Supporting parents and strengthening families

THE REALITY

In one year, an estimated 3.2 million incidents of child abuse and neglect are reported to child protective service agencies in the United States alone. And while that number may be astounding, know that those cases are just the tip of the iceberg. So many other cases go unreported or undetected.

What’s also astounding is that in some 80 percent of reported child abuse and neglect cases, the alleged abusers are overwhelmed, stressed parents who took their frustrations out on their own children. Given the current economic and social pressures facing many families today, parents are often confronted with stresses that challenge their ability to cope. Many families struggle financially and, as a result, are unable to provide adequate child care or even meet the children’s basic needs.

In other cases, child abuse results because parents have never learned how to be good parents. Experts believe that the majority of parents with abuse problems were abused as children, physically, emotionally and/or sexually. The “learned” behavior becomes the mode by which parents resolve conflict, communicate with their children and even discipline them. Unlearning the behavior is the first step in stopping child abuse and creating healthier environments for children. Given support and proper intervention, the majority of parents with problems can keep their families intact, stop unwanted parenting behaviors and begin healing.

Startling statistics

In the United States during just one year, an estimated 3.2 million referrals involving 5.8 million children were reported. Upon investigation, an estimated 794,000 children were determined to be victims of abuse or neglect.

Who are these victims?

- 52% females
- 48% males
- 46% white
- 22% African-American
- 21% Hispanic
- 59% suffered neglect
- 11% suffered physical abuse
- 8% suffered sexual abuse
- 4% suffered psychological maltreatment
- 1,760 children died
THE PARENTS ANONYMOUS SOLUTION

Parents Anonymous, Inc. helps families by offering free, professionally facilitated, peer-led support groups for parents with abuse problems. The philosophy of the organization is that parents have the ability to heal themselves by seeking solutions to their problems within themselves. Parents Anonymous serves families through hundreds of support groups. These groups meet in schools, hospitals, community centers, churches and a variety of other sites. In addition to the traditional parent-support model, Parents Anonymous has created special groups for teenagers, various ethnic groups, prison inmates and grandparents. While parents and caregivers meet in the Parents Anonymous group, their children participate in a national standards-based children and youth program. These weekly groups meet for 90 minutes in a location free of stigma and easily accessible to all families.

A Parents Anonymous group is often the first step a parent takes in seeking help to control anger directed toward his or her children. This group offers a safe atmosphere where parents discuss what works with their kids and what doesn’t. Each individual can examine his own behavior and chose more constructive options in parenting.

HOW KIWANIS CLUBS CAN HELP

Kiwanis clubs can work with Parents Anonymous accredited organizations in their mission to prevent child abuse and neglect. There is also a need to start new Parents Anonymous support groups, as well as children and youth programs, in many areas. The first step a club should take is to contact the national Parents Anonymous office. The office will tell you who is conducting Parents Anonymous programs in your area or provide information on the process to start a new program. When a club’s committee for Young Children: Priority One contacts the local group, it can:

- Meet with Parents Anonymous national or local staff to discuss the needs of the program and how the club or division can help.
- Invite a Parents Anonymous representative to speak at a club meeting.
- Ask if a local Parents Anonymous program would allow a member of the committee to attend a meeting of the group.
- Develop a plan to help the Parents Anonymous local accredited organization and present it to the club’s board of directors.

Kiwanis support can take many forms. Most Parents Anonymous programs need volunteer support, additional publicity and financial assistance.

Support projects

Provide child care. Providing child care would eliminate an obstacle for parents, enabling them to attend group meetings regularly. The club could hire a licensed, trained child-care worker or use members of the club to help supervise the children and youth programs.

Arrange transportation. Transportation problems keep some parents from getting to Parents Anonymous meetings. Club members could give rides to parents who need them or set up a bus system that would pick up all the parents in the group.
Support projects (cont’d)

Adopt an office. The Parents Anonymous state and affiliate offices often need more help to give adequate support to local Parents Anonymous programs. A club or division could provide volunteers to help with general office tasks, arrange for members to share their professional expertise (legal, accounting, management, publicity), raise funds or help set up a “Support Council” of companies that are willing to help the Parents Anonymous program.

Help with communications. Parents Anonymous Inc. provides proprietary program materials for its programs as well as promotional items. These items can be purchased from Parents Anonymous Inc. at a nominal cost.

Establish a lending library. There are many excellent videos on parenting issues that could be purchased by a club and loaned to members of local Parents Anonymous programs.

Raise public awareness

To help Parents Anonymous make the community aware of what Parents Anonymous does and its presence in the community, clubs could develop and distribute fliers, ask for public service ads in newspapers or on radio and television, sponsor a parenting event or establish a speakers bureau.

Establish a speakers bureau. A club could help set up and publicize a speakers bureau featuring Parents Anonymous leaders and experts on various parenting issues.

Promote the stress help line. Parents Anonymous Inc. operates a national parent help line. To get further information on how to access this critical service, contact the national office.

Plan a special event. A Parents Anonymous program could use Kiwanis support for an event outside the Parents Anonymous meeting that would allow the parents to do something special with their families. This could be a picnic, a family expedition to a tourist attraction or a fun day for the children.

Set up or support a Parent Aide program. Parent Aides are trained, professionally supervised individuals who assist parents under stress and parents whose children are at risk of abuse or neglect. They visit families and help the parents understand the developmental stages of their children, develop coping skills, increase communication and use community resources. A Kiwanis club could help set up a Parent Aide program or support an established program with funding or volunteers.

Adopt a Parents Anonymous program. There are certain costs in running a Parents Anonymous program, and a club could help with these expenses. In addition, a club could work with the group’s facilitator to offer assistance to members of the group, such as helping a family with transportation to a doctor’s office or searching for a job.

Provide family support. A club could offer to give whatever assistance a family needs. Volunteers could visit and help with the children, provide transportation, help set up a family budget or help make the holiday season a merry one.

How Parents Anonymous helps

Parents benefit from attending regular meetings where they can:

- Share advice
- Talk about problems
- Socialize, feel less isolated
- Share a sense of purpose
- Enjoy a non-judgmental atmosphere
- Have other parents listen
- Receive parenting information

According to a recent study, after attending Parents Anonymous meetings, parents indicated a statistically significant reduction of risk factors for child abuse and neglect:

- Less potential for child maltreatment
- Less aggression towards their children
- Reduced experience of life stress
- Reduced drug and alcohol use
- Reduced intimate partner emotional violence
Fundraising

Kiwanis clubs could support a Parents Anonymous organization by developing a fundraiser to benefit Parents Anonymous. Linking Kiwanis resources with the Parents Anonymous cause could create a high-profile event that garners great community support, raising public awareness as well as money. This event could be targeted for April, which is Child Abuse Prevention Month. Form a committee of Kiwanians and Parents Anonymous supporters to develop a fundraiser that takes advantage of the resources you have and will “sell” well in your community. Here are some ideas.

Dinner. A per-plate dinner is often successful. Find a theme. Try to keep costs to a minimum by soliciting in-kind donations of food, printing, a facility or even a speaker. Combine the contacts of the Kiwanis club and the Parents Anonymous mailing list to launch ticket sales.

Raffle. Declare that all proceeds will go to support Parents Anonymous and solicit one—or a few—expensive items that can be awarded as prizes. Sell tickets for $1.00 to $5.00.

Auction. The value of the items collected for an auction can vary tremendously, but the people who come must be interested in many of the items on the block. Consider selling low-cost tickets ($1.00) as a mechanism for Kiwanians to push attendance and to cover basic expenses. Then, all the funds raised during the auction can go to Parents Anonymous.

Flea market. The items collected may have very little value, but quantity and location are important. The more items collected and the busier the location of your market, the more money you will raise.

Bingo. This game has proven to be a good fundraiser, and it requires a minimum investment of time and people. Find out how many bingo games already operate in your area and attend several to learn what the local bingo customs are.

Car wash. While there are probably more effective ways to raise money, a car wash is an excellent icebreaker, involving Kiwanians and Parents Anonymous members in an enjoyable, relaxing activity.