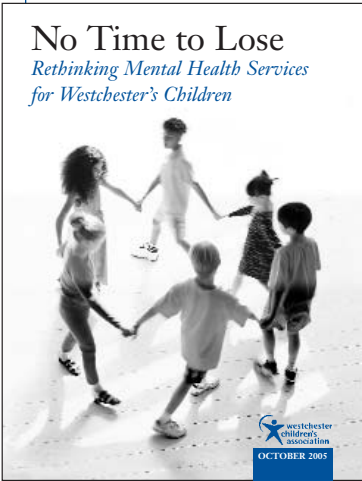


WCA Report Urges New Approaches for Children's Mental Health

No Time to Lose
Rethinking Mental Health Services for Westchester's Children



Westchester children with mental health needs are not getting the help they need. So says a report by the Westchester Children's Association that calls for changes in the way children with social, emotional and behavior problems get help. "Traditional clinic-based services do not come close to meeting the needs of our county's children," said Cora Greenberg, Executive Director of WCA.

According to the report, entitled *No Time To Lose: Rethinking Mental Health Services for Westchester's Children*, national statistics suggest that as many as 11,500 children in Westchester could be affected by serious emotional illness.

Moreover, the report cites the New York State Office of Mental Health's "Patient Characteristics Survey" of 2003 which states that of the 9,108 individuals receiving mental health services in the County that year, 2,408, or about 26%, were under the age of 21.

WCA's report states that insurance regulations, lack of trained therapists and social stigma are some of the barriers keeping kids from getting the mental health services they need. Further, the report states that many children would be best served by services within community-based programs that they and their families already use, such as day care centers, health centers, and schools. "Right now, teachers and day care providers are often frustrated when they encounter a child with emotional problems, and sometimes children are expelled from programs because their problems cannot be addressed" Greenberg said. "Children and professionals who care for them need a better answer," she added.

Based on two years of research by the Association, the report makes five specific recommendations for action by local and state governments, service agencies and community leaders. (See Sidebar)

"Improving the social and emotional health of all our children will take the effort of government, social agencies, parents and schools," Greenberg said. "But there are wonderful, proven models of what works. We need to close the gap between what we know and what we do."

The full report is available on the WCA Web site at www.wca4kids.org. ■

WCA's RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 Increase mental health services to young children (ages 0-6) by expanding staff training and sharing information about effective service models.
- 2 Invest \$250,000 of Westchester County tax levies to pilot community-based, non-traditional, collaborative, mental health services and interventions for young children and their families.
- 3 Enlist the participation of pediatricians and other primary care providers as key partners in children's mental health prevention and treatment.
- 4 Develop a pamphlet to educate parents about children's mental health.
- 5 Work to reform insurance reimbursement formulas and other financing mechanisms for children's mental health services.

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County Candidates Support Investments for Children, Advocates Push for Action

Candidates in the 2005 Westchester elections overwhelmingly support increasing County investment in services to children, according to the results of a survey conducted by the Westchester Children's Association. "We are pleased to have such a strong showing of support for kids," said Cora Greenberg, Executive Director of WCA. "Now we call on our elected officials to translate their concern for children into increased funding to address their needs," she added. Results of the survey were announced at a Child Watch Speak-Out on October 20 at the YWCA of White Plains. Parents, youth and advocates spoke about the importance of County funding for children and youth.

Under Westchester Children's Association leadership, child advocates are calling for increased County investments in child care subsidies, community-based mental health services, and programs that nurture positive activities for our youngest citizens. "We know that even small investments in helping young children do well will save taxpayers much larger expenditures by preventing later problems in education, social functioning, job readiness and health," Greenberg said.

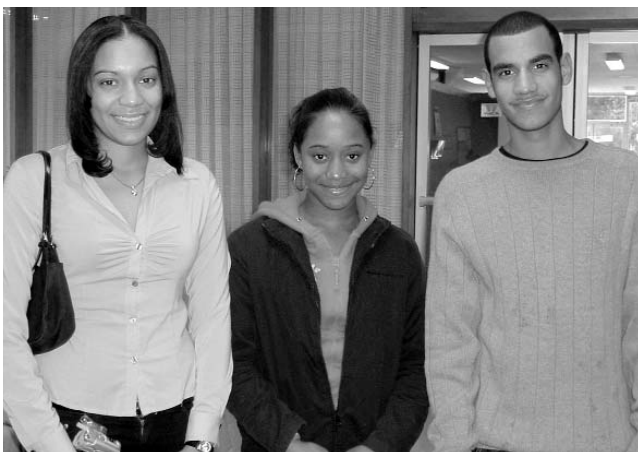
Local parents and youth spoke eloquently about how County investments have helped them. Jodee MacDonald of Greenburgh said, "I have been homeless, I have been on welfare and needed child care subsidies, I have used Section 8 [housing assistance] to help pay my



Community Activists listen to speakers at WCA Child Watch event.

rent." She called on elected officials to think about families like hers when they decide how to spend County tax dollars. "All those programs really helped me keep my family safe and secure," she added.

Overall response to the survey was high, with 22 out of 31 candidates submitting answers. But only half – five out of 10 – of candidates seeking to represent Westchester's three largest cities, including some of the County's neediest communities, responded to the survey. "Any issue that affects children will have a greater impact on poor children," Greenberg remarked. "It is disappointing that candidates running for office in these communities did not care enough to respond to our proposals." Complete candidate responses can be read on the Westchester Children's Association Web site, www.wca4kids.org. ■



Conference attendees included Aljuany Tobal, Sindy Balis, Alphy's Tobal, participants at CLUSTER's Study Buddies, in Yonkers.



Jodee MacDonald of Greenburgh.

WCA Takes Foster Kids to the Theater



The Performing Arts Center at Purchase College was the scene of a lively performance by the comedy troupe, the Flying Karamazov Brothers on November 19. The event was made extra special by the attendance of about 150 children living in foster care. Through the generosity of its donors and supporters, and as part of its effort to improve the lives of foster children, WCA purchased a block of tickets to this entertaining and kid-friendly event and invited foster care agencies to bring youngsters to the show. Supporters were also able to purchase tickets to treat themselves and their families to an enjoyable afternoon of inspired silliness. ■

WCA Begins Work on Children's Data Book

With a generous grant from the Wallace Westchester Fund in the Westchester Community Foundation, WCA will soon begin work on a Children's Data Book for Westchester County. The Data Book will compile a wide range of information about children's well-being – such as data on education, health, economic status, safety, etc. – both at the County and municipal level. “We intend the Data Book to be a resource for service planners, community agencies, local governments and children's advocates,” said Cora Greenberg, Executive Director of WCA. Plans include publishing information in print and on the WCA web site. Dan Lipka, formerly with the International Rescue Committee, will join WCA to head up this important project.

In preparation for developing the Data Book, a task force of WCA's Board of Directors, under the leadership of Ann Spindel, have been interviewing service providers and community leaders to ascertain their need for, access to and use of data. The results of these interviews will help WCA focus its work most effectively to meet the needs of its intended audience. ■

HOW TO BE AN EFFECTIVE CHILD ADVOCATE

Whether speaking about the County budget (*see schedule on page 4*), state laws on teen driving, zoning for day care centers or any other children's issue, here are some tips for communicating your message effectively:

- **Know your facts: Do your homework about the issue you want to affect.**
- **Clearly state the problem you want to address: Use facts to paint a picture of what is not working for kids.**
- **Be clear about what should be done: Focus on a specific change you want to see.**
- **Be “hard on the issues” and “soft on the people” Your goal is to persuade decision-makers to become your allies, not to make them look bad.**

For more tips on being a child advocate, go to the “Advocacy 101” section of the WCA web site:
<http://www.wca4kids.org/howtobeanadvocate.htm>

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Health Update: WCA Gets Grants to Keep Kids Insured

New York State offers two great programs – Medicaid and Child Health Plus – that provide health insurance to uninsured children. WCA has helped shape Westchester's program to enroll eligible children in these programs since 1999, and while we have enrolled thousands of children, many of those same children subsequently lose insurance because their families fail to properly re-enroll them annually as required.

WCA has received two grants to help us learn why families fail to re-enroll and how to make the process easier so more children can keep the health insurance and the health care they need. Under a Legislative Initiative Grant sponsored by Westchester's legislators in Albany, WCA will lead a countywide workgroup on recertification and re-enrollment, identify approaches that work, seek input from consumers and make recommendations to improve the reenrollment rates in the County. Under the second grant, from the United Way

of Westchester and Putnam, WCA will tackle the problem of re-enrollment in Tarrytown/Sleepy Hollow, convening local partners and developing specifically tailored initiatives to speed and ease the re-enrollment process.

WCA is grateful to these funders who help us make Westchester a better place for children, youth and families. ■

SPEAK UP FOR KIDS!

Each year, Westchester residents are invited to comment on the proposed County Budget at three public hearings. This year's hearings on the 2006 Budget, all beginning at 7 p.m. will be held as follows:

- Monday, November 21 Mamaroneck Town Hall
- Wednesday, November 30 Yorktown High School
- Wednesday, December 7 County Office Bldg, White Plains

For further information, call the Board of Legislators at (914) 995-2800. For tips on effective advocacy, see page 3.