Oregon Health Plan Survey Reports Satisfaction Among Vulnerable Members

When the Oregon Health Plan began enrolling new members five years ago, it exempted people who are elderly or disabled and children in foster care because of concerns about whether managed care would meet their special needs.

Now, a new survey of several thousand such adults - that were enrolled in the health plan a year later, beginning in February 1995 - shows a high level of satisfaction with it, including managed care.

Sixty-eight percent of 5,747 respondents said they would recommend their managed-care health plan to a friend or family member, and only 9 percent said they would not (22 percent were unsure).

"Although we must continue to be diligent to ensure high-quality care for these people, more than half of whom consider their own health fair or poor, I am encouraged that most say health-care access and quality have improved," said Hersh Crawford, state Medicaid director in the Oregon Department of Human Resources. He said a next step will be to identify reasons behind some people's dissatisfaction.

The new survey was done in 1997-98, and its results can be compared with those of a comparable 1995 survey. Among the findings of the new survey:

• Respondents generally rated access to health-care services and quality of care higher than they did in 1995. Three-quarters (4,208 of 5,553) reported they received all the care and services they needed or wanted.

• Respondents reported ease in

finding a doctor or nurse, making a prompt appointment, and in getting to a conveniently located office. Almost 70 percent said it was easy to find a doctor while 13 percent reported difficulty.

• More than 75 percent said doctors or nurses showed respect while 70 percent said time spent with the doctor or nurse was satisfactory. Also, 70 percent said their doctors communicated well and explained ways to stay healthy.

But Crawford expressed concern about what appears to be deterioration in three areas: obtaining special equipment and supplies (such as wheelchairs and walkers), getting such equipment repaired, and gaining access to rehabilitative therapies.

"This is a significant finding, and we will work on it with the insurance plans and providers," Crawford said. He noted that his office has an ombudsman where Oregon Health Plan members can seek help and that the

individual health plans, with whom his office contracts, employ people called exceptional-needs care coordinators who fill a similar function.

Survey respondents rated access to after-hours medical advice and satisfaction with alcohol and drug services as problems. Of those who

reported needing mental health services, 21 percent said obtaining them was difficult, a higher percentage than in 1995. Crawford said his office will work with the Mental Health and Developmental Disability Services Division and the Office of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Programs that the survey identified.

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## Nominations sought for Oregon Arts Commission grant panels

The Oregon Arts Commission is seeking nominations for Oregonians to help review grant applications and make funding recommendations for the fiscal year that begins on July 1.

Most of the panelists are needed for Art Industry Development grants, which assist the state's medium and larger arts organizations with operating support. Panels will be organized by artistic discipline: music, theater, dance, literature, visual arts and a multi-disciplinary group that considers combinations of the other. Separate panels will be assembled to review Regional Arts Partnership and art education applications. Potential panelists should have significant expertise in the areas they propose to review.

The arts community, the general public or the candidate may

suggest potential panelists. To nominate yourself, submit a resume and a short letter of interest. To nominate someone else, submit a statement of qualifications along with the candidate's postal or e-mail address and telephone number.

Letters should be sent to the Oregon Arts Commission, 775 Summer Street, NE, Salem, Oregon 97310, or e-mail to [oregon\\_artscomm@state.or.us](mailto:oregon_artscomm@state.or.us). Nominations should reach the

commission office by Feb. 19, 1999 to be considered for the panels, which meet in May.

The Oregon Arts Commission fosters the arts in Oregon and assures their excellence. The agency's policies and programs are overseen by a nine-member commission appointed by the governor, with funding from the state general fund, the National Endowment for the Arts and income from publication sales and services.

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