

The Campaign for a New Children's Center: *Little Kids with Big Problems Need Your Help!*

Imagine a child who no longer trusts adults to help him when he is hurt or frightened. Imagine a child who gets so angry that other children are afraid to play with him, and whose parents are afraid to take him out in public in case he throws one of his "fits." Imagine a child who has been physically and sexually abused . . . and is only three years old.

Imagine the parent who anticipates a long, frustrating day filled with despair because she knows there will be one frightening battle after another. Imagine the parent who is experiencing parenting as more of a burden than a joy. Imagine finding yourself filled with thoughts about your child you never thought possible.

Most of us are blissfully unaware of the vast numbers of children under the age of seven, right in our own community, who are enduring serious emotional and behavioral problems. At The Children's Center, we are very much aware. We provide professional, compassionate mental health care for families with infants, toddlers and preschoolers throughout Salt Lake County and neighboring communities, offering reassurance and hope for families who have no place else to turn.

Founded more than 40 years ago by Dr. Agnes Plenk, The Children's Center has established a legacy of effective therapy for infants, toddlers and preschoolers with emotional and behavioral problems. We are the only mental health resource in the Salt Lake Valley specifically providing treatment for families whose young children are struggling with psychiatric problems including hyperactivity, depression, anxiety, severe opposition and aggression. Many of those children have been traumatized as witnesses of domestic violence, or have themselves been victims of abuse and neglect. Early intervention is critical because the longer problems go untreated the less amenable they are to change, and the more expensive they are to treat.

Facing a Critical Crossroad

The Children's Center finds itself at an important crossroad as we face our future. Each year, we successfully treat over 1,200 children, allowing them to lead happier, healthier lives. Our parent satisfaction surveys document that 95% of our families report improvement in their child's behavior since the start of treatment. Even more important, 97% of parents added that they are getting along better with their children. This is the good news. The bad news is that with the 20 to 30 new referrals we receive every week, families still wait as long as two or even three months to access our services. That's two or three months in a deteriorating situation in which the child's health and welfare, not to mention that of other family members, may be at serious risk. Even longer waiting lists for our therapeutic preschool mean that children who are in crisis might have to wait several months before they can enter our program. During that time, the families experience more distress and frustration, which further damages the parent-child relationship.

But we are concerned not just with our inadequate capacity. We are equally concerned with our unstable funding. One-third of our current agency income comes from Medicaid reimbursement, which is unpredictable and inconsistent, leading The Children's Center many times to confront painful decisions regarding cutbacks in staff and programs. If any of the cuts to Medicaid that are now being threatened are made, it will severely hamper our ability to serve children who desperately need our care. As a sole-resource treatment program for families with young children, losing these programs puts these families in immediate jeopardy.

Our passion for the very important work that we do and the people we help compels us to look beyond simply maintaining our current level of service. The population of Salt Lake County is expected to grow rapidly during the next decade and we must plan to meet the mental health needs of future generations who will require our support. Over the next ten years, estimates of the incidence of psychiatric problems in children from newborn through age four suggest that in Salt Lake County alone over 17,000 children may require therapeutic services for emotional problems. In order to meet this demand, we must greatly expand our facility. At the same time, it would make far more sense to be centrally located in the valley where we are more accessible to families throughout our growing community.

The Campaign to Fill the Need

To continue fulfilling our commitment to serving families with the highest degree of professionalism and superior mental health services, we are launching a far-reaching initiative for 2006:

*The Campaign for a New Children's Center:
Little Kids with Big Problems Need Your Help.*

This Campaign is a \$10 million effort to build a new Children's Center and to obtain long-term funding for programs, services, and professional staff. This ambitious campaign will ensure a strong Children's Center, supported through long-term funding for dynamic programs, the attraction and retention of expert personnel, and a centrally located facility to better serve the expansion of the Wasatch Front.

A successful Campaign will:

- Create a new Children's Center main facility and allow us to double our current client capacity.
- Enhance our ability to fund staff positions and support new and existing treatment and educational programs, thereby ensuring the provision of services despite fluctuations in other funding sources.
- Develop innovative income streams in order to decrease dependencies on government and other unpredictable funding sources.

The New Children's Center

Currently The Children's Center provides treatment for families from every zip code in Salt Lake County, as well as from Davis, Summit, and Wasatch Counties. Over the next decade, population growth in Salt Lake County will largely affect Sandy, Draper, Alpine and many of the communities in the western part of the valley as well as south into Utah County. For that reason, at the same time we construct a facility to expand our services, we would also like to move to a more central location in the Valley in order to be more easily accessible for all the families we currently serve and will serve in the future.

In addition, a new facility would support a broader base of programs in order to provide a spectrum of services focusing on prevention, early intervention and intensive intervention for emotional and behavioral problems. A new Children's Center would provide the space we need for new, specialized parent-child therapy. When the Campaign succeeds, our new home will be an efficient, modern, 30,000 square-foot building designed to be family-friendly, warm and welcoming. This facility would enable us to more than double our capacity from serving 1,200 families to more than 2,500 families annually by 2015.

A successful Campaign will not only allow our facility to grow, it will also allow our professional team to grow, which is a high priority as well. Ensuring streams of funding for a wide spectrum of innovative programs, along with offering competitive salaries, will help us attract and retain outstanding, qualified professionals. We envision an environment that allows for professional growth along with a collaborative approach to therapy and treatment. We will continue to utilize professional training, treatment and research in order to remain the best in our practice as we help children reach their full potential.

By assuring continuation of both programs and critical professional positions, The Children's Center can maintain our high standards of service to the community. We can also continue our policy to treat ALL children who need our services, by offering a sliding fee schedule based on family income. With the ability to rely less on unpredictable government contracts, we will be able to provide ongoing care to thousands of families in need.

Our Campaign Carries a \$10 Million Goal!

The Campaign for a New Children's Center will allow children to play with friends, hug instead of hit, smile when happy and receive guidance in coping with the pain in their lives. A successful Campaign will bring relief for parents and let them experience renewed love for their child. A successful Campaign will put smiles on the faces of families we otherwise would not have been able to help. Our goal is aggressive: \$10 million. Our success depends on the involvement of all segments of our community.

We are their hope for a brighter, happier future. You are ours. Your support will allow us to continue our legacy of helping little kids with big problems for decades to come.