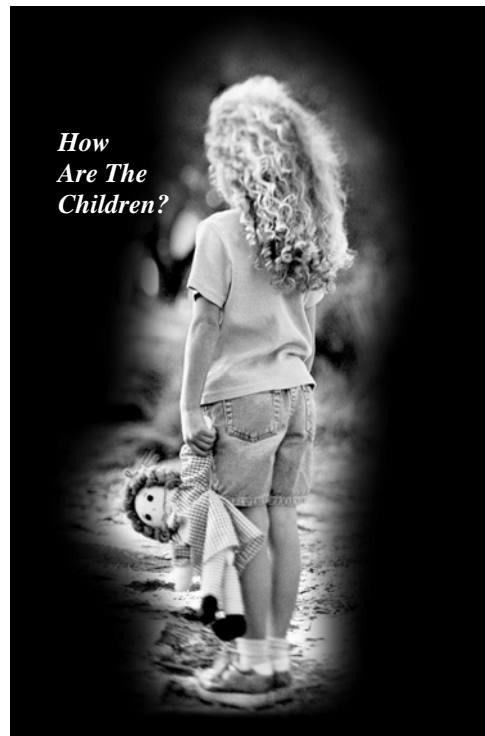


A Response to Child Abuse in Mesa County



We prevent child abuse and neglect by
supporting families,
educating parents, and
engaging community members
to ensure the children are well in Mesa County.



Town Hall Meeting

A Response to Child Abuse in Mesa County

Background

Between January of 2006 and June of 2007, just 18 short months, six Mesa County children died as a result of child abuse or neglect. All of them were under the age of three. Three of them were beaten to death. The citizens of Mesa County believe this is completely unacceptable. As upsetting as it is when a child dies from abuse, it is perhaps even more upsetting to think about the children that must continue to live in abusive and neglectful homes.

Study after study shows a direct connection between child abuse and most other social problems. In the vast majority of cases of juvenile delinquency, high school drop outs, drug and alcohol addiction, and adults in the criminal justice system, there is a clear connection to a history of child abuse or neglect. If we focus on preventing child abuse, our children's quality of life could be greatly improved and billions of tax dollars could be saved in criminal justice and welfare services.

Child abuse is ugly and people don't want to look at it or think about it. But our children are being abused all around us. We can't turn our heads away any longer.

With a goal that "Not One More" child should die from abuse, Mesa County hosted a Town Hall meeting on Child Abuse in October of 2007. Local leaders and citizens from all across Mesa County came together to identify the causes of child abuse in our community. Several critical areas of concern and opportunities for improvement were identified and citizens self selected into breakout groups in order to begin the process of developing a strategic plan. Goals and objectives were identified at the Town Hall meeting and were further refined and defined through several follow up meetings. This paper documents those goals and objectives and includes goals from strategic planning in 2010.

Plan

The work of this Child Abuse Prevention Initiative will be included in the *Mesa County Partnership for Children and Families*. The work will be carried out through four ongoing committees or work groups and an Executive Committee composed of the committee chairs and other key individuals. The Co-Chairs of the Executive Committee are:

Stacey Mascarenas, Fruita City Councilmember
Donna Bennett, Community Member
Janet Rowland, Mesa County Commissioner

244-1787 stacey.mascarenas@mesacounty.us
639-2224 silverislet@bresnan.net
244-1606 janet.rowland@mesacounty.us

The Executive Committee meets the second Tuesday of each month at 12:00pm at the Old Courthouse- 544 Rood Ave, in Training Room A.

Our committees and their goals are documented in this paper. In order to avoid duplication of services the goals of this initiative will not involve working directly with families, but rather we will facilitate the development of new services or increase the capacity of existing services through existing agencies and organizations. For individuals who wish to be more involved and work directly with families, many opportunities will be identified and shared through the Community Outreach Committee.



How
Are The
Children?

Parent Education/Family Support

Increase capacity of parent education and ensure that services are in place to support families to avoid reaching a crisis point.

Background

Mesa County is fortunate to have a variety of services to support struggling families provided by several agencies in the community. A comprehensive list of ongoing parenting classes and other supportive services is maintained through Western Colorado 211.

Parent Education~ Although classes are available those that could benefit most from them either don't know about them or choose not to access them. And in other cases there are long waiting lists especially for in-home parent training.

One suggestion that was raised at the Town Hall meeting was to consider ways to provide parents with information other than the traditional classroom setting. Alternative venues that were suggested included web based methods (MySpace/Facebook) or television and radio. One suggestion that perhaps offered the most opportunity was to insure that all parents of newborns receive parent information and referrals for other services before ever leaving the hospital.

Family Support Services~ One barrier that seemed to reach across all areas discussed at the Town Hall meeting was public awareness of services available to support children and families. The families that need help the most are often not aware of the services. Additionally some families don't reach out for help until they are at their breaking point, and at that time, they need immediate help.

Suggestions for addressing these issues included establishing a parent support line and ensuring more people are aware of Western Colorado 211. In 2008 How are the Children?[®] worked with Hilltop Community Resources to establish a local Parent Help Line using volunteers who operated the Domestic Violence crisis line. In 2009 Prevent Child Abuse Colorado was established and the 1-800-CHILDREN line became available. This is a great tool for our local families provided they are aware of it.

Opportunities

- 1- Increase parenting information available for all parents of newborns through discharge planning at the hospital.
- 2- Complete a gaps analysis of services available to families in the Grand Junction area and increase the number of families that access parent education or family support services.
- 3- Work with the Outreach Committee to increase awareness about and usage of 1-800-CHILDREN.
- 4- Work with the Outreach Committee to increase awareness about and usage of Western Colorado 211.

Contact Information

This workgroup is chaired by Donna Bennet. For more information e-mail her at silverislet@bresnan.net



Community Outreach

Develop a comprehensive communication plan to support the efforts of child abuse prevention.

Background

One of the issues that came up repeatedly at the Town Hall meeting was a need to insure the general public is informed about child abuse and neglect. The specific areas identified ranged from how to identify and report abuse and what happens after a report is made, to how to know what services are available to support families and how citizens can get involved and volunteer for or donate to various non profit agencies.

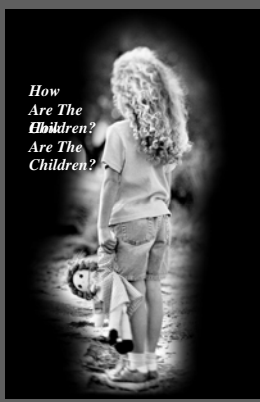
The Mesa County Meth Taskforce's Drug Endangered Children's (DEC) Committee also identified the need to inform the public about how to identify and report child abuse as a priority and in fact included this goal in their 2008 Strategic Plan. DEC published a booklet that provides clear information on this very subject. It is a very good tool to use to inform the public. DEC also produced a television commercial to encourage the general public to be aware of children who are abused or neglected and to report it. The Community Outreach Committee will continue to partner with DEC when working to inform the general public and professionals who are mandated reporters.

Opportunities

1. Work with the Systems Committee to develop and implement a comprehensive plan to educate professionals about how to better recognize and report child abuse or neglect. This effort would improve communication between the reporting parties and DHS and improve the understanding of the child protection system.
2. Inform community members about the importance of parent education and family support in preventing child abuse and neglect, and engage them in prevention efforts.
3. Work with the Outreach Committee to increase awareness about and usage of 1-800-CHILDREN through the Got Kids? Campaign. (This will replace the 683-HELP line). **(Samples from past campaign included in packet: Bus Bench artwork; McDonald's placemat artwork; Brochure.** Several of these will need to be updated prior to 2011 Kick Off. We provide them simply as a sample).
4. Work with the Outreach Committee to increase awareness about and usage of Western Colorado 211.

Contact Information

For more information contact Janet Rowland at 244-1606 or janet.rowland@mesacounty.us



Systems

Identify and resolve barriers to communication pathways between agencies and systems.

Background

One of the challenges identified at the Town Hall meeting was communication between all agencies that work with children and families. Of specific importance was communication between Child Protective Services and agencies that make reports to the Child Protection Hotline.

Immediately following the Town Hall meeting we convened a meeting of all the agencies that serve children and families in order to better identify challenges, obstacles and opportunities. Top priorities were improving communication between CPS and the schools and medical professional and to ensure that mandated reporters know how to identify and report suspected child abuse.

The Department of Human Services established the Community Liaison position and hired two people to focus solely on answering the hotline, following up with mandated reporters after a report was investigated and training both mandated and non-mandated reporters, about how to identify and report child abuse. The school district and medical professionals report that this new model has been very successful.

Several of these systems are currently involved in developing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) defining how they will work together to insure the safety of at-risk children.

Opportunities

1. Work with Community Outreach and the Dept of Human Services Community Liaison's to develop and implement a comprehensive plan to educate professionals about how to recognize and report child abuse or neglect
2. Improve communication and cooperation between systems such as Child Protective Services, schools and medical professionals to insure all at-risk children and their families are identified and served. Complete the Multi-Disciplinary MOU.
3. Meet on a regular basis with agency leaders to define and prioritize challenges and opportunities.

Contact Information

This workgroup is chaired by Erica Anderson. For more information call 256-2476 or e-mail Erica.anderson@mesacounty.us