

Interchange

The News Connection for Southeastern Grantmakers

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The Courage to Combat Child Sexual Abuse

One out of every four girls will be sexually abused before her 18th birthday. The same is true for one in six boys.

While these statistics are alarming, they are not well known — and the subject of child sexual abuse and its pervasiveness in our society barely registers on our social consciousness. The Pittulloch Foundation in Atlanta, Georgia intends to change that, at least in its home state, by creating an initiative to partner with other foundations and youth-serving organizations to train one million Georgia adults to recognize and minimize the risk of child sexual abuse by 2020.

“The issue of child sexual abuse has not been addressed in a significant way but is in a crisis stage that affects every youth-serving nonprofit, school and church we support,” says Lynn Pattillo, president of the Pittulloch Foundation. “We tend to think of the issue as applying to ‘those kids over there in the cor-

ner’ and not really affecting me or my foundation, but it does. We all pay for it later.” Statistics about the ramifications that child sexual abuse has on society are sobering. There are an estimated 39 million survivors of childhood sexual abuse in the United States. Victims of childhood sexual abuse are more likely to suffer from depression, substance abuse, eating disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder and a host of other psychological, emotional and social problems. 70-80% of sexual abuse survivors report excessive drug and alcohol use. An estimated 60% of teen first pregnancies are preceded by experiences of molestation, rape, or attempted rape. Over 75% of serial rapists report they were sexually abused as youngsters. *

Pattillo discovered the issue when she met Anne Lee, the founder of Darkness to Light, a Charleston, South Carolina-based national advocacy group that focuses on shifting the responsibility of preventing child sexual abuse from children



to adults and teaching adult “Stewards of Children” how to recognize and minimize the risks.

“Our foundation prefers to take the initiative rather than to respond to requests, and look for root causes to address rather than symptoms,” says Pattillo. “The more Anne talked about child sexual abuse, the more it made sense to address it. Traditionally, programs have focused on the children themselves, teaching them to ‘just say no,’ but it’s hard for a child to say no to an authority figure they have been told to trust. About 90 percent of the time, the family knows and trusts the offender. Another approach is to target offenders, but they are a hard group to turn around.” According to Darkness to Light, the aver-



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The Southeastern Council of Foundations is a membership association of grantmaking foundations and programs that promotes excellence throughout the field of philanthropy and the creation of new philanthropic resources to benefit the region.

age child molester may have as many as 400 victims in his lifetime.

The Pittulloch Foundation will use Darkness to Light's Stewards for Children curriculum to achieve its goal of one million trained Georgia adults over the next 10 years. Pattillo hopes that giving such a large number of adults the tools and ability to talk about child sexual abuse will begin to initiate state-wide transformation. "Protecting children and preventing child sexual abuse will require a cultural change," says Pattillo. "Right now, talking about child sexual abuse is taboo. This works in favor of the offenders. But over the next decade or so, we want to make it mainstream on any adult's mental checklist or radar, just like any other safety measure. For example, my children's pediatrician has never mentioned anything about how to prevent sexual abuse, recognize when it might have occurred, or what to do if I suspect it. But he has told me all about using car seats.

"Think of the smoking culture we had in this country 10-20 years ago. There were smokers everywhere. It took media attention, a stand by the medical community and eventually policy changes to curb the use of cigarettes in public places, but the culture has changed.

"Children are much more likely to be sexually abused than they are to be injured in

a car accident, to ingest poison, or to contract a critical childhood illness," says Anne Lee, founder and executive director of Darkness to Light and a survivor of child sexual abuse. "Yet, although most parents know how to use safety belts, lock up poisons and vaccinate their children, they have no idea how to prevent sexual abuse."

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The Stewards of Children training helps adults understand the pervasiveness of child sexual abuse in every segment of society, regardless of income or race, and shares the stories of adult survivors as well as reports from psychologists, school nurses, attorneys and other professionals who explain how the results of child sexual abuse impact their day-to-day work.

Core to the training are seven simple steps that every adult can take (see sidebar). "Even though this is a huge issue," says Lee, "we can address it by giving adults common sense, proactive steps they can take to protect the children in their lives." For example, minimizing risk can be as simple as minimizing uninterrupted one-on-one time with other adults or older children.

(The fastest growing group of offenders is children 11-17 years old.)

"Parents need to learn to ask certain questions when sending children to places like school or camp or afterschool programs," says Pattillo. "Has the staff been trained in recognizing and responding to child sexual

abuse? Is there a formal policy about how to handle that situation?"

Georgia Center for Children is the main hub for training adult stewards and will be the recipient of the Pittulloch Foundation's investment. "We have committed to invest several million dollars over the next few years," says Pattillo. "This is a long-term, multi-faceted problem so in addition to the investment in training, funds are also needed to re-shoot the training video using Latino professionals and survivors and to provide materials and brochures to places such as jury waiting rooms, Alcoholics Anonymous meeting rooms and community health clinics."

In the past, the Center's work focused on response to sexual abuse. Now it will also

highlight prevention. The goal is to train 500 facilitators over the next five years, who each will then commit to training 200 people a year to reach the goal of 1 million by 2020.

"When people go through this training, they are excited and empowered. It's a very positive experience," says LaVann Landrum, executive director of the Georgia Center for Children. As of August 1, 2006, the Georgia Center for Children had trained about 30 facilitators and more than 200 adult stewards.

The Foundation and the Georgia Center for Children are partnering with Bright from the Start, Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning to make child sexual abuse training an optional part of teachers' ongoing professional development. They are reaching out to Boys & Girls Clubs, other child-serving organizations and individual schools and school systems. They have approached Columbia Theological Seminary and Emory University as a source for trainers and to train future clergy. Undergraduate students at Emory who serve as volunteer tutors and mentors in the community will be trained this fall.

Pattillo realizes that this work will have considerable repercussions on facilities that treat child sexual abuse victims. "Only one out of ten children report it and 42 percent of the time it is to

FACT: Preventing child sexual abuse



is a job for adult's.



A MESSAGE FROM
Cyndi Lauper

Child sexual abuse is an epidemic. 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys will be sexually abused before the age of 18, and most will never report the abuse. Go to darkness2light.org and get the information to prevent, recognize and react responsibly through our prevention training "Stewards of Children" and our guide "7 Steps to Protecting Our Children from Sexual Abuse." It's that easy. It's that important.

darkness to light
Confronting child sexual abuse with courage.

Television, radio and print ads like this one help raise awareness of the issue and help adults learn to protect children in their care.

a teacher or a counselor. The number of incidences reported will increase, which will stress the system. We are working with Children's Healthcare of Atlanta, regional hospitals, community health clinics and child advocacy centers to figure out how to handle the increase in demand for services to children who have been abused."

"I think we'll have a different Georgia once this information is out there and we have the courage to address it. Right now most people are like I was

a year ago, either oblivious or choosing to ignore it, but it's pervasive and has devastating effects on individuals, families and society. Yet, people want to talk about it. At one session in a local school, the parents were nervous at first, but ended up staying more than an hour after the allotted discussion time to continue the conversation. We just need to give people permission to talk about it."

According to Pattillo, there's an easy way for any foundation to have an immediate impact

on the problem. "Going forward, all the nonprofits we fund that serve children will be required to have staff training and formal policies in place around child sexual abuse," she explains. "The training cost per person is only \$15 and scholarship funds are available on a sliding scale. Every organization that serves children has at least one child who has been sexually abused. If staff and volunteers are trained, they can direct that child to safety and recovery much sooner.

"The lowest cost way for a foundation to better participate is simply to work with its grantees to ensure that they have the training and child sexual abuse policies in place for their own liability protection as well as for the children's health and safety. Asking if the organizations train their staff and volunteers and requesting copies of their child sexual abuse policies is a reasonable and prudent thing to do. Adding a small amount of funds to grants so that willing organizations can increase their child sexual abuse prevention standards will produce outstanding returns."

For more information about childhood sexual abuse and what adults can do to prevent it, please visit the Darkness to Light website, www.d2l.org.

* Source: Darkness to Light website, www.d2l.org.

Seven Steps for Prevention

Step 1: Learn the facts

Realities—not trust—should influence your decisions regarding your child.

Step 2: Minimize Opportunity

If you eliminate or reduce one-adult/one-child situations, you'll dramatically lower the risk of sexual abuse for your child.

Step 3: Talk about it

Children often keep abuse a secret, but barriers can be broken down by talking openly about it.

Step 4: Stay Alert

Don't expect obvious signs when a child is being sexually abused.

Step 5: Make a Plan

Learn where to go, whom to call and how to react.

Step 6: Act on Suspicions

The future well-being of a child is at stake.

Step 7: Get involved

Volunteer and financially support organizations that fight the tragedy of child sexual abuse.

For more information, visit www.d2l.org.