

Family Living

'Kids run better unleaded'

The children most susceptible to lead poisoning are those who live in older homes where there is lead-based paint. Children in Multnomah County may be more susceptible than kids living in most other places. Nationally, 27 percent of all homes were built before 1950; by contrast, almost 45 percent of Multnomah County homes were built before that date. The potential for harmful lead exposure is well recognized by community groups and by state and local governments.

The Multnomah County Health Department and the Oregon Health Division are conducting testing programs for susceptible children; CLEARcorps and the lead hazard reduction program of the Portland Water Bureau are successfully engaged in efforts to reduce youngsters' exposure to lead in their homes.

Lead poisoning is subtle, but can include the following:

Damage to the Brain and Nervous System

Behavior and Learning Problems (such as Hyperac-

tivity)

Slowed growth
Hearing problems
Headaches

For Adults, Lead can also cause the following problems:

Difficulties during pregnancy

Other reproductive problems (in both men and women)

High blood pressure

Digestive problems

Nerve disorders

Memory and concentration problems

Muscle and joint pain

Unless concentrations are sky-high, victims of lead poisoning exhibit few apparent symptoms. Not even the most watchful parent would be likely to suspect that a child's blood contained elevated levels of lead. Serious cases can impair mental and physical development.

Testing is usually the only way to discover lead poisoning. Make it part of your "back-to-school" routine to ensure that your children are free from lead poisoning; your doctor or the Multnomah County Health Department can tell you how.



Strong Families = Strong And Healthy Children

By MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

Sometimes, it seems, the obvious must be restated simply to remind people of what they already know. I thought of this recently when, in the same day, my mail brought me a press release from the U.S. Department of Justice and information from the Family Resource Coalition of America, a Chicago-based organization. Both were making a point that cannot be stressed too many times in a society and country that does not put children first.

The solutions to many of society's problems will grow in a garden seeded with this one core truth: children do better in families that are able to draw strength and assistance when necessary from their communities.

The Department of Justice press release announced the findings of a RAND Corporation study of a program in Elmira, New York, called "Prenatal and Early Childhood Nurse Home Visitation," a 15-year-old program allowing for prenatal and early childhood home visits by trained nurses to low-income, first-time young parents. Nurses visit participating mothers once every one to two weeks during their pregnancy and continue the visits until the child reaches two. During the visits, nurses teach pregnant young women about the importance of prenatal nutrition and the negative effects of smoking, drugs, and alcohol, and help new mothers with postpartum recovery and teach them about infant care. The study found that youths whose mothers participated in the program were 55 percent less likely to be arrested than children of mothers who hadn't. Not only that, but by the time children from families in the program were 15 years old, the program's cost savings of taxpayers have been shown to be four times the original investment. These savings come from reduction in crime, welfare, and health care expenses, and the increase in taxes paid by working parents. Attorney General Janet Reno applauded the program, saying, "A healthy start is critical in steering youth away from crime and drugs. By working with parents early, even before childbirth, we can help their children to lead safe and productive lives."

The second piece of mail from the Family Resource Coalition of America (FRCA), which exists to help build cooperation in the public and private sectors to offer families community-based

support, told of the "growing consensus among health care professionals that services for families that strengthen parent-child relationships and build community are crucial for positive health outcomes for children."

Every family has different needs, and sometimes multiple needs, and when parents, social service professionals, doctors and health professionals, schools, policy makers, and the private sector join together to find ways to support a family's needs for health care, child care, jobs paying a living wage, and decent housing, families and children are given an environment in which they can thrive.

Working with the sponsorship of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, FRCA has developed the "STATES Initiative," a pioneering effort to change the way state governments and communities can work together to deliver needed family services. Demonstration sites in Colorado, Connecticut, Georgia, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Washington, and West Virginia have held "Family

Day" fairs and developed programs focusing on the needs of parents and grandparents. The fairs offer collaboration models on how we can all work together to help strengthen families who could benefit by parenting classes, employment counseling, access to affordable, quality day care, and information about health care and the State Children's Health Insurance program (CHIP), which provides \$48 billion to states over the next 10 years to

cover 5 million of the more than 11 million uninsured children, and other social services available in their community. Helping families helps children. Strengthening families strengthens our society and our nation. It's a simple prescription that we've always known works, but sometimes our country's policy makers and those in public service as well as in the private sector need to be reminded of it. Maybe we all need to be reminded of it.

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