

A Summary
of the

Take Action
for Kids
Conference



Presented by



Monday, September 27, 2004

Crowne Plaza, White Plains, NY





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Cover photos:

WCA Board members with Senator Hillary Clinton; Panelist Danielle Laraque, MD; Conference participants; Panelists Ted Childs and Hon. Amy Paulin; Keynote speakers Hugh B. Price; Barry Zuckerman, MD.

This page photos, left to right:

Senator Clinton with County Legislator Lois Bronz; Workshop presentation; KidPins for sale; Workshop in progress.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to our guest speakers, workshop presenters and interns Michele Cayo and Christine Gagliardi.

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Take Action for Kids
Conference

Monday, September 27, 2004
Crowne Plaza, White Plains



Westchester Children's Association
175 Main Street, Suite 702, White Plains, New York 10601
914.946.7676 www.wca4kids.org

Complete Program for Monday, September 27, 2004

Take Action for KIDS!: A conference for everyone who cares about children and youth

8:00 AM – 2:00 PM

Monday, September 27, 2004

Crowne Plaza, White Plains

Program

8:00 AM – 9:00 AM Registration and Breakfast

9:00 AM – 11:00 AM Morning Plenary

Welcome

Keynote Address

Hugh B. Price, Senior Advisor, Piper Rudnick & Past President, National Urban League
Achievement Matters: How Communities Can Support Quality Education For All Children

Panel Discussion

Taking Action for Children's Well Being

Moderator: **Kate Stone Lombardi**, *The New York Times*

Preventing Injury: **Danielle Laraque**, MD, American Academy of Pediatrics

Investing in Child Care: **Ted Childs**, VP, IBM Corporation

Promoting Oral Health: **Hon. Amy Paulin**

11:15 AM – 12:30 PM Workshops

12:30 AM – 2:00 PM Luncheon Program

Barry Zuckerman, MD

Professor, Chair of Pediatrics, Boston Medical Center

Children's Health is Everybody's Business

Special Guest

Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton

Summary of the September 27, 2004 Take Action for KIDS! Conference

Presented by Westchester Children's Association

On September 27, 2004 parents, youth, government officials, non-profit services, business, civic and religious organizations gathered to Take Action for KIDS! The conference was part of Westchester Children's Association's 90th Anniversary and what better way to celebrate than to encourage positive changes for children and youth in our communities.

Throughout the day participants learned from keynote speakers, panel discussions, and workshops, how advocates can change public policy to benefit children and youth. Our conference goal was to raise awareness of children's needs, inspire and equip people to become advocates and activists for kids, and finally to engage many new people in actions that will result in better outcomes for kids.

The conference did just that. Take Action for KIDS! enabled participants to learn about successful models of advocacy and activism that they can use in their own communities and to meet allies with whom they can work to make needed changes in public policies affecting children. The discussions and important sharing that took place at the conference have greatly enhanced our ability to move from awareness to action.

In our efforts to move participants from awareness to action, we have compiled the conference proceedings including the summaries of plenary sessions, speech transcripts, summaries and recommendations from workshops, evaluations, a quick guide to advocacy, and an appendix of conference handouts. It is our hope that you will refer to it and find it useful as you embark on your endeavors.

Evaluation results suggest we are in good company with colleagues of like mind ready to take action. We hope that everyone who cares about children and youth will use this resource to more effectively improve the lives of young people in our communities.



WCA Executive Director Cora Greenberg introduces moderator Kate Stone Lombardi and panelists Laraque, Childs and Paulin.

Workshop presentation

County Legislator Andrea Stewart-Cousins and Senator Clinton chat with conference attendee.

Summary of Guest Speakers



Hugh B. Price

Hugh B. Price, past president of the National Urban League, gave the keynote address and emphasized the importance of education and economic opportunity. He is the author of *Achievement Matters: How Communities Can Support Quality Education for All Children*. Mr. Price discussed various factors that mitigate against all students receiving high quality public education and the role of various community “stakeholders” in assuring quality public education for all students.

He said that although education is not a guarantee of success, it is “the closest thing to a surefire passport to success that we know.” He also spoke of the importance of afterschool programs, learning to love to read from an early age, and parental involvement in children’s education.

Price said that students who are doing well in school should be seen as heroes. “We need parades down Mamaroneck Avenue, down North Avenue, down Fifth Avenue, down Fordham Road, for children achieving academically in school. If we can do it for football champions, why can’t we do it for them? And imagine the signal that would send to the children and the community about what’s important.” He also spoke of the larger social issues confronting working families that affect children: housing, healthcare, the shrinking middle class, and the increasing cost of higher education which “locks in a skills deficit from generation to generation.”



Dr. Barry Zuckerman

Dr. Barry Zuckerman, MD, a Professor of Pediatric and Public Health at Boston Medical Center, and Chief of Pediatrics at Boston Medical Center spoke of new approaches to problems that children face, and encouraged establishing coalitions and networks to change the balance of power in at-risk communities. He spoke of one program in which lawyers are working in children’s health clinics to help ensure that families in Massachusetts have their basic needs met, including food, safety, and housing.

According to Dr. Zuckerman, “having a lawyer gives new meaning to the word empowerment.” He used an example in which a child had severe asthma, but the landlord refused to provide pest control. A lawyer intervened, the landlord complied, and the child’s health improved dramatically.



Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-NY)

Senator Clinton, who has an extensive history in children’s advocacy, spoke of the increasingly media-saturated environment in which kids are growing up. She said, “The media environment that surrounds us all must now be seen as one of the real public health challenges confronting the well being of our children. Researchers today estimate that children spend an average of five-and-a-half hours a day using electronic media. That’s more time than they spend doing anything other than sleeping. Even children under the age of six spend as much time watching television, playing video games, and using computers as they do playing outside. What is particularly striking is that the media is targeting these children at younger and younger ages.”

Clinton cited several studies, including one which correlated television watching with aggressive behavior, and others that linked television watching with obesity and sleep and attention deficit disorders. According to Clinton, this media saturated environment is “beginning to undermine our children’s ability to learn and to control their own emotions. And parents and society – the ‘village’ – is letting it happen.”

Empowering a CommUNITY: Nodine Hill Community Initiative

Speakers: Natural Allah, Metta Cantlo, Caroline Fluckinger, and Albertina Sambula

Why Take Action:

- Community residents should have knowledge of community matters that concern their neighborhoods.
- To improve the physical, social and spiritual conditions of the community.
- To improve police--community relations.
- Making the neighborhood safe for all its residents.

Factors Most Important in Moving Forward:

- Persistence and tenacity are essential.
- It is important to include a wide range of community residents, businesses, civic and religious leaders in the effort.
- Everyone should feel that they have something to contribute.
- Many desired changes require building alliances inside and outside the community, and take longer than we wish.

How to get involved:

- Begin by speaking to as many people as possible in the community who might be interested in helping.
- Put together a small group of people that are respected and known in the community and are willing to be leaders.
- Take part in developing ideas and/or finding ways for yourself/community members to want to become invested in and work towards improving the community.

Challenges:

- For people to find the time for volunteer involvement.
- People getting discouraged quickly and easily.
- Time – it is important to pick goals that are realistic and can produce interim victories.

For more information regarding this workshop please contact:
Kim Maeshack at: info@nodinehill.org

Breathe Easy/Take Action on Asthma in Schools

Speakers: Adrienne Weiss- Harrison, MD, F.A.A.P., Virginia Lockwood, RN, MSN, AE-C, Brenda Guy, RN

Why Take Action:

- Asthma is the major cause of hospitalization due to chronic disease in children and teenagers.
- Asthma is the #1 cause of absence from school due to illness.
- 500 children die from Asthma each year in the US.
- Many asthmatic children have not learned the skills necessary to manage their condition.
- The management of asthma involves intensive education of the patient and the patient's family, avoidance of environmental risk factors, and long-term carefully monitored use of oral and inhaled medications.

Factors Most Important in Moving Forward:

- Prime Mover is essential
 - Prime mover has interest in the problem.
 - Some expertise in the problem OR a willingness and ability to learn.
 - Willingness to exert leadership.
 - Ability to motivate staff and stakeholders.
 - Willingness to invest time, energy, expand own job description.

Who Can Help:

- Expanded the team to include:
 - Medical Director
 - Asthma Educator
 - Staff Coordinator and clerical support
 - Hudson Valley Asthma Coordinator
 - School Nurses
 - Parents including bilingual/Hispanic parents
- Partnership with the American Lung Association (ALA) and Open Airways for Schools (OAS) to implement asthma education in schools.

Challenges:

- Engaging parents and building their trust.
- Need to network to more districts.
- Engaging a variety of constituencies.
- New Rochelle only school district in Westchester.

For more information regarding this workshop please contact:
Dr. Adrienne Weiss-Harris at: aweiss@newrochelle.k12.ny.us

The Art and Science of Lobbying Your Elected Officials

Speakers: Hon. Amy Paulin, NY Assembly, Jo Brill, Citizen Budget Commission

Why Take Action:

- Lobbying brings public awareness to issues that are affecting the community.
- Lobbying informs legislators on the different viewpoints of a community issue; and what suggested solutions the community would like to see.
- Legislators do not have absolute power.
- Be clear about what you want- the loudest voices get heard. (the loudest voices get money restored to their interest).

Factors Most Important in Moving Forward:

- Figure out the obstacles and deal with them and learn the art of convincing.
- Build a coalition.
- Persistence- you cannot give up but sometimes you may need to lay low.
- Know what you can ask for, and what is within the power of the person with whom you are talking.
- Learn how your issue affects the person you are lobbying.
- The best networking often occurs after meetings.
- Do not stray...stay on track...be clear about the message you are trying to convey.
- Be a good listener.
- Regularly invite legislators to attend your events and ask them to speak and thank them because they thrive on recognition.

How to get involved:

- Develop a plan for your organization.
- Build a relationship with your lawmakers.
- Recruit trustees with clout.
- Capitalize on positive events.
- Do your homework on elected officials - check their websites and government websites that may have information on your elected officials.
- Seek involvement by trustees, staff, clients, family members, and vendors.

Challenges:

- Learning how to disagree on an issue and present your side without creating an argument.

For more information regarding this workshop please contact:

Jo Brill at: jo.brill@verizon.net

Hon. Amy Paulin at: paulina@assembly.state.ny.us

Youth Organizing Youth

Speakers: Hayling Price, Westchester Youth Council
Frank Marte, Family Service of Westchester

What is the Youth Council?

- The Westchester Youth Council is a youth led advocacy program that identifies needs and youth-related issues in our community and champions healthy life choices for youth from a holistic viewpoint.

Why Take Action:

- This allows young people to become familiar with the process of policy making, coalition work, and issue advocacy on behalf of themselves or a group.
- It offers youths the chance to become a part of the decision-making process on issues that affect them.
- It allows youths to become a recognized voice and population.

Factors Most Important in Moving Forward:

- As advocates for the youth population it is important to be aware of the current and different views that the youth population may have on current issues.
- The Youth Council conducts trainings/workshops for youths on how to cope with current issues affecting the youth population.
- The Youth Council can offer a positive outlet and experience to youths in the local community.

How To Get Involved:

- There are a variety of Youth Boards at state and city levels that adolescents, between the ages of 14 to 19 years old, can become involved in.
- Allowing your local youth council to put youth participants on your board.
- Attend youth sponsored events and continue to remain current on youth issues: know the issues; know the positions; and help to advocate for change.

Challenges:

- Finding agencies that hold their board meetings after school hours so Youth Council members can participate.

For more information regarding this workshop please contact:

Frank Marte at: fmarte@fsw.org

A Community Response to Middle School Risks: The Clear Choices Program

Speakers: Bruce Kelly, Office of Westchester County District Attorney
Judy Exton, Pleasantville Parent

Why Take Action:

- Issues that arise in middle school should be dealt with properly and in a timely manner because it can lead to long-term problems when the child enters high school. Examples include substance abuse and acting out sexually or behaviorally.

Factors Most Important in Moving Forward:

- Parent meetings should be held in community centers and local schools. These meetings allow parents/guardians to get to know one another and discuss universal issues regarding their children.
- This allows parents in the community to trust and rely on one another; this forms the beginning of parent networks within the community.
- Proactive administration in the schools. Principals and teachers need to be involved in these meetings and be available to parents/guardians as a referral source to external supports.

How To Get Involved:

- Schools which participate in these programs include:
 - Pleasantville
 - New Rochelle
 - Lakeland
 - Harvey Middle School
 - Katonah
- Advocate for your school to become a host of this program.
- Become active in your community parent/guardian network by calling other parents and informing them of recent occurrences and situations they need to be aware of as parents/guardians in the community.

Challenges:

- Positive reception and participation from the staff of the hosting school.

For more information on this workshop please contact:

Bruce Kelly at: bekelly528@netscape.net

Judy Exton at: jexton@burnsfilmmcenter.org

Local Businesses Take Action for Kids

Speakers: Richard Schoetz & Cohn Insurance

Why Take Action:

- Health insurance is characterized by escalating health-care costs and includes many different and often confusing options.
- Small businesses that employ one to 50 people often find themselves in a difficult situation when it comes to providing health insurance for their employees.

Factors Most Important in Moving Forward:

- Encourage the business community to be aware of needs in their communities and to work with community-based organizations.
- By “doing good” you can increase your bottom line by positive reactions.
- Get word out about the availability of programs.

How to get involved:

- Conduct presentations/outreach/trainings for local businesses through your Chamber of Commerce on state sponsored health insurance programs.
- Hosting Conversations about Children forums in your office for businesses in your area.
- Help WCA by sponsoring and attending events that advocate for issues affecting children.

Challenges:

- As companies explore their health insurance options they often overlook and/or are not aware of useful New York State programs.

For further information of this workshop please contact:

Richard Schoetz at: richard@schoetzcohnins.com

Building a Cross-Cultural Coalition

Speakers: Lorelei Vargas, Yonkers Early Childhood Initiative (ECI)

What is the Early Childhood Initiative?

- ECI is a coalition of organizations whose vision is to assure that children in Yonkers will be born healthy, and will be nurtured and supported by their families and the community so that they maintain good health, are prepared to learn, and achieve their full developmental potential.

Why Take Action:

- Yonkers has a significant number of the most disadvantaged children in Westchester County.
- The majority of homeless children in Westchester come from Yonkers.
- Westchester County is a very wealthy county and the number of disadvantaged children is disproportionate to this fact.

Factors Most Important in Moving Forward:

- Engage all members of the community in coalitions
- It is crucial to build bridges between different constituents.
- Strengthening communities is key.
- Addressing racial and ethnic tensions that may be prevalent among community constituents.

How to get involved:

- Published a Data Book in 2000.
- Sponsor local “neighbor circles” to empower your surrounding communities.
- Include in your neighbor circles race and communication curriculum to help guide neighborhood circles when addressing community concerns.

Challenges:

- Combating the prejudice that has been historically present underneath many of Yonkers' social issues.

For further information on this workshop please contact:

Lorelei Vargas at: lvargas@jdam.org

Mobilizing to Hold Public Schools Accountable

Speakers: Hon. Bruce Tolbert, African American Men of Westchester (AAMW)

Who are the African American Men of Westchester?

- They develop strategies for the advancement of African Americans in the areas of economic development, cultural and social awareness.
- They aim to strengthen the family institution.
- They focus their attention on social issues, which have a disproportionately negative impact on the African American community (e.g. underemployment, inadequate / unaffordable housing, crime, inadequate health care, poor quality education and substance abuse).

Why Take Action:

- It is pointed out that special education can be a very divisive issue because of the high costs involved; there is a need to educate all parents about the importance of providing appropriate services to all kids who need it.
- Affluent, highly educated parents are much more fierce advocates for their children: how can we help low income parents also to become effective advocates.

Factors Most Important in Moving Forward:

- Empower local communities to address critical issues, which confront them. Look for partners with whom to collaborate.
- Strong local leadership can provide some solutions to problems, which plague school communities, and many parents.
- Educate parents and communities about a condition and stimulate action to combat it.

How to get involved:

- Organize a local “SEPTA” (Special Education PTA)
- Attend Youth Network Day programs for young men aged 13 to 21. Held at varying locations in Westchester County, these full-day programs, include workshops on health, the importance of education, family values, community commitment, and other age-appropriate topics.

Challenges:

- The placement and transportation of foster children in public schools, in particular special needs children, present a morass of obstacles and problems.

For further information on this workshop please contact:
African American Men of Westchester at www.aamw.com

Promoting Good Nutrition for Kids: State and Local Perspectives

Speakers: Catherine Borgia, Chief of Staff to Hon. Sandra Galef
Julie Buyon, White Plains parent, Jennifer Ervin

Why Take Action:

- Poor nutrition among elementary school children has lead to:
 - Obesity leading to health issues
 - Compromised academic performance
 - School behavior problems
- Nutritional programs in schools set the beginning stages for kids to learn how to make life-long healthy choices in food and activities.

Factors Most Important in Moving Forward:

- Ensure stronger commitment from district leaders so that change occurs in each school building.
- Educate parents- change what is fed at home and sent in school lunch bags.
- Eliminating nutritionally empty choices from food service and vending machines.
- Involve parents and school personnel in food decisions.
- The review and adoption of a new health curriculum for K-12.
- Timing – right issue at right time.

How to get involved:

- Parents can change what is fed at home and sent in school lunch bags.
- Become involved in coalitions addressing nutritional issues in schools.
- Change the environment within our elementary school to one that constantly promotes wellness.
- Connect with decision-makers who can effect change – i.e. school administrators, principals, food services director.

Challenges:

- Lack of administrative commitment throughout the school districts to make nutrition a priority in all school buildings.

For further information on this workshop please contact:

Catherine Borgia at galefs@assembly.state.ny.us

Julie Buyon at buyon@optonline.net

Strength in Numbers: Building a County-wide Coalition to Combat Teen Substance Abuse

Speakers: Tom Meier, Westchester County Exec. Office of Drug Prevention
Judy Winston, Student Assistance Services

Why Take Action:

- The most dramatic increases in the abuse of prescription medications have occurred among 12-17 year olds and 18-25 year olds.
- In 2000, heavy drinking was reported by 5.6% of the population aged 12 and older, or 12.6 million people (US Dept of Health).
- By the 8th grade, 52% of adolescents have consumed alcohol, 41% have smoked cigarettes, and 20% have used marijuana.

Factors Most Important in Moving Forward:

- Get personal with the community by networking and making personal contacts.
- Do not be afraid to combine efforts with other organizations with different goals.

How to get involved:

- Start with these small steps:
 - Needs Assessment
 - Media
 - Fundraising
 - Short-Term Planning
 - Youth Involvement
 - Sustaining Programs
 - Evaluations

Challenges:

- Some school systems are resistant to needs assessment, although, studies show white affluent males are most at risk.
- Lack of networking and involvement.

For further information on this workshop please contact:

Tom Meier at tam7@westchester.gov

Judy Winston at judy.winston@sascorp.org

Families as Partners in Policy-Making

Speakers: Emily Tait, WestCOP Head Start; Charlene Dech, Family Ties

Why Take Action: (Head Start)

- Parents are children's first teachers.
- Parents must be invited into the decision-making process.
- Empowers parents and prepares them to become decision-makers.

Why Take Action: (Family Ties)

- Mental Health issues involving children are not addressed adequately.
- To promote proper/relevant intervention when addressing children's mental health issues.
- To improve service delivery and access to mental health services for children.
- To eliminate the gaps in services for children.

Factors Most Important in Moving Forward: (Head Start)

- Responsiveness and acceptability to parent's points of views, ideas and concerns.
- Honest and clear communication-listening, hearing what parents have to say.
- Networking with related services and organizations.

Factors Most Important in Moving Forward: (Family Ties)

- Always communicate honestly and clearly with the family.
- Network with related services and organizations to provide the best treatment services for children with mental health issues.
- Include parents/family members on committees that address children's mental health issues.
- Committees are needed to be a forum that explores the parent's point of views and needs.

How to get involved:

- Parent Council open to all Head Start parents.
- Parents of children who are or have been hospitalized should volunteer to staff resource centers for families with children being hospitalized for the first time.
- Attend The Leadership Counsel meetings.
- Join committees that focus specifically on children's mental health issues.
- Volunteer at respite centers.

Challenges:

- Conveying the importance of voting.
- Getting to know county legislators.
- Taking away the stigma associated with mental health issues.
- Linking parents to daytime meetings, who are directly affected by issue.
- Involving parents who are not directly affected by the issue.
- Finding ongoing financial support.

For further information on this workshop please contact:

Charlene Dech at wpfamties@aol.com

Emily Tait at etait@westcop.org

Parents Take Action to Support Early Literacy

Speakers: Rosalind Keys
Dr. Terry Klemm

Why Take Action:

- 4th grade testing results show that the number of children who cannot read on a 4th grade level has increased significantly over the past few years in the City of White Plains.
- There needs to be a balanced response to the increased number of children who cannot read.

Factors Most Important in Moving Forward:

- Parents are children's first teachers.
- Literacy after-school and Saturday programs help to support parent involvement and create a supportive environment in which parents are more likely to ask questions.
- Programs should promote culture competence where people of all races and ethnicity feel comfortable.
- Literacy after-school and Saturday programs are a response to balance the increasing number of children who cannot read.

How to get involved:

- Attend parent workshops on the following topics:
 - How to read the school report card and end of the year report.
 - How to have a successful parent-teacher conference.
 - The importance of children reading aloud.
- Create a library at home and take your child on trips to the local public library.
- Encourage children to bring home books from the school library.

Challenges:

- The children and parents of Westchester have changed. Parents are not involved in their children's education.
- Conveying the importance of parental involvement from the start of a child's academic career.
- Getting parents to attend meetings after work and on the weekends.

For further information on this workshop please contact:

Frank Williams at White Plains Youth Bureau, fwill@ci.white-plains.ny.us

Attendees Evaluation

Speakers Evaluation	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor
Keynote Speaker	80%	16%	4%	–	–
Luncheon Speaker	70%	16%	13%	1%	–
Overall Conference Evaluation	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor
	63%	33%	4%	–	–

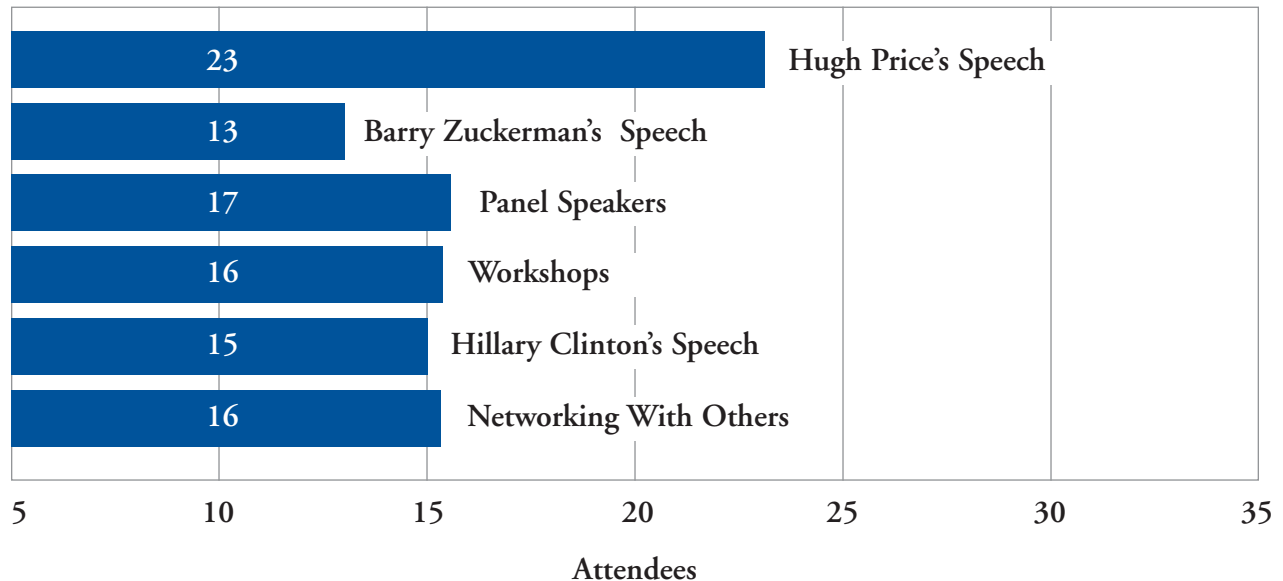
Workshop Evaluations

Workshops were provided to help current children's advocates and future advocates gain knowledge about programs, organizations and issues that impact the daily lives of Westchester's youth.

Of Workshop Attendees:

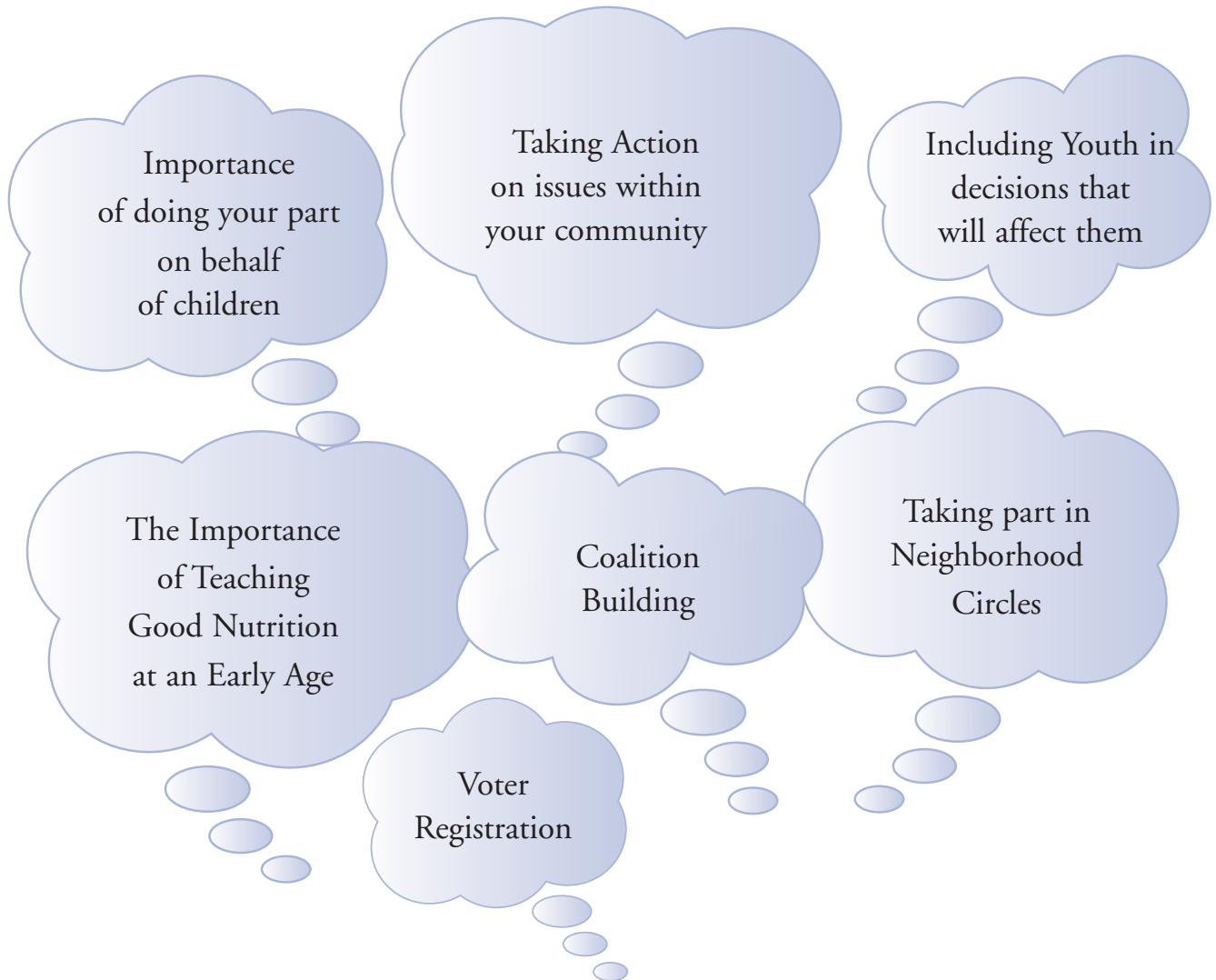
- More than fifty percent of the evaluation respondents reported their workshops as good.
- Over forty percent of the evaluation respondents reported their workshop as very good or excellent.

Responses to “Which part of the conference was the most valuable to you?”



Attendees Evaluation (continued)

Ideas from The Conference You Plan to Implement in Your Work/Community



Appendices

Speaker Profiles

(in order of appearance)

Hugh B. Price

Hugh Price is currently a Senior Advisor and Co-Chair, at Piper Rudnick, of the Nonprofit and Philanthropy Practice Group.

For nine years Mr. Price served as President and CEO of the National Urban League, the nation's oldest and largest community based organization devoted to empowering African-Americans to enter economic and social mainstream America. A member of the editorial board of The New York Times from 1978-1982, he also served six years as Senior Vice President of WNET/Thirteen, the nation's largest public television station. Mr. Price was appointed vice president of the Rockefeller Foundation in 1988. He oversaw its domestic investments to improve education for at-risk youth and increase opportunities for people of color.

Mr. Price is a highly respected author on many issues. He is the author of two books, most recently *Achievement Matters: Getting Your Child the Best Education Possible*. His articles have appeared in numerous newspapers and journals and he is a frequent guest on television and radio programs. Mr. Price currently serves on many boards and committees including the Westchester Clubmen.

Kate Stone Lombardi

Kate Stone Lombardi is a regular contributor and a columnist for the Westchester section of the New York Times. She is the winner of six Clarion awards for feature and investigative reporting, as well as the Art of Courage Award from Victims' Assistance Services. Her coverage of children's issues in Westchester has been extensive. Her own two children also claim to have been embarrassed on a regular basis by being featured in their mother's column.

Danielle Laraque, M.D.

Danielle Laraque, MD, the Debra and Leon Black Professor of Pediatrics, is Chief of the Division of General Pediatrics at the Mount Sinai School of Medicine, Department of Pediatrics. Dr. Laraque is a former Robert Wood Johnson Fellow in General Academic Pediatrics and a 2001 United States Public Health Service Primary Care Policy Fellow. She is a nationally recognized expert in injury prevention, child abuse, adolescent health risk behaviors, children's mental health and in the issues critical to health care delivery in underserved communities. Dr. Laraque is the immediate-past-president for the American Academy of Pediatric (AAP) NY Chapter 3 (2003-2005), and in October 2004 will start her tenure as NY District II Vice Chair (2004-2007). She is on the editorial board for *Pediatrics in Review* (2000-2006) and is a past member of the AAPs' National Committee on Injury and Poison Prevention (1996-2002). Her collaborative injury prevention work in community-based interventions is recognized as a national model.

Amy Paulin

Assemblywoman Amy Paulin was elected to the New York State Assembly in November, 2000 and represents the 88th Assembly District. She currently serves on the Assembly Education, Higher Education, Health and Veterans' Committees.

A twenty-year resident of Scarsdale, NY, Assemblywoman Paulin has a long, distinguished record of activism in public policy and community issues. Prior to her election to the Assembly, Paulin served in several highly visible jobs, including President, Westchester League of Women Voters; Vice President, NY State League of Women Voters; Executive Director, My Sister's Place; Founder and Chairwoman, Westchester Women's Agenda. Paulin has been honored with a number of awards over the years including Westchester County Woman of the Year in 1999 presented by the Women's Equality Day Committee.

Ted Childs

Ted Childs is IBM's Vice-President, Global Workforce Diversity with worldwide responsibility for workforce diversity programs and policies. In addition to a variety of human resource staff and management assignments, Ted served as Executive Assistant to Dr. Benjamin L. Hooks, Executive Director of the NAACP, on an IBM Social Service Leave from March 1982 to September 1983. In December 1989, Ted was appointed by Governor Mario Cuomo to the New York State Governor's Advisory Council on Child Care. In 1996, Ted was invited by Vice President Albert Gore to serve on the eight person planning team for the 1996 Family Re-Union "V" that the Vice President and Mrs. Gore hosted in Nashville, TN. In 1997, Ted was named by "Working Mother" magazine as one of 25 Men Friends Of The Family – who have made it easier for working parents to raise and nurture children.

Ted has received numerous awards for his leadership, work on diversity and commitment to quality of life issues for America's families. He has served as advisor on best practices that address child care problems facing working parents.

Barry Zuckerman, M.D.

Barry Zuckerman, M.D., is Professor of Pediatrics and Public Health at Boston University School of Medicine, and Chief of Pediatrics at Boston Medical Center. His major interests include promoting the health and development of children, training child professionals from all disciplines, and establishing more effective child health services.

Founded at Boston Medical Center in 1989 and now in over 2000 additional sites nationwide, the Reach Out and Read Program (ROR) promotes literacy for young children in primary care settings by arranging for pediatricians to give a book to a child at every patient visit, starting at six months. Dr. Zuckerman has developed and implemented programs for children in Boston and throughout the country, which emphasize prevention and extend beyond traditional medical care including Healthy Steps a multi-site national trial of expanded pediatric services, The Family Advocacy Program, which integrates legal advocacy and policy work within a pediatric setting, The Boston Training Center for Infants supporting doctors, nurses, social workers, educators, graduate students, and others who work with young children and their parents, by disseminating knowledge regarding the "whole child - whole family" approach to care.

Dr. Zuckerman has authored more than 180 scientific publications emphasizing the impact of biological, social, health services and psychological factors on children's health and development. He is an editor of nine books, including Behavioral and Developmental Pediatrics: Handbook for Primary Care (published in both English and Spanish). Dr. Zuckerman played a significant role in the development of American Academy of Pediatrics Child Health Supervision Guidelines and the government sponsored Bright Futures Guidelines For Preventive Health Care.

In recognition of his work on behalf of children and families, Dr. Zuckerman has been invited to serve on many national committees and has received numerous awards.

Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-NY)

Hillary Rodham Clinton, a resident of Westchester County, was elected United States Senator from New York on November 7, 2000. She is the only First Lady ever elected to the United States Senate. Senator Clinton has an extensive history in children's advocacy.

Senator Clinton serves on the Senate Committees for Environment and Public Works; Health, Education, Labor and Pensions; and is the first New York Senator to serve on the Senate Armed Services Committee

During the 108th Congress, Senator Clinton made homeland security, economic security, and national security her top priorities. Senator Clinton has continued to speak out against the tax cuts for wealthiest Americans, which has led to the elimination of a federal budget surplus and a return to irresponsible deficit spending. The Senator has been the recipient of numerous awards. She is the author of *It Takes a Village: and Other Lessons Children Teach Us* and other works.

KEYNOTE ■ Address

Achievement Matters: How Communities Can Support Quality Education For All Children

Hugh B. Price, Senior Advisor, Piper Rudnick LLP

Let me begin by thanking Katherine Lobach for that warm introduction. I am very grateful for the opportunity to address the Westchester Children's Association this morning. That's because I have such a high regard for the organization and for your leader, Cora Greenberg. It's also a treat to see so many friends and neighbors here this morning.

WCA is hugely important because of what's happening nationally to children and because it's so easy to gloss over the grim realities facing many kids here in Westchester. WCA is a principled and persistent voice reminding us that all children in Westchester are our children. Your "Child Watch" newsletter is very effective.

Everyone knows I care deeply about how children are doing academically. While education doesn't guarantee success in life, there's a clear correlation between how much education you have and how well you'll do economically. Higher levels of education generally translate into higher income and less unemployment.

We have to care about education as well because the federal education legislation called No Child Left Behind places mounting pressure on schools and schoolchildren to perform. It's incumbent on parents to keep an eagle eye on both.

There's reason to be really concerned about whether America's children are learning as well and as much as they should. The stark reality is that roughly 60 percent of black and Latino fourth graders read "below basic." That's two notches below grade level. If that dire situation doesn't improve, then our children will struggle with those fourth grade exams they must pass in order to advance to the fifth grade. They'll struggle in social studies and algebra where reading is essential. They'll struggle with the mandatory high school exit exams, the SAT and ACT, and the qualifying tests for jobs.

Employers I talk to are really worried about the weak quality of much of the domestic work force, and especially about their writing, reasoning, computational and problem-solving skills. It does children no favor to send them out into the world ill prepared to perform.

Much of the focus in school reform these days is on structural and instructional reform, on accountability,

transparency and testing. But these efforts inside the schools must be augmented by a concerted effort to persuade children that achievement is cool and to convince parents to get involved.

That's why I wrote my book, *Achievement Matters*. It's all about the concrete kinds of things that parents, relatives, pastors, librarians, youth workers and pediatricians can do to help children become good readers and achievers.

To begin with, parents should resolve that they're going to make certain their kids get educated, come what may. They ought to set high expectations for their children. Parents should be actively involved in the schools, going to meet-the-teacher night, so that teachers and children know the parents think their youngsters' education is critically important and that they're right on both of their cases. Get the teachers to explain how parents can help. Monitor the report cards and let the teachers know that they should alert the parents the instant they spot any sign of academic slippage. Don't wait until the report card comes out.

We need to focus on literacy to make sure children become proficient readers. Parents and grandparents should read to children even when they're infants and before they can read themselves. That impresses on children right from the start that reading is important and they'll never forget it. Make sure there are books and magazines around the house and let children see parents reading. Talk to children about the world around them. Everything from street signs to canned foods is fodder for conversation and discovery, both of which develop children's vocabularies.

Limit the amount of TV they watch. The research is clear. Fourth-graders who watch three or four hours of TV daily typically read worse than those who watch an hour or less. Encourage children to read for fun. When I was growing up, I dreamt of becoming a pro baseball player and I read everything I could about the sport. That strengthened my reading skills, even to the point that in elementary school I could comprehend any baseball magazine written for adults.

When you think about it, many subjects taught in school are embedded in baseball. If a youngster reads the biography of Jackie Robinson, just consider what he could learn: geometry, namely the square footage of the baseball field; social studies, namely the migration of black families from the south to the north and west in search of jobs; and military justice, because the Army tried to court martial Jackie resisted racial discrimination in the service.

Churches could play a huge role in promoting literacy. Just imagine how fast the reading gap would close if pastors and preachers declared that all of the children in their flock were going to become strong readers so they can read the Good Book.

After-school programs are hugely important as well. I belong to a black men's organization called the Westchester Clubmen that often meets here at the Crowne Plaza. Some years ago we started a mentoring program called Higher Aims. It's for middle school boys who are struggling in school. The program operates every weekday after school. Our group pays for a youth worker and tutors to help the kids with their schoolwork, assist them with developmental issues, and take them on outings that expand their horizons.

Several years ago we took the fellows to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. We knew most of them wouldn't take to the art, but we wanted to expose them to it even so. As we walked down one of the corridors, they spotted the armor. Boys being boys, the testosterone pump kicked on and they made a beeline for the display cases. Their faces were pressed up against the glass as they tried to read the captions about the crossbows, lances and all the other hardware.

What we should have done the next day had we thought of it was take the guys to the library or on-line to see what else they could learn about armor. Think of what they could have discovered. They could learn about metallurgy and the science of how the armaments are made. About history and the great religious crusades. About the Great Crusades and how Europe was shaped. About math and physics by learning how far the arrow of a crossbow will travel depending on the tension setting and how far it's pulled back. Many of the topics and skill sets that schools teach are embedded right there in the story of armor.

We also need to celebrate young achievers as our 21st century heroes. When I headed the National Urban League, we started a program called the National Achievers Society. It's a community-based honor society. We inducted children with B averages into NAS in a solemn ceremony staged in black churches. I vividly remember one Saturday afternoon at Bayview Baptist Church in San Diego. We inducted 350 achievers, half of whom were boys. There were 1,000 parents and well-wishers in the church to cheer them on.

I believe we can do even better than that. What about an Achievement Day Parade down the main boulevards of Westchester's cities and towns? I even suggested to Mayor Mike Bloomberg that the City of New York

should stage a parade right down Fifth Avenue, for all of the schoolchildren who pass the state exams in reading and math. As a matter of fact, let them march with their parents and teachers. Think of the powerful signal that would send to other children and how determined they'll be to march in the next parade. We hold parades for the Yankees and the Giants when they win championships. When are we going to hold a parade for our academic champs? It's time.

Let me turn now to another subject that's on my mind a lot these days that profoundly affects how children are faring. That is what's happening to America's working people.

For decades, and certainly after World War II, America maintained and honored a social compact with its working people. A core value of our country was to make America work for working people. Now I'm not pollyannaish. I realize the economic mainstream wasn't open to everyone. Racial discrimination barred millions of blacks from landing the jobs and buying the homes that enabled them to enter the mainstream. Cyclical bouts of economic recession and depression have wreaked havoc on the economic status of working families.

Through it all, however, society basically adhered to an implicit social compact with working class and middle class people. The government, employers and unions were collaborators in the enterprise. Politicians geared federal and state laws and tax policy to help workers. Think of it, that was the very point of social security; the minimum wage; the National Labor Relations Board, which protected workers' right to organize; the tax code; FHA housing loans and guarantees; subsidized housing; the GI Bill; land grant colleges and universities; and federal highway subsidies that made suburban living affordable and accessible. Union agreements with employers assured that workers received job security along with decent salaries, pensions and health benefits.

The goal of this social compact was to enable working people to join the mainstream and enjoy a middle class lifestyle. They could live the American Dream of owning a home and a car, sending their kids to college, taking an occasional vacation, and retiring in dignity with reasonable economic comfort.

Today America is rewriting the social compact in ways that threaten middle class and working people. The Center for Budget and Policy Priorities reports there are 43 million people living in low-income working class families with children. The fastest growing demand for food relief from America's Second Harvest is from the working poor. Thirty-nine percent of the people that

they feed belong to households with someone who works. Nearly half of those they help live in rural or suburban areas. Thirty-nine percent are kids and 11% are senior citizens.

I'm convinced this sorry state of affairs has come about in part because federal policy is less biased these days toward working people. It isn't geared to help make certain that everyone who works hard for a living gets to partake of the American Dream. The recent massive federal tax cuts tilted blatantly toward the wealthy, even though they'll be wealthy whether or not their taxes are slashed. The tax cuts coupled with the costs of the Iraq War have created staggering long-term budget deficits that strip the federal government of its ability to provide much help to address the needs of middle class and working people. These days, governments at every level are virtually paralyzed fiscally.

Even *The Wall Street Journal* admits that the economic recovery, to the extent there is one, is lopsided. Upper-income families have reaped the greatest gains from the tax cuts. The biggest beneficiaries are upper-income families that own stocks, collect dividends and buy expensive homes. Lower and middle-income households haven't benefited nearly as much.

Another problem facing these families is severe economic insecurity, which isn't the same as an income squeeze. Insecurity is triggered by sharp drops in living standards due to loss of a job or a catastrophic expense. Jacob Hacker wrote not long ago in *The New Republic* that more Americans face economic insecurity than ever before as the effect of job loss on work hours, pay and prospects for reemployment have worsened substantially since the 1980s

In other words, there's been a massive transfer of financial risk associated with insecurity from employers and the government onto families and individuals. Workplace benefits, such as health insurance and pensions, have been on the chopping block. Meanwhile employers increasingly rely on part-time, contingent and contract workers – all of whom enjoy precious little security. As Hacker observed:

“In today's post-industrial economy, less skilled workers are much more vulnerable than when unionized, manufacturing labor was more the norm.... Not surprisingly, instability is greater for families headed by less educated workers, though it has actually risen more quickly in the last decade for workers who went to college.”

Earnings are under siege as well. It's true, as we saw in the late 1990s, that lower-wage workers benefit when unemployment falls. Tight labor markets help prop up

wages across income categories.

But the long-term trend is worrisome. It tells the story about what's really going on. Do you realize that the number of middle-class families, namely those earning between \$25,000 and \$75,000 annually adjusted for inflation, actually declined from 51.9% in 1980 to 44.9% by 2003. That's scary.

Let me cite another disturbing statistic that shows you what's really happening out there. More than 28 million people, about quarter of workforce between the ages of 18 and 64, earn less than \$9.04 per hour. That translates into full-time salaries of \$18,800 per year, which is the federal poverty line. Sixty-three percent of the families languishing below the poverty line have one or more workers.

Nor are many of the new jobs being created much of a prize. According to the U.S. Conference of Mayors, the jobs that were lost between 2001 and 2003 will be replaced by jobs paying 20% less. A disproportionate amount of the new hiring is concentrated in the low-wage sector. Lower-end industries employ 22% of the workforce yet accounted for 44% of new hires from March to June of this year. Jobs with restaurants, temporary hiring agencies and building services accounted for 25% of growth in non-farm jobs from March to June of this year even though they're only about 10% of all jobs. Pretty much the same is true of jobs in clothing stores, courier services, hotels, grocery stores, trucking businesses, hospitals, social work agencies, business support companies and providers of personal and laundry services. Nineteen percent of job growth, but only 12% of all jobs.

To make matters rougher on working people, today's minimum wage of \$5.15 per hour is worth 30% less than was in 1968, adjusted for inflation. New York's energetic Attorney General Eliot Spitzer has sued four employment agencies and settled with five others to stop them from supplying workers to business that often pay just \$3 or \$4 per hour, far less than federal minimum wage. One agency owner he nailed claimed not to realize employers had to pay the minimum wage.

Health care is another sorry example of the steadily eroding economic status of middle and working-class families. Since 2001, 5 million fewer jobs provide health insurance. Sixty-three percent of small firms employing 3 to 199 people provided health coverage last year versus 68% as recently as 2001. Fourteen million more Americans lack health insurance today than two decades ago. The number of uninsured rose to 45 million last year, up by 1.4 million from the year before.

The picture isn't any prettier in housing, where there's

a widening gulf between family income and rent. According to the Economic Policy Institute, real pay for the bottom 10% of wage earners rose less than 1% in inflation adjusted dollars from 1979 through 2003. That's an entire generation of stagnant wages. Welfare payments buy less than half of what they did in 1970 and millions of families no longer even receive welfare.

While incomes have stagnated or worse, housing costs have nearly tripled since 1979. That has triggered a surge in what's called the working homeless. Landon House Shelter in St. Cloud, Minnesota is apparently bursting at seams. The number of families requesting shelter climbed by 45% in past decade, while large cities report surging demand at shelters over the past two to three years.

Let me cite one final example -- higher education. One of America's noblest attributes, indeed one that sets us apart from every other industrialized nation on earth, is our historic commitment to make higher education widely accessible and affordable. While a college degree doesn't guarantee of the good life, it is a time-tested passport to success. I've attended many an annual dinner of the Horatio Alger Society and heard the heartfelt tales of corporate CEOs who've risen from hardscrabble backgrounds to the pinnacle of success in the business world, thanks in substantial part to the education they received at the public university in their state.

Under our system, lowly economic status isn't supposed to be an obstacle to higher education. Ensuring that a university education is affordable to across the board was the rationale for creating the land grant schools financed by taxpayers.

Yet soaring college costs are pricing talented young people from poor and working-class families out of colleges and universities, even the state institutions. Tuition at public 4-year colleges rose 47% in past decade and 42% at private colleges. Last year alone the cost of public colleges jumped 14%. The cruel irony is that state education aid is decreasing as tuition soars. For the academic year 2003-04, total state appropriations for higher education declined by 2.1%.

Washington established the federal Pell grant program in 1972 to equalize educational opportunity for Americans. Originally the grant covered 84% of public college tuition. Today it covers less than 40%. As with housing, low-income and working-class families are caught in the crosshairs of soaring tuition and stagnant household income.

The tragic result is we aren't fully tapping the pool of talented young people from poor and working-class fam-

ilies for college. The proportion of low-income of youngsters who earn college degrees stood at fewer than 5% in 2001. The ratio has barely budged in 30 years. According to the Educational Testing Service, a mere 3% of students at nation's top 146 colleges and universities come from families in the bottom quarter of wage-earners.

And consider this alarming statistic. Only 5% of high achieving students from high-income families pass up college. But for high achievers from low-income families, the loss ratio is five times that, a shocking 25 percent.

That means the pattern of low skills crosses generations, with gains in educational attainment concentrated among youngsters from rich and upper middle class families. While higher education isn't for everyone, it's a colossal waste of human potential and it mocks everything America stands for to let cost get in the way.

As you look at these various statistics on what's happening to income security, wages, housing, health care and higher education, the distressing picture of what's happening to low-income, working-class and even middle-class families becomes clear. America is gradually renegeing on the social compact that helped assure working people they'd get to experience the American Dream. The economic insecurity and steady erosion of their financial well-being is a major reason that America's Second Harvest enjoys a growth rate any corporation would envy.

Yet it's a national shame. I urge you to become active and engaged citizens and to call politicians to account for policies that imperil the economic well-being of working people.

I salute the Westchester Children's Association for nearly a century of leadership and service on behalf of children. Your laser-like focus is understandable, pragmatic and effective. But we all know that kids are profoundly impacted by the problems afflicting working families, indeed all families. So even as you go about your historic mission, I strongly urge you to forge coalitions across traditional agenda to try to reverse the alarming slippage in the economic status of working people.

Some of these are cyclical phenomena that ebb and flow with short-term economic boom-bust cycles. But most reflect a secular shift in the way our economy works and where working people fit in the overall scheme of things. Our country is slowly, almost surreptitiously rewriting the social compact with working people, and they're getting the short end of the stick.

Politicians talk these days about the dawn of an ownership society where individuals play a much greater role, for instance, in their own health care and retire-

ment. But keep a wary eye on the flowery rhetoric. To me, ownership society will increasingly mean that if you have a problem, you own it. It'll be your own little red wagon, with government, employers and society shedding shared responsibility for the common good.

America's is suffering from an acute case of conscience deficit disorder. It will take a new vision and a new movement to cure this disorder, a movement that reawakens our sense of shared responsibility. For want of a better phrase, the theme of this movement might be: "Making America Work for Working People."

Mind you, this cannot be done on the cheap. Many policy prescriptions will provoke heated debate and cost money. We're talking about raising the minimum wage or cutting payroll taxes, providing health coverage for the uninsured, increasing tuition assistance, perhaps even limiting the deluge of undocumented workers that undercuts wage levels.

It isn't enough merely to tweak programs. We need to promulgate and proselytize on behalf of a compelling set of first principles, and then let the policies and appropriations flow from those. We're talking about a contest of ideas, instead of scrapping over incremental improvements.

I don't have any illusions that mounting a movement on behalf of working people will be easy. The steep federal deficits will lead folks to argue that the policy prescriptions simply aren't affordable. Well-organized conservatives will rail against big government. What's more, the traditional methods of progressive movements, like marches and press conferences, are tired and appear not to move people much any more.

Another obstacle is the reality that class-based appeals seldom resonate in U.S. politics, at least in this day and age. Notice how little sustained outcry there's been from the working poor themselves. Only 40% of them vote vs. 74% of what might be called the investor class.

The architects of any such movement face other daunting challenges. Awakening concerned citizens from their slumber. Marshalling raw political clout on behalf of working people. Bestirring citizens to realize they are their brothers' and sisters' keepers. Yet this is what it'll take to cure America's conscience deficit disorder.

Make no mistake, a movement like this won't take blossom overnight. The conservative movement that's so potent today took 40 years to gestate and grab hold after

Barry Goldwater's crushing defeat in 1964. I commend to you a book by Sara Diamond called *The Road to Dominion*. It's a riveting analysis of the rise of conservatism in this country.

Reading her book, you'll see that it took bushels of money donated by millionaires and generated by evangelical television stations. It took a coherent set of first principles that were propelled forward by a cunning combination of military war-gaming and Madison Avenue marketing. It required taking the long view and mobilizing communities, council district by council district. It took grassroots organizing in living rooms and kitchens and churches. It took like-minded media outlets and publications. And it took a resolute, and in some instances, ruthless determination to win.

I see hopeful signs out there that a movement to improve the lot of working class and middle class people might actually be getting some traction. Witness the stirrings of activism in the form of *MoveOn.org*. Consider the astonishing popularity of *Nickel and Dimed* by Barbara Ehrenreich, which has been on the best-seller lists for months on end. *The Working Poor* by David Shipler is another hot seller. Some business magazines and corporate leaders get it and are genuinely worried about the trends. The cover of the May 31st issue of *Business Week* was titled "Working... And Poor" and contained this quote:

"In today's cutthroat job market, the bottom rung is as high as most workers will ever get. But the political will to help them seems a long way off."

James Sinegal, the CEO of Costco, is worried by the downward economic spiral of working families as well:

"If current trends persist, a greater and greater share of wealth will keep going into the hands of the few, which will destroy initiative. We'll no longer have a motivated working class."

In closing, I again salute the trustees, professionals and volunteers of the Westchester Children's Association for nearly a century of leadership and service. And for being on the leading edge of a 21st century movement to "Make America Work for Working People."

In the first and final analysis, our job as committed members of the village is to make certain that all of the children who believe they can fly get their chance to touch the sky. Thank you.

Advocacy 101: How to Be an Effective Child Advocate

What is Child Advocacy?

Child Advocacy is about speaking out, speaking up and speaking the truth. It is about joining neighborhoods together, building connections among institutions and strengthening families within homes. It is about using facts, using faces, and using every tool possible to improve the lives of children and families.

Child Advocacy means working to influence laws, programs and policies that affect the lives of children and youth. Advocates speak, write and act to make changes at any level of government. Advocates work to change or support:

- Laws
- Public policies
- Public spending
- And other issues that raise public concern

Why Do Children Need Advocates?

- Children do not vote, so their voices too often go unheard.
- Children and youth deserve to have government programs work in their best interest.
- Children are the future of our community.

Who Can Become a Child Advocate?

Anyone can become an advocate.

- A parent
- A teacher
- A student
- A resident in a community
- A young person
- A Senior Citizen

How to be an Advocate

How to Communicate about Children's Issues

When communicating your message to law-makers, the media or the public, remember to:

- 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.

Communicating with Elected Officials

Remember, it only takes a handful of phone calls from district constituents to influence a lawmaker/elected official on an issue. Even on the most controversial matters, most local lawmakers/elected officials report that they only receive about a dozen calls and/or letters asking them to vote a certain way. Through simple advocacy methods you can begin to encourage public policy changes and improvement for the children of our local communities.

Plan a visit to the offices of decision makers/lawmakers/elected officials

- Plan your visit carefully- know what you want to say and how you are going to say it.
- Make an appointment, be on time, and be prepared to wait if necessary.
- Bring fact sheets and/or summaries of your position.
- If appropriate, tell the (lawmaker) about your group and what it does in his/her area.
- Find out his/her position on the issue- be polite if he/she does not support your issue (you want to be able to communicate with him/her again).
- Follow up the meeting with a thank you note.

Make phone calls to decision makers/lawmakers/elected officials

Include the following information in your call:

- Identify yourself- tell the person answering the phone who you are, where you are from, and whom you represent
- You should try to speak to the elected official directly. If necessary, leave a concise message, including:
 - The specific issue, bill or regulation you support or oppose.
 - The reason for your position.
 - If appropriate, a request to know their position on the issue.
- Be polite even if they do not agree with you- (remember, you want them to become your ally for children in the future!)
- Follow the call with a thank you note briefly restating the conversation.

Writing letters and sending e-mails:

- Identify yourself as a constituent, and state any other special reason you are interested in the issue.
- Identify the specific issue/bill/law you support or oppose. Give one or two brief facts to illustrate the importance of the issue.
- Keep it simple- one issue per letter, put your letter in a short easy to read format- a few sentences per paragraph and spacing in between.

When preparing testimony for a hearing:

- Before the hearing, write out or outline your testimony and practice in front of family, friends and colleagues. Make sure your remarks fit into the time allowed at the hearing. Bring a written copy of your testimony to leave for the hearing record.
- At the hearing, give your name, where you live, and, if appropriate, what group you represent.
- Thank those holding the hearing for the opportunity to present your views.
- Communicate your message succinctly – keep it short.
- Support your position with facts, and if appropriate, relate specific personal or professional incidents to support your point of view.
- If you can, offer solutions or ways of addressing the issue at hand.
- If asked questions, give an accurate answer. If you do not know the answer, offer to find out the information and get back to them. Then make sure you do!

Another important way to advocate is to raise public awareness about children's issues.

Writing to the editor of your local newspapers:

- Define the problem- in simple and concise language.
- Tell the public what is at stake; talk about long-term effects of not solving the problem.
- Explain data and numbers – in simple and concise terms; put data into context.
- Offer solutions.

A Guide to Contacting Your Elected Officials

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NY State Senate Web site: www.senate.state.ny.us
 NY State Assembly Web site: www.assembly.state.ny.us

Community Groups Taking Action for Kids: A Report by WCA

The goal of the Westchester Children's Association, that every child should grow up healthy, safe, and prepared for life's challenges, is shared by parents and all caring adults in Westchester County. In its diverse cities, villages, and townships, countless individuals and groups are concerned about children and youth, and take action on their behalf.

As it celebrated its 90th anniversary year, WCA sought out several of these myriad groups to discover more about who they are, what issues they are addressing, their goals, strategies, accomplishments and disappointments. In the spring of 2004, a WCA task force of board members and staff conducted a series of "Conversations about Children" with six of these organizations across the county. It was anticipated that the information obtained about their activities would help in the planning for WCA's fall 2004 conference, "Take Action for Kids," and indeed four of the groups are conducting workshops at the conference.

The results of the conversations are reported here in the belief that the stories of these six groups will inspire others who have similar goals, help disseminate innovative ideas about how to aid and advocate for children, and perhaps lead to more unified efforts on their behalf across community lines and across issues.

Profile of the Groups

Two of the groups were countywide in scope; the rest operate in their own communities of Mount Kisco, New Rochelle, Pelham and Yonkers. Three of the organizations have been on the scene for decades, the others sprang up in the late 1990's. Some blossomed from grass roots, others formed as coalitions of service professionals, one emerged from the mandate of a federally funded program. Often the leadership of a single individual provided the impetus for the development of the group. Volunteers are the backbone of these organizations, but funding for activities and staff support remain needs for most of them. The groups address a variety of issues as detailed below, but recurring themes are to improve community conditions for children and families, to support the role of parents, and to provide opportunities for youth development. Their experiences illustrate a few of the many creative, effective approaches by which community members can and do address the needs of Westchester's children and youth.

Summary Of Individual Organizations – Countywide

African-American Men of Westchester County

This is a dynamic group of individuals with diverse professional backgrounds who focus on promoting change countywide. While providing positive images and role-models of African-American men for young people, the organization takes on issues of the environment, health and education. It is developing youth business programs, and reaches out to the grass roots community. It recently sponsored a major forum at Manhattanville College, attended by more than 300 participants, on strategies for improving public education in Westchester. Its annual all day Martin Luther King, Jr. Day program at the County Center draws hundreds of participants and features MLK Legacy Awards to youth selected from communities throughout the county for their achievements. The group has developed corporate support in Westchester, but also relies on the human and financial support of its members. It has been in existence for eighteen years.

Westchester Community Opportunity Program (WestCOP) Head Start Policy Council

The Council meets monthly and is composed of about 50 parents and community representatives from Head Start and child care programs throughout the county. Monthly meetings are conducted in English and Spanish. Child care and dinner are provided. In addition to its program oversight responsibilities, the Policy Council focuses on the needs of the children and families in the programs and also responds to state and national issues involving child care. Its current priorities are to advocate for regionally sensitive income guidelines for Head Start, to extend the involvement of parents beyond the time their children are in preschool, and to confront the lack of affordable children's dental services. Its health services advisory committee has been especially active in regard to the latter. The Council is also seeking funding to develop more active involvement of fathers in the programs. This group has a long history (since 1965) of collaboration with numerous voluntary and public agencies in Westchester.

Mount Kisco Chamber of Commerce, Mount Kisco

The Chamber has not previously addressed issues of children and youth, but its recently installed president is interested in developing a new emphasis on this age group. Formation of a committee on children, youth, and families is being proposed. Issues and projects to be considered by the committee may include youth activities and transportation needs; services for children with disabilities; and risk behavior, especially sexual, in middle-school aged children. Identifying existing resources in the community will be a priority, after which there is the possibility of using the Chamber's website to disseminate this information more broadly. A local home page with a youth link might be created. The Chamber will reach out to other Mount Kisco groups with similar concerns and will explore comparable efforts by civic organizations in other communities such as the Tarrytown Rotary Club and the Mahopac Lions.

The Village Team, New Rochelle

The Team is a unique collaboration of some forty-five civic agencies and corporate entities in New Rochelle such as the Medical Center, the Board of Education, the Guidance Center, the Police Department, etc. whose representatives meet regularly. At its inception in 1998 there was recognition that the issues and problems affecting children and families could seldom be resolved by one agency acting alone. Solutions required a team effort and the successes of the Village Team have confirmed that idea. The Team's top priorities have been strengthening families and dealing with domestic violence; youth services, which include training in conflict mediation; and raising parents' awareness and educating them about youth violence and the signs of substance abuse. The work with young people has culminated in the establishment of their own organization, "Kids in Control", where the planning and activities are carried out by the youth themselves. The need for resources to continue the Team mission is an ever-present concern.

Parents and Community Together (PACT), Pelham

Founded in 1998, PACT is a community organization of parents, educators, and community leaders who are concerned about the health and safety issues facing children and youth in the Pelham community. Its first efforts included a survey of parents and community members that resulted in publication of the Drug and Alcohol Awareness Handbook for Pelham Parents. In November 2001, PACT began another of its signature programs, Pelham University, a series of evening workshops and speakers for parents and secondary students on a range of topics. Hundreds of parents and students have attended PACT-sponsored presentations on such topics as bullying, drug and alcohol awareness, sexuality, and emotional health of families.

Follow-up surveys of parents and the community have helped set priorities and recently spurred the formation of a health committee to consider revision and strengthening of the health curriculum in the middle and high schools. Partnering with other local groups, particularly the Pelham School District and the PTA's, has been essential for PACT. Looking ahead, the group seeks more involvement with the local police departments in addressing key areas of concern.

The Early Childhood Initiative, Yonkers

Representatives from over sixty community and governmental organizations in Yonkers and elsewhere comprise this group. Its current goals are to build stronger neighborhoods for families with children; to motivate Yonkers residents to initiate changes around young children; and to influence policy changes in connection with child care. ECI's establishment and support of "Neighborhood Circles" has been a most effective way of involving local residents in neighborhood improvement ranging from clean-up efforts to first aid training for parents. ECI's annual "Family Day," presented in partnership with the Mayor's office, has attracted thousands of participants and helped connect many of them to the resources and services provided by ECI's member organizations. Producing and updating the Early Childhood Databook of Yonkers statistics has been another valuable accomplishment. ECI has attracted substantial foundation funding, developed corporate partnerships, and would also like to see the creation of an Office for Children in the Yonkers city government.

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Special Thanks

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Urban League of Westchester
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**Westchester Children's Association works to
ensure that all children are healthy, safe
and prepared for life's challenges.**

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Since 1914, WCA has been an independent, knowledgeable and effective voice for Westchester's children.

WCA helps Westchester's children by:

- Informing legislators, policy-makers and the public about children's needs
- Advocating for policies and programs that work for children
- Mobilizing communities to raise their voices on behalf of children
- Building coalitions of organizations and individuals to improve children's lives

WCA is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization supported by individuals, foundations and businesses.



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