

# PROTECTING

## Safe Havens for the Nation's Children

All children deserve healthy lives that are free from violence and abuse. Unfortunately, too many children are victims of violence in environments typically thought of as safe havens for them: their schools and their homes.

### VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS

Violence in schools is not a new phenomenon. But until recent years, most school violence involved minor assaults. The seemingly harmless schoolyard fistfights of the past have evolved into altercations involving weapons, some with fatal consequences. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 1,287 individuals are shot in schools each year (CDC 2001). Between 1994 and 1999, there were 253 deaths on school grounds, more than half of which resulted from handgun violence (National Education Association 2004). Among the most notorious incidents during this time period was the 1999 massacre at Littleton, Colorado-based Columbine High School. In some ways, the nation's school systems are still reeling from the effects of the gun violence there that left 15 dead. Though most schools have put in place safety measures since the Columbine incident, the problem of gun violence in schools persists. Continued multisector support is needed to stem the tide of school-based violence affecting children of all ages.

### VIOLENCE IN HOMES

For many children, the cycle of violence in their lives begins in the home. Many are suffering physical and sexual abuse at the hands of parents or caretakers expected to watch over them. In fact, of the millions of incidents of child abuse reported in 2001, physical abuse and sexual abuse accounted for nearly 30 percent of the cases (HHS 2003). The nation continues to be shamed by this abuse, which took the lives of 1,300 children (three per day) in 2001 (HHS 2003).

### VIOLENCE AS A PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE

In recent years, the nation's perception of violence, particularly violence involving children and youth, has changed dramatically. Once perceived as a criminal justice issue, violence is now widely perceived as a public health issue. As a result, the way grantmakers and others address this problem has changed. Many grantmakers now look to end the epidemic of violence affecting children and youth

through public health strategies, such as:

- data collection and surveillance efforts focused on explaining the root causes of youth violence and implementing programs to prevent this epidemic,
- consideration of the impact of violence on all affected parties,
- adoption of environmental and social norms that promote nonviolent conflict resolution, and
- community involvement.

### OPPORTUNITIES FOR GRANTMAKERS

Grantmakers have a number of opportunities to transform homes and schools into safe environments where children can thrive and reach their full potential.

- **Supporting educational and public awareness programs** – Violence in schools and homes is preventable, and educating the public is an important first step to violence prevention. The Northwest Health Foundation, for example, funded a public education and community involvement campaign as a key component of local efforts to prevent child abuse and neglect. The *Cherish Every Child* project produced a series of television, print, and radio public service announcements (PSAs) conveying positive parenting messages as part of an aggressive media campaign to create healthy community norms related to parenting, early childhood wellness, and personal responsibility for the wellness of children. The project also offers prevention and early intervention strategies, including parenting education and support, risk screening, home visits for all newborns, 24-hour access to parenting help, therapeutic preschools, and crisis nurseries or respite care.

Grantmakers are also funding efforts to heighten awareness about children and gun violence. The Joyce Foundation has supported a number of programs focused on public education and policy-relevant research regarding the impact of handgun ownership on public health and safety. The foundation supported broadcast and print PSAs as part of the *Faces of Firearms* public education and mobilization effort designed to educate Americans about the dangers of having a handgun in homes where children are present. Collaborating with The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the David Bonnett Foundation, The Joyce Foundation funded the *Join Together Gun Violence Prevention Project*, a Boston University program that provides a comprehensive Web site of resources

and services (available at [www.jointogether.org](http://www.jointogether.org)), and technical assistance to individuals and organizations interested in gun violence prevention. The Joyce Foundation is also supporting efforts to educate the public and policymakers about the need for gun violence prevention policies in Minnesota and to work toward their implementation. This public education effort focuses on keeping children safe, assuring product safety, keeping guns from criminals and gang members, and keeping current gun laws from being weakened.

- **Preventing youth violence in schools and communities** – Extreme school violence in recent years, particularly shootings, have drawn attention to the need for violence prevention efforts for young people. The Colorado Trust has long supported broad violence prevention efforts through its *Colorado Violence Prevention Initiative*. This five-year, \$6.4 million initiative focused on four components: community-based violence prevention planning and implementation grants, a statewide public education campaign, grantmaker education for an alliance of funders, and a study of handgun violence among youth in the state. In the wake of the 1999 Columbine High School shootings, The Colorado Trust provided support for school-specific violence prevention programs designed to foster healthy school climates in which students feel safe. The *Safe Communities – Safe Schools Initiative* offers Colorado schools a number of resources to promote safer environments, including a template to assist schools in designing individualized safe school plans; technical assistance; publications; and an interactive Web site with fact sheets, a database of resources on school violence prevention, and school violence statistics.

The California Wellness Foundation, through its *Violence Prevention Initiative*, was instrumental in changing the perception of violence from a criminal justice issue to a public health issue. This 10-year, \$60 million grantmaking program to address youth violence was successful in reducing youth access to firearms and increasing support for youth violence prevention. Foundation grantees were successful in changing local policies, with at least 60 cities and six counties in California enacting more than 180 ordinances regulating firearms. At the state level, grantees of the *Violence Prevention Initiative* influenced the passage of five gun control laws.

The Alliance Healthcare Foundation, also in California, funded the implementation of a community-based approach to reducing adolescent violence in three communities. Each community project included five integrated components: student leadership; community education; training on violence prevention and intervention for school, community clinic, and social services professionals; anger management classes for youth; and affordable mental health services for families.

- **Preventing violence in the home** – Grantmakers are funding a number of programs aimed at making home environments safer for children. Some grantmaker efforts to reduce violence in the home are targeting parenting skills. The Deaconess Foundation, for example, funded a local church's *Positive Family Program*, which aims to prevent abuse by helping parents learn positive approaches to

parenting. The Lucile Packard Foundation for Children's Health is targeting Spanish-speaking parents through its *Una Vida Mejor Para Mi Familia (A Better Life for My Family)* program. The parenting education and child abuse prevention program teaches children self-protection skills while parents attend classes on effective parenting. The Lucile Packard Foundation also funded an outreach program to promote safe and healthy home environments for Pacific Islanders living in East Palo Alto and East Menlo Park, California. The program teaches parents about nonphysical disciplinary techniques and child abuse laws.

Other grantmakers are funding efforts to head off child abuse through home visitation programs. The Missouri Foundation for Health, for example, has funded the implementation of the *Better Beginnings* program, which seeks to strengthen families at risk for negative health outcomes, including child abuse. *Better Beginnings* case workers conduct in-home visits to increase the number of healthy pregnancies and births, decrease the incidence of child abuse, increase parent-child interaction, and promote the healthy growth and development of infants and children. The Dorothy Rider Pool Health Care Trust also funded home visitation, using trained paraprofessionals who work with families identified by hospital staff as at risk of child abuse. The program combined home visits, well-baby visits, phone calls, referrals to other services, transportation, and other social supports for families in need of services. Program efforts were aimed at increasing positive child development, increasing parental coping skills, and decreasing precursors to abuse.

Among the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation's efforts to prevent child abuse is funding for the development of child advocacy centers. These centers, designed by communities to meet their needs, provide comprehensive, child-focused programs in facilities that allow law enforcement, child protection professionals, prosecutors, and the mental health and medical communities to work together to handle physical and sexual abuse cases.

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## SOURCES

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