



The Council Commitment

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The Reviews are in: The Phantom is a Runaway Hit!

On March 29, 2005, the Child and Family Resource Council hosted a very successful fundraising event that people all over town are still talking about.

Entitled *Phantom Without the Opera*, the event featured performer Byron Nease, who spent years performing in *Andrew Lloyd Weber's The Phantom of the Opera*. He delighted the sold-out crowd with a wildly entertaining evening of rousing song, excellent humor, and touching stories.

Since then, guests have been raving about the performance, using words such as “amazing”, “sensational”, and “wonderful” to describe their experience that evening. Will the Phantom return? Who knows? All we can say is that plans are already underway for next year’s event...



Stella Royce, Kathleen Stewart Ponitz, and Chuck Royce



Pianist Phil Hall with Byron Nease



Emcees Christine Albertini and Jim Heynen



Carlos Sanchez, Lynne Pope, and Carlos Pava



Sister Kathi Sleziak, O.P. and Carmelita Murphy, O.P.



Pat and Peter Cook

Our Mission: to shape a community that protects children from abuse and neglect.

The *Council Commitment* is a publication of the Child and Family Resource Council.

Established in 1985, the Council's mission is *to shape a community that protects children from abuse and neglect.*

The Council focuses on programs and services that protect children, support families and strengthen our community. Utilizing primary strategies of education, coordination and advocacy, the Council uses a variety of tools to accomplish its mission, including:

- Advocacy Training
- Community Education
- Connections
- Encouraging Family Foundations
- Family Resource Guide
- Kent County Healthy Start
- Mandated Reporter Training
- RAVE (Resources Against Violent Encounters)

The Child and Family Resource Council is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization funded through the Children's Trust Fund, Heart of West Michigan United Way, grants, and the support of individual donations.

The Council does not discriminate in employment opportunities or practices because of race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, national origin, age, citizenship, veteran status, marital status, parental status, membership in any labor organization, political affiliation, height, weight, disability, record of arrest without conviction, or any other characteristic protected by law.

Together we can.

At the Child and Family Resource Council, we take those three words to heart because they not only represent our commitment to preventing child abuse and neglect, they demonstrate how we do it, and

this issue of *The Council Commitment* highlights a few of our successful collaborations and initiatives over the past few months.

For example, working with media partners and community leaders in Kent County, together we launched a successful Blue Ribbon campaign. Working with friends of the Council and an active Board of Directors, together we collaborated with musical star Byron Nease to spread the word about how important it is to support the Council's work.

Through our Encouraging Family Foundations program, together we helped a young mother become a more confident and informed parent, and together we gathered at the Service to Children Awards to thank all the extraordinary individuals and organizations who work to keep our children safe.

Every day in Kent County, thousands are dedicating their time, money, and passion to make a difference in the lives of children and families. We need thousands more. As we continue to move forward as a community, it is my hope that everyone in Kent County will join with us to prevent child abuse and neglect, because together—and only together—we can.

Sincerely,

Candace Cowling, M.S.W.



During the month of April, which is National Child Abuse Prevention month, blue ribbons—the symbol for child abuse awareness—are hung, pinned, and printed all across the country to remind everybody that child abuse and neglect are significant issues for all communities to address.

Here in Kent County, the Child and Family Resource Council, in partnership with the Child Protection Team at DeVos Children's Hospital, did many exciting things to raise awareness.

A kickoff rally was held on March 31 at Rosa Parks Circle. Speakers in-

cluded Mayor George Heartwell, State Representative Michael Sak, Rosalynn Bliss of DeVos Children's Hospital, a representative from Family Independence Agency, and Candace Cowling, Executive Director of the Council. Trees close to the Circle were covered in blue ribbons and lights to symbolize the 9,664 reports of child abuse and neglect that occurred in Kent County last year.

We also held a panel discussion, in conjunction with Grand Rapids Community College, on child abuse and neglect; that panel discussion was broadcast throughout April. We worked with many local houses of worship to recognize Blue Sunday (a national day of remembrance), which was Sunday, April 24.

In addition, we had PSAs running on many local radio stations highlighting the blue ribbon campaign.

Although the month of April is over, the need for awareness and action are not, so remember to keep your blue ribbon on throughout the year.

For more information about the Blue Ribbon campaign, how you can get a blue ribbon lapel pin, or how to help prevent child abuse and neglect, call the Council at 616.454.4673.



This sign and thousands of blue ribbons were displayed during the month of April



Just over a year ago, Heather was a typical teenager: she went to school, hung out with her friends, and dreamed what her life would be like.

Then she found out she was pregnant.

Soon after came the questions: How do I take care of my baby? How do I keep him safe? How do I save money for his future?

Still, Heather felt fairly confident. She was receiving prenatal care, and had the support of her family to help her. She felt she knew enough to be OK.

nice and made us feel comfortable, and they gave us so much information to take home with us. I learned a lot from each class.”

As she looks back on her experience with EFF, she says, “I thought I knew enough, and I didn’t know nearly as much as I thought I did. I was surprised that I knew so little.”

She enjoyed the classes so much that Heather has become one of EFF’s biggest boosters, recommending the program to friends and family whenever she can.

Heather’s grandmother, whom she brought with her to the classes, was also surprised to learn as much as she did.

“I didn’t know that feeding certain foods to babies could lead to allergies,” she said. “After the classes were over, I told Heather she was lucky so many resources were available to her.”

Today Heather is still going to school, seeing her friends, and planning for her and her family’s future, using the tools and information she learned from her EFF classes. She is saving her money, making sure her baby is up-to-date on his immunizations, and establishing a solid foundation for her son to thrive, which is exactly what Bev Crandall, EFF director, wants to hear.

“Heather is a wonderful example of how effective EFF can be,” said Crandall. “It is very satisfying to hear success stories like hers; it makes the work we do all the more rewarding.”

During one of her prenatal visits she was given information about programs and services available for her, which is how she learned about Encouraging Family Foundations (EFF), a series of classes for single parents in Kent County. Participants take one class a week for six weeks, covering topics like balancing family and work, improving parenting skills, and money management.

Heather was curious and signed up. From the very first EFF class, she was glad she did. Heather soaked it all in, learning how to prevent Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), the importance of immunizations, and how to safely handle a baby.

“I liked that it offered different classes, because I wanted to learn as much as I could,” she said. “Each instructor was very



A woman walks into her son’s school. Her son’s principal has requested a meeting to discuss her son, who has been struggling in school.

Her principal is nice enough, but she is saying things like benchmark and AYP as she speaks. The mother isn’t sure what they mean, but she doesn’t want to seem like a bad parent, so she nods her head and smiles politely.

As she leaves the meeting, the mother is frustrated because she now has more questions than answers. She wonders what else she can do to help her son.

Many parents in Kent County have experienced situations like this; as a response to these parents, the Council is currently implementing a program that will empower many parents in situations like the one described above.

This program, called the Right Questions Project (RQP), has enormous implications for families, schools, and many others in Kent County.

“RQP is a program that teaches people how to ask the questions that will provide information about, for example, their child’s education, the government, or health-related questions. It gives families a voice,” said Sonya Archer, Community Education Manager at the Council.

The Council recently trained 24 community members from agencies such as Grand Rapids Public Schools and Kent Regional 4C in an RQP “Train the Trainer” session, where participants learned the principles of RQP and how to best teach those principles to others.

“Our community took a big step toward empowering thousands of families in Kent County,” said Archer.

More RQP training sessions—taking place throughout Kent County—are in the works. Check our website www.childresource.cc for dates and locations, or call contact Sonya Archer at 616.454.HOPE (4673).

Family Resource Guide Online

Imagine you are meeting a friend for coffee. As you catch up, she tells you that she is looking for a program that might help her daughter, who has been going through a rough time lately. You grab a pen and paper, write www.familyresourceguide.info, and hand it to your friend.

The Child and Family Resource Council is finalizing the new online version of the Family Resource Guide, which will carry our flagship publication into a new medium, one that will keep up-to-date records throughout the year.

“By putting the Family Resource Guide on the web, we are providing an arena for a wider audience to benefit from its information, we are creating a space where information about local resources should never be outdated,” said Elisabeth Mills, Project Manager at the Council.

In addition to having various types of searches on the site, the online Family Resource Guide will also offer a community calendar, allowing users to easily locate events in the community for them and their families.

For more information about the site, contact Elisabeth at 616.454.4673.



Service to Children Awards

The 17th annual Service to Children Awards took place on Tuesday, April 19th, and those that attended were treated to a special evening of music and celebration.



Recipients were given an award and a vase of tulips

The ceremony, which took place on April 19th, honored individuals and organizations in Kent County whose work has helped prevent child abuse and neglect.

Guests enjoyed live music from the Grand Rapids Youth Symphony, and enjoyed the debut of a new Council video highlighting families we have helped and community leaders who support the Council's work.



Deb Zondervan received the Booker T. Washington Volunteer Award

Reviews of the evening were overwhelmingly positive.

“So many go unrecognized every year for the tremendous work they do each day to make our community better for children. This is one small way we can thank them,” said Candace Cowling, Executive Director of the Council.



Rosalynn Bliss, recipient of the Christine Nelson Professional Award, with Monica Smith, who received the award last year



Guests enjoyed a live performance by the Grand Rapids Youth Symphony



Laureen Kennedy, who received the Lifetime Child Advocate Award, with her mother Kathleen (?)



The recipients of the Community Group Award, the AmeriCorps Team at Cherry Street Health Services

Parenting is for a Lifetime

“I’ve noticed that one thing about parents is that no matter what stage your child is in, the parents who have older children always tell you the next stage is worse.” —Dave Barry

Parenting is wonderful, thrilling, frustrating, rewarding, grey-hair producing, ultimately worthwhile, and universal; there probably isn’t one parent out there who couldn’t use some additional information and support from time to time.

That’s where the Child and Family Resource Council can help. We offer community education services throughout Kent County on a variety of subjects, including sessions just for parents.

Topics include:

- Advocating for your child
- Communication
- Conflict resolution
- Playing with your child
- Parenting in a positive way
- Positive discipline
- Problem solving
- Stress management
- Talking with children

It’s normal to have questions; that’s why we have some of the answers. To schedule a presentation, contact Sonya Archer at 616.454.HOPE (4673) or e-mail her at sarcher@childresource.cc.

Resource Bonanza V



Over 400 visitors and 90 exhibits came to the Paul I. Phillips Gymnasium on Tuesday, March 8, 2005 to participate in the fifth annual Resource Bonanza, organized by the Child and Family Resource Council. The Resource Bonanza

is an opportunity for professionals to exchange local information and resources.

This year was the most successful Resource Bonanza ever. Elisabeth Mills, Project Manager at the Council

and organizer of the Bonanza, said, “This exceeded all of our expectations. We are very excited that so many came to learn about the vast number of resources available in Kent County.”



Final Thoughts

As you can see, the Child and Family Resource Council has been very busy engaging the community in the fight to prevent child abuse and neglect.

Your financial support of the Child and Family Resource Council and its programs and services is vital to our continued success.

Simply put, we cannot continue to protect our children and families in Kent County without your help, so please consider sending your gift today.

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