

Heliogram

Solutions to strengthen people and communities

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Our newsletter's theme is Innovations and Inspirations. Over the last year, we've discovered fresh perspectives and inventive strategies to help us apply a strengths-based approach to adoption, education, and advocacy. We hope you find these stories inspiring as well. Thank you for all you do to strengthen children, youth, families and communities. Happy New Year!

-Nancy Ashley and Lisa Kagan, Heliotrope

HOPE FOR KIDS AWAITING ADOPTION: A Community of Parents, Volunteer Grandparents, and Staff Raising Children and Youth Together

By Lisa Kagan

Many of us are familiar with the struggles children and youth face, but we're not always aware of the almost-revolutionary steps people take to help children and youth overcome tough circumstances and still thrive.

Researchers Brenda Krause Eheart and Marty Bauman Power spent a decade looking at what happens to "unadoptable" children and adolescents who spend their entire youth being bounced from one foster home to another. They found that adoptive parents were often not equipped to deal with children and youth who were troubled, at-risk, or chronically ill. Even though the families wanted to give these kids the best, they lacked the knowledge and support to succeed.

Over two years, Eheart and a group of like-minded friends developed a vision for an entire community built around these children. Their dream was to create a place where 'unadoptable' children would be adopted by caring parents who would themselves be supported by

a small staff as well as "backup" older adult guardians to provide relief from the stress of dealing with extremely troubled or ill children.

In 1993, their newly established non-profit, Generations of Hope (previously Hope for the Children), began negotiations with the Pentagon to acquire military housing in Rantoul, Illinois. A year later, Generations of Hope converted the 22-acre military base into a planned, intergenerational community they named Hope Meadows.

Hope Meadows is a place where adoptive families get the support and information they need, children can finally find a place to call home, and elders find real purpose and meaning in their everyday lives. The children and youth of Hope Meadows enjoy the care of an adoptive family, a stay-at-home parent, many (volunteer) grandparents next door, on-site therapy,

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heliotrope 1. A flower that turns to face the sun. 2. An instrument for making long-term observations. 3. A purple that is bluer and stronger than cobalt violet.

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and the ability to live with their siblings. Parents receive support with their child-rearing responsibilities and elders experience the joy of having a community of “grandchildren” to nurture.

Almost 100 children and youth have now lived at Hope Meadows. Right now there are nine families with a total of forty children and youth as well as fifty elders. Each resident who comes to Hope Meadows automatically becomes part of an extended family. Marilyn, a senior resident, had four grown children and missed the sound of children in the house. She read about Hope Meadows and was inspired to move there along with her husband. The couple has been living in the Hope community for six years and Marilyn puts in at least six hours a week volunteering, teaching sewing, crafts, cooking, and being a Girl Scout troop leader.

Ayden, a 13-year old resident of Hope Meadows, enjoys having seniors like Marilyn around. “You can go to a senior’s house and they’re nice, like an extra grandma and grandpa.” Ayden even helps out his

“grandmas” when they go out of town by caring for their pets or watering their flowers.

The children and youth of Hope Meadows enjoy success at school as well as at home. While only 46 percent of foster kids on average graduate from high school, all of the 18 year olds at Hope Meadows have graduated and one has gone on to college.

Hope Meadows’ unique focus helps garner funding from the State of Illinois, grants, senior housing rent income, and donations. While Generations of Hope continues to support children, youth, families, and elders, it also educates others about policy, legislation, and best practices regarding the adoption of hard-to-place children, post-adoption support, and successful aging.

In 2006, the Generations of Hope Development Corporation was established, extending the inter-generational community-intervention concept and has started the replication of new sites across the country. For more information visit the Generations of Hope website at www.generationsofhope.org.

A Springboard into Math and Science Careers for Middle School Girls

By Lisa Kagan and Nancy Ashley

Middle school can be challenging academically and socially and when it comes to self-esteem, experience middle school differently the same for boys and girls. Research shows that confidence strongly correlates with achievement in subjects like math and science, but because the biggest drop for girls in self-esteem occurs during middle school, it is not surprising to see girls lose confidence and interest in math and science and experience lower academic success during these critical years.

A group of Seattle parents wanted to avoid academic pitfalls and give their daughters a place designed for the unique way girls think and learn. They founded the Seattle Girls’ School in the central district in 2000. Today, the school has 130 students with almost half of them (48 percent) students of color. The school provides financial help to over 30 percent of its student body annually with an average award of over \$12,000.

The Seattle Girls’ School mission is to empower middle school girls to think critically and seek creative solutions to real world problems. The girls work in a challenging academic environment that highlights science, math, and technology in the context of our global economy and community. Studies show that girls at single-gender schools plan careers in math, science, and technology four

times more often than their peers from coed schools.

The school’s model is designed to have a profound positive effect on students’ ability, motivation, and self-image. Marja Brandon, head of the school, says, “Our goal is to bring out the best in girls. It’s already there. We teach them how to remove the obstacles to seeing it, believing it, and using it.”

The integrated curriculum cuts across disciplines, providing the kind of skill development required in the 21st century. Learning and teaching are approached in a holistic way that reflects the real world. The curriculum emphasizes projects and employs sources beyond textbooks. Girls experience unique opportunities like co-piloting real planes, gardening in pea patches, or simulating flights to Mars. Information is presented in meaningful, connected patterns so girls gain the ability to make connections, solve problems by examining multiple perspectives, and incorporate information from different fields.

The Seattle Girls’ School is one model for how parents, educators, and community leaders can collaborate to raise a generation of daughters to become critical and creative thinkers. For more information visit the Seattle Girls’ School website at www.seattlegirlsschool.org.

A New Addition to Grassroots Advocacy for Public Schools

By Lisa Kagan

In 2007, a new child and youth advocacy group put down roots in Washington state. Stand for Children is a citizen-led, child advocacy organization which has been active in Oregon, Massachusetts, and Tennessee. It uses a nationally recognized model for grassroots citizen

The focus will be increased funding and improved policies for public K-12 schools

involvement to teach everyday people how to advocate on behalf of children to their legislators.

Stand for Children uses a curriculum for leadership training and mentoring advocates who learn to be effective leaders, develop key organizational skills and gain a heightened understanding of children's issues. These advocates become member-leaders, organized into local chapters and teams, researching their major concerns, deciding on issues, setting specific goals for change, and then working in coalitions with other organizations.

Stand for Children and its citizen lobby, in collaboration with established Washington state advocacy groups with similar missions, plans to spend the next three years identifying at least six communities across the state in which to build local chapters. The focus will be increased funding and improved policies for public K-12 schools with an emphasis on:

- Establishing a statewide non-partisan citizen voice for children capable of wielding significant grassroots pressure.
- Holding elected officials accountable for establishing child-centered education policies aligned with best practices.
- Increasing funding for public schools at the local and state levels.
- Helping to elect pro-children, pro-schools candidates to the state legislature and local school boards.

For more information please visit the Stand for Children website at www.stand.org.

Staff Changes at Heliotrope

Heliotrope was founded in 1995 by Nancy Ashley. Four years later, Nancy invited Christina Malecka to join her and doubled the staff of Heliotrope. Christina brought with her nine years of experience in grassroots and community-based work. On top of her phenomenal contributions at Heliotrope, Christina attended graduate school, earned a Master's degree, and left Heliotrope earlier this year to become a therapist at Jewish Family Services. We, along with our colleagues and friends, miss Christina's insight, dedication, and wit.

Upon Christina's departure, Lisa Kagan joined Heliotrope after seven years of working in research and advocacy. She has worked for the Office of Children's Administration Research, the state legislature, and the University of Washington, as well as within the non-profit sector. Lisa holds a Masters degree in Social Work where her work focused on public policy, specifically juvenile justice. Lisa is very excited about her new job in spite of the myriad acronyms she has to learn each week.

A note from Christina:

As many of you know, I ended my eight years with Heliotrope in April 2007 to pursue a new career as a Mental Health Counselor. I want to thank all of Heliotrope's fantastic clients and friends for inspiring and challenging me during the time I worked with Nancy. I am grateful to Nancy for her mentorship over the years and her support of my moving to this next phase in my life.

I continue to use a strengths-based philosophy in my job as a therapist at Jewish Family Services and I'm constantly inspired by what human beings can accomplish when they put their hearts and minds to a task. Thanks again to all of you.

—Christina Malecka

Update: What Heliotrope is Working On

We continue to be privileged to work with amazing and committed people and organizations that are dedicated to improving the well being of our children, youth, families and communities. In many situations, we have been able to contribute on a multi-year basis in ways that influence long-term positive changes. Here is a sampling of our recent and current projects:

Innovative Early Learning Approaches to Support Parents and Extended Family

The exciting momentum to improve early learning in Washington State has focused policies and resources primarily on children who attend licensed child care programs, preschools, or other formal group settings. However, for children aged birth to five in our state, 63 percent are cared for primarily by parents, families, and community members. Two of our projects aim to develop strategies and allocate resources to reflect the realities of where children are, respect parents' choices for care of their children, and increase outreach to serve children who are among those least likely to be ready for school.

- **Improving the Quality of Family Friend and Neighbor Child Care.** As the result of investment by a public and private funders' collaborative called the Opportunity Fund, and ongoing leadership by funders and community champions, a system to provide resources and support to extended family caregivers is emerging in King County and gaining a foothold throughout the state. Child Care Resources and the Washington State Child Care Resource & Referral Network are the strong intermediary organizations implementing these efforts. Heliotrope provided staff support to the Opportunity Fund and continues that role with the successor Family, Friend, and Neighbor Caregiving Leaders Team. Heliotrope has been deeply involved in strategic planning, fund development, policy changes, and evaluation. This year, we supported policy and legislative action resulting in initial state funding; served as the coordinators for a "showcase" visit for leaders around the country; and prepared an extensive business plan for 2008-2010.

Many young children, especially infants, toddlers,

the children of immigrant families, and families living below the poverty line rely heavily on grandparents, other relatives, friends and neighbors to care for their children while parents work. Intense work over five years by a small but mighty collaboration has brought growing awareness of Family, Friend, and Neighbor care as a critical component of a comprehensive early education system.

- **Closing the School Preparedness Gap with the Parent Child Home Program.** A group of King County business leaders called the Business Partnership for Early Learning (BPEL) stepped forward in 2005 to launch a five-year demonstration project to determine if an evidence-based, home visiting program for parents and toddlers could help children who are at high risk of coming to kindergarten more than two years behind their peers. The families served are not involved in organized programs because of cultural choices, fear or mistrust of "outside" organizations, language barriers, and the existence of waiting lists for free programs.

The Parent-Child Home Program is a pre-literacy program for children aged 2 and 3. BPEL is also funding Play and Learn groups for the children and parents involved. Evaluation results are exceeding expectations -- retention rates are high and families express high levels of satisfaction.

Heliotrope serves as the project coordinator for BPEL. BPEL provides grants to Neighborhood House and Atlantic Street Center to deliver the programs.

A Comprehensive Framework To Reduce School Dropout

Earlier this year, Heliotrope completed a report describing a strategic framework for reducing the rate of school dropout in King County. Heliotrope collected and analyzed evidence-based practices and programs from around the county, and mapped out a comprehensive but feasible approach needed to ensure more young people graduate from high school and are ready for post-secondary education or livable wage jobs.

Our client was Reinvesting in Youth, a collaboration of juvenile justice, education, human services leaders and elected officials that initially tackled an innovative

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approach to reducing costs and increasing positive outcomes in the juvenile justice system.

The dropout problem in King County and the state is closely related to the achievement gaps suffered by low income, African American, Latino, and Native American students, as well as English Language Learners. Much can be done to spot the early warning signs of dropping out and to improve our educational systems in ways that keep students engaged and on track to graduate. Major changes require both state-level policy and resource decisions and a commitment within school districts to be accountable for reducing their dropout rate.

Maximizing the Power of Afterschool and Youth Development Programs

After assisting Schools Out Washington to develop a statewide strategic plan to improve the quality and quantity of after school programs in 2004, Heliotrope was recently engaged to conduct further analysis and planning for two important components of that plan.

First was the development of a strategic framework for the professional development of the afterschool/youth development workforce in Washington. School's Out Washington is committed to ensuring that program staff

are well trained, stable, and supported, which is a critical ingredient in achieving positive outcomes for children and youth.

We have also recently started work on a study of the supply and demand for afterschool/youth development programs in the state. Policymakers require solid information to determine need for these programs. Licensing or registration with a regulatory agency is not required for many. Because programs are sponsored by many sectors, no one maintains a comprehensive directory of programs, making it difficult to assess the current supply. Obtaining the most relevant data will require a multi-layered approach. This work will continue through 2008.

Supporting the Bold Goals of the YMCA of the USA

Heliotrope has been assisting the YMCA of the USA over the past year and a half to develop and implement a bold, new strategic plan, designed to engage 25 million people in the country in building strong kids, strong families and strong communities. Neil Nicoll, previously President and CEO of the YMCA of Greater Seattle, was tapped to lead the national organization in July 2007. He is providing strong and inspirational leadership to support 970 YMCAs and increase their impact in their communities.

Off the Clock: Heliotrope's Volunteerism

Both Nancy and Lisa volunteer their time to organizations and projects that reflect their personal passions. Among them are:

University Family YMCA

Nancy is an active board member at the University Family YMCA, a branch of the YMCA of Greater Seattle. She's leading a new Advocacy Committee aimed at building stronger partnerships with other organizations in the community to leverage resources and improve the well being of community members. Initial partnerships for the group's focus include Children's Hospital and childhood obesity issues; Windermere Real Estate and scholarships for low-income children to attend afterschool programs; and a focus on prevention of substance abuse problems at Eckstein Middle School.

The Refugee and Immigrant Family Center

Lisa is a board member of the Refugee and Immigrant

Family Center (RIFC) in White Center. The RIFC is a thirteen-year old organization serving refugee, immigrant, or low-income children and adults in the Highland Park area. The program houses a model Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP), a whole-child, family-focused preschool program designed to help low-income and at-risk children and their families. The RIFC also offers adult literacy and computer education programs. The RIFC board members are currently working on program expansion to include more preschool students, instructor recruitment for the adult programs, and fundraising. For more information go to the RIFC website at www.rifccenter.com.

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