

The Alliance

WINTER 2011



PFSA Launches New Program: The Front Porch Project®

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How many times have you witnessed a parent struggling with a child in the midst of a tantrum in a public place? Have you ever been concerned that your neighbor is leaving her young children home alone? How often have you observed a child in your neighborhood playing unsupervised in the street? How often have you struggled with questions about whether or how to help a child?

You're not alone. Studies show that many people are concerned about children in their communities, and would like to get involved and help families, but often do not know what to do. They might feel uneasy approaching a stranger or feel that they can't really make a difference. Some people mistrust the child welfare system and don't know of other options for helping a family. Whatever the reason – ordinary citizens are often hesitant to help a child because they don't know what to do.

That's why the Pennsylvania Family Support Alliance (PFSA) is partnering with American Humane, a nationally recognized leader in the prevention of child maltreatment, to launch the Front Porch Project® (FPP) in Pennsylvania. The Front Porch Project® is a community-based primary prevention initiative based on the belief that **everyone can – and should – become more aware of**

how to protect children in their own community. It provides people with the knowledge, training and encouragement they need to become involved.

Developed by experts in the field of child welfare and abuse prevention, FPP is a two-day training that teaches members of the general public to:

- Identify when and how to get involved when they are concerned about a child.
- Review definitions, dynamics and indicators of child abuse and neglect.
- Examine our personal approaches to action – how culture, gender and socioeconomics influence behavior.
- Explore a range of parenting approaches and discuss ways of disciplining and caring for children that can lead to abuse or neglect. Identify positive parenting and intervention strategies.
- Discuss how to ensure personal safety.
- Develop a personal action plan and a commitment to helping to protect children.

Participants who complete the training leave with the awareness, knowledge, skill and willingness to intervene for

Mission

Pennsylvania Family Support Alliance protects children by teaching citizens to recognize and report child abuse and neglect by providing information, educational materials and programs that promote positive parenting.

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It's Never Too Late

By Marshall Harrison, Dauphin County

September 25, 2007 - I thought it was the worst day of my life, but it was the best thing that could have happened to me. You see, on that day I was locked up on sixteen drug charges and thought my life was over. All my selfishness had caught up to me, and all my drug selling and drug using had come to an end. Up until the day of my arrest I thought my life was OK. I had three beautiful daughters and a girlfriend who loved me to death, but none of that mattered. All I could see was me doing my own thing and letting everybody deal with life on their own. Drugs were my only friends and I hung out with them all my life.

I did what many of us do – allow our past to control our thoughts. In my case, I was sexually abused at the age of seven. This horrible act made me angry inside, so angry that I didn't trust or love people – even myself – because I thought it was my fault. Not knowing any better, I kept this all to myself until I turned 35. I didn't want kids because I didn't have any love for myself, let alone love for a child.

I had my first child when I was 21, but I didn't play a part in her life. I would see her from time to time and make promises, but when it came to a choice of getting high or seeing her, the drugs won that battle. I remember one night I was getting high and I had enough with life and wanted to kill myself. I called her to say I loved her and I will see her around someday. "Always remember that I love you," I said. She knew what I was really saying and started crying. Then she said, "Even though you were not around, I still love you because you are my dad. So don't worry; I forgive you." That was ten years ago. It still wasn't enough to get me on the right path.

Finally, in jail, something clicked in my heart and woke me up. I found the peace that was missing all my life – God. This time things were different. I finally surrendered. I had enough with the way I was living and feeling about myself. I was tired of hurting myself and my family. Things had to change and change fast. So I read many self-help books, went to church in jail, and made a commitment to living a clean and sober life. I started to understand my purpose in life and wanted to become what God intended me to be.

Then I felt this love for my children that I never felt before. My youngest daughter, who was four at the time, said something really life changing for me. I spoke to her on the phone from jail and she told me she'd promise to stop being bad if doing so would make me come home. The thing that changed my life was the fact that she was willing to give up something just to have me in her life. **Whoever said a child can't teach you something?** At that moment I promised myself that I would never hurt or leave her again.

Being released from jail has allowed me to do the things I always wanted to do as a father. I spend some good quality time with my kids, mostly listening, because I have to get to know them all over again. I'm still learning how to be a father so I know things will take time. My main goal is to gain their trust, knowing that daddy is here and I'm never leaving them again. My youngest daughter still has her guard up when we are together. We laugh, play games, crack jokes, but when it's time for me to go back to the halfway house, she doesn't like it and never kisses me goodbye. My parenting group has helped me a lot; I'm still attending even though I completed



Marshall Harrison, of Harrisburg, and his daughter Mikayla, age 5.

what was required of me to do.

I know now that time is running out. Before you know it, your kids are all grown up and out of the house. I want to have a loving, trusting relationship with my kids and it all starts with me. So if you can learn how to do that with the help of others, sign me up. The sad thing is not the father that doesn't know, but the father that doesn't try. I have to try; they need me more than anything in this world. Today I can say that **I understand the importance of a father in a child's life.** You have to dedicate your life to your kids, and before I went to jail I didn't understand that. Now I tell this to every other father I meet, "Once you are involved in your kids' lives you'll never want to leave again."

Marshall Harrison is currently a resident at the Community Corrections Center in Harrisburg. He attends the PFSA-affiliated family support program there. His children are now 22, 6 and 5 years old. ❖

Find Us on Facebook



The Front Porch Project®

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children. **Their actions can impact thousands of children.** For

example, participants in other states who have completed FPP training have found some creative ways of helping families:

“I did some research on local community resources for families and shared the information with the other parents in my apartment complex.”

“I now watch my neighbor’s three young children one night a week so she can run errands or go shopping.”

“I wrote a letter to the grocery store so they would make a family-friendly checkout aisle that does not have candy in it, to help prevent stressful moments at checkout.”

“I threw a block party on my street to get to know my neighbors.”

PFSA is extremely pleased to be partnering with American Humane to bring the Front Porch Project® to Pennsylvania. We’ll be the first statewide initiative for FPP in the country, and our collaboration with American Humane is a new facet of our work. As the lead entity for FPP in the state, the initiative complements what PFSA has been doing for many years – training professionals to recognize and report child abuse and helping families strengthen and heal.

Presented by trained professionals in the field of child welfare, education and health services, the Front Porch Project® training will be offered in several locations across the state this summer and fall. Check our website at www.pa-fsa.org for updates as training dates and locations are scheduled. ❖

PFSA cares about keeping our planet green for future generations. Our newsletter is printed on 50% recycled paper, and is also available electronically. Visit our website at www.pa-fsa.org to sign up for the e-version of “The Alliance.” ♻️

Director of Training Services Hired

PFSA is pleased to announce that Tina Phillips has been hired as our new Director of Training Services. Tina has more than 17 of years experience in the child welfare field, including as an associate director with the National Center for Child Death Review in Washington, D.C. Tina graduated from Lebanon Valley College and began her career as a caseworker for Lebanon County Children and Youth Services. Tina then worked for the Department of Public Welfare (DPW) as a caseworker for ChildLine and in human services program specialist roles for several more years. In 2005, Tina began working for the PA Child Welfare Training Program where she worked on the development of training curriculum and quality assurance throughout the program. Tina recently returned to the Child Welfare Training Program as a Practice Improvement Specialist. Tina, her husband, and her 1 1/2-year-old bulldog, Penny, reside in Lebanon County.

PFSA is excited to have Tina bring her training and child welfare expertise to its Mandated Reporter Training Program. The program trained more than 7,540 mandated reporters last year; a total of 293 training sessions were held in a variety of locations across the state. ❖



did you know?

The assistance of just one adult can make a difference in protecting children and supporting families in your community. Any interaction, no matter how small, has the power to make a difference. There are many ways that you can make a difference today:

- ✓ Offer to babysit the children of a parent who is under stress.
- ✓ Talk quietly and without judgment to a parent who is on the verge of becoming angry with a child.
- ✓ Volunteer at or donate to a child- or family-serving agency in your community.
- ✓ Advocate for after-school activities for children.
- ✓ Let parents know when you see a positive interaction take place between them and their child.
- ✓ Show support and empathy for a child or parent by smiling or offering to help.
- ✓ Get to know your neighbors and their children.

We never know how we touch the lives of others. Together, we can build on the natural strengths and resiliency of children and families to support them through difficult times.

(Source: American Humane, “The Front Porch Project®”) ❖

New Research: Childhood Abuse May Shorten Life

The emotional pains we suffer in childhood can lead to weakened immune systems later in life, according to a new study supported by the National Institute on Aging. “What happens in childhood really matters when it comes to your immune response in the latter part of your life,” explained Janice Kiecolt-Glaser, a researcher at Ohio State University. The study showed that for some children who experienced serious abuse or adverse experiences as kids, the long-term effect might be a lifespan shortened by 7 to 15 years.

The study looked at 132 healthy older adults who averaged 70 years old. Researchers took blood samples from each person measuring the levels of two immune system cells known to be stress markers. They also used a series of surveys to determine the participants’ level of depression, health status, health behaviors and whether they had experienced childhood abuse or neglect. The surveys also looked for adverse events as kids such as the loss of a parent, serious marital problems between parents, or mental illness or alcoholism within their family.

Nearly one-third of the people in the study said they’d experienced some form of physical, emotional or sexual abuse during childhood. Participants who said they’d either been abused or suffered adverse experiences as kids showed higher levels of the stress markers than did those who didn’t. As might be expected, participants who reported being abused showed greater levels of depression than those who weren’t, but those who faced childhood adversity showed no significant increase in depression.



Building on previous research, the new study also compared the stress of

carrying for a loved one with dementia and the ill-effects of childhood abuse to determine which created the biggest health concerns for the elderly study participants. The study showed that the impact of childhood abuse was a greater stressor than the current caregiving situation. “That these incidents weakened the immune response even more than the stress of caregiving is very significant, given that the high levels of stress markers have been linked to health problems such as cardiovascular disease, arthritis, type 2 diabetes, osteoporosis, cancers and Alzheimer’s disease,” researchers said. “Childhood adversity casts a very long shadow,” the report concluded.

Details on this study, and more child welfare news, can be found on PFSA’s website – www.pa-fsa.org – under “About Child Abuse.” ❖

PFSA Holds Fall Conference



Deb Gadsden, Training Specialist for SWAN, presents information on kinship care.

Our full day of training on “Caring for Kids: When Families are Impacted by Placement, Incarceration or Addiction” was held in November in Greensburg (Westmoreland County). Over 80 people attended the event, which featured presentations on how to help incarcerated parents maintain relationships with their children, trends and resources available to kinship caregivers, the impact of chemical addiction on family life and child welfare,

and more. Additional training sessions and conferences will be held in the Harrisburg area and the eastern part of the state in the spring. ❖

What if it isn't child abuse?

In Pennsylvania, reports accepted by a county children and youth agency are classified as either a child protective services report (CPS) or a general protective report (GPS). A CPS report would be made when someone suspects that harm has occurred to a child as a result of a caregiver's action or failure to act. For mandated reporters (people who come in contact with children as a result of their employment, occupation or practice of their profession), these situations are required by law to be reported to ChildLine, who then refers the report to the county child welfare agency for investigation.

For example, Mr. and Mrs. Parent leave their ten-year-old and five-year-old children alone at home in the evenings while they are at work. The ten-year old usually cooks dinner and, one evening, severely burns his hand. Harm has occurred to the child as a result of his parents' failure to provide supervision. This situation would require a CPS report. If the child's teacher became aware of what happened, the teacher would be mandated to make a report of suspected child abuse.

A GPS report would be made when no harm has come to a child, but it is likely that serious harm will occur to a child if the situation continues. Often these concerns are informally identified as "neglect or general neglect." Although it is estimated that 70% of the children receiving services from a county child welfare agency are receiving GPS services, no mandate exists for anyone to make these reports.

If the same scenario with Mr. and Mrs. Parent existed, but the child was not injured, the situation would call for a GPS report. No harm has yet come to either of the children, but a risk of serious harm exists if they continue to be unsupervised. If the ten-year-old's teacher became aware of the situation, she should make a report alleging a need for general protective services to ChildLine or the county children and youth agency.

The purposes of general protective services are:

- Protect the safety, rights and welfare of children so that they have an opportunity for healthy growth and development.
- Assist parents in recognizing and remedying conditions harmful to their children and help parents

fulfill their parental duties without putting their children at risk.

Providing effective services to families in need of GPS is a shared concern. To help

– Nurse Supervisor

community professionals understand their role in identifying and assisting families, Pennsylvania Family Support Alliance offers a three-hour training entitled *Recognizing and Responding to Child Neglect*. This training helps professionals recognize signs of neglect in children, parents and other caregivers and to identify services available to

Thank you! This was excellent – one of the clearest, most informed and useful trainings I have participated in as a professional.

– School Administrator

neglected children and their families. In addition, professionals learn to determine when and how to make a GPS referral. As with all of our trainings, participants receive a workbook and valuable resources to assist them after the training.

To arrange a training session for your agency, please contact PFSA at (800)448-4906. ❖

save the date:



Dauphin County mural, April 2010

Child Abuse Prevention Month 2011

"Painting for Prevention" events

**Saturday, April 2 –
Indiana Mall, Indiana PA**

**Saturday, April 9 –
Cherry Lane, York PA**

**Thursday, April 14 –
SCI Muncy**

(not open to the public)

Look for details in the spring edition of "The Alliance" in early March, or visit www.pa-fsa.org for details.

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Pennsylvania
Family Support Alliance™

Protecting children from abuse

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**“No act of
kindness, no
matter how
small, is ever
wasted.”**

Aesop (620 BC - 560 BC)

