



MiPSAC

Newsletter of the Michigan Professional Society on the Abuse of Children, Inc., the Michigan Chapter of APSAC.

Volume 5, Issue 1

January - April, 2000

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By Tracy Cyrus, MSW, ACSW

Hello! Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Tracy Cyrus and I am the President of MiPSAC for the year 2000. I graduated with my MSW in 1983 from Western Michigan University. After graduating, I worked at Catholic Social Services in Muskegon initially providing Foster Care services and then moved to full time Counseling. In 1988 I changed jobs and moved to Child and Family Services of Western Michigan, Inc. in Holland and coordinated the Sexual Abuse Treatment Team there for five years. In 1993, I came to DeVos Children's Hospital at Spectrum Health (formerly known as Butterworth Hospital) in Grand Rapids and am the Coordinator of the Child Protection Team. I am married to Dana and we have three great kids, Mark age 13, Kevin age 10 and Stephanie age 8. We enjoy camping and golfing as a family.

I am excited to be the President of MiPSAC this year and am dedicated to bringing our organization to the "next level" this year. We are a fairly young chapter, just 5 years old, and we have been doing a lot of growing over the past several years. I believe it is now time to start shaping our chapter, and along with the Board have developed the enclosed member survey. We are very interested to find out more about each of you and would like to hear from you about what you would like to see your State chapter do.

I would also like to tell you about a momentous occasion that took place on March 24, 2000. On this day, the Executive Board of MiPSAC met with the Board of the Michigan Committee to Prevent Child Abuse. The two Boards had been meeting over the past year to discuss and explore a merger of the two organizations. MCPCA has a history rich with committed professionals and activities addressing the concerns of child maltreatment in Michigan dating back some 20 years. It was with great pride that MCPCA President Dr. Eleanor Berden and I signed the documents merging MCPCA with MiPSAC. I am in awe of the passion and commitment the members of MCPCA have for children. Our state chapter received an infusion of elite professionals who have a wealth of knowledge, insight and experiences. We welcome them as new members of APSAC and MiPSAC and look forward to sharing and working with them to continue to address the needs of children and families in Michigan and specifically assisting them in working to prevent child abuse.



President's Corner (cont. from page 1)

I would like to briefly comment on the letter each of us received from Veronica Abney, President of APSAC. As explained in this letter, APSAC is in the midst of restructuring. Executive Director Thom Gauthier is managing this transformation which will result in a more financially secure organization. I am confident that the national organization is working diligently to address this temporary situation and will ultimately improve their services to state chapters. In order to support this effort, I would ask that all of us do what we can such as: renew our APSAC memberships; recruit new members and encourage lapsed members to renew their memberships; attend the Colloquium July 12-15, 2000 at the Chicago Hilton and Towers; contribute products and services for the Silent Auction during the Colloquium. APSAC needs our support during this time of rebuilding and I hope that each of us can in some way give back to APSAC some measure of what this organization has contributed to our own professionalism. APSAC will continue to be the leader in uniting professionals who work within the specialized area of child maltreatment.

Please take several minutes and complete the enclosed survey and return it to me. Your input is vital to our state chapter's development. Please feel free to contact me anytime at (616) 391-2295.

My e-mail at work is tracy.cyrus@spectrum-health.org.

Thank you for your membership and interest in MiPSAC!

***In this issue: 1 President's Corner
2 Member Survey
3 Editorial Comment
4 Book Review***

MIPSAC Goals:

- ◆ To bring together Michigan professionals working in the area of abused children
- ◆ To foster networking among Michigan professionals
- ◆ To be an information resource for Michigan professionals
- ◆ To sponsor quality training for Michigan professionals.

REMINDER!

Please renew your annual membership to APSAC. You need National membership for MiPSAC. *Part of you annual dues to APSAC pays for MiPSAC membership automatically!*

APSAC

407 S. Dearborn, Suite 1300
Chicago, IL 60605

MiPSAC 2000 Board of Directors

President., Tracy Cyrus, MSW, ACSE DeVos Children's Hospital, 100 Michigan Ave., Grand Rapids, MI 49503 (616)391-1223, [Tracy.Cyrus\(a\)Spectrum-Health.org](mailto:Tracy.Cyrus(a)Spectrum-Health.org)

Vice President., Frank Vandervort JD, Michigan Child Welfare

Law Resource Center, 611 Church Street, Ste. 4C, Ann Arbor, MI 43104-3000 (734) 998-9191 [vort\(a\)umich.edu](mailto:vort(a)umich.edu)

Treasurer.- Pat Walsh, RN, BS, MSW Bethany Christian Services, 901 Eastern NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49503 (517) 224-7502 pwalshebethanyorg

Secretary., Leni Cowling, BS, M.Ed., LPC. 309 N. Genessee, Bellaire, MI 49615 (231) 533-6949 Kitzie@torchlake.com

At-Large Board Members:

Richard Bearup, Lutheran Child and Family Services
Linda Caurdy-Bess, MSW, William Beaumont Hospital
Kathleen Coulborn-Faller, PhD, University of Michigan
David Harrison, JD, Rochester Hills
Susan Heartwell, MPA, Children's Assessment Center
William Ladd, JD, Wayne County Legal Aid, Honorary
Clyde Owings, MD, PhD, Univ of Michigan, Honorary
Vincent Palusci MD, DeVos Children's Hospital
Mary Smyth, MD, William Beaumont Hospital

Volunteers are always welcome for MIPSAC
Committees: Membership committee (Vince Palusci)
Legislative committee (Bill Ladd)
Conference/training committee (Pat Walsh)
Newsletter/brochure committee (Leni Cowling)
Communications (Roger Pickering)

CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT IN MICHIGAN
Editorial Comment, by LENI COWLING,

Michigan's Children's Budget Watch newsletter for January 5, 2000, raises some important questions about the investigating reports of child abuse and neglect by the Michigan Family Independence Agency. One of the major legal responsibilities of the state is to investigate reports of suspected Child abuse and neglect. It notes that "the true extent of abuse and neglect of children is difficult to measure. Many cases are not reported, and only half of the cases brought to the attention of the state receive a full investigation. Further, state definitions of abuse and neglect, and Protective Services workers' interpretations of related policies, vary in ways that can affect the overall number of children confirmed as victims." It also notes that the number of complaints received by the MFIA has continued to rise, and now nears 130,000 annually. Approximately half of those complaints do not receive a full investigation by the state. Social workers screen out the calls for a variety of reasons, including judgments that the callers aren't describing behaviors that meet the legal definition of child abuse or neglect, that there is insufficient evidence of maltreatment, or that the reporter is not credible."

Having spent the past ten years as a Child Protective Services worker, I fully understand the difficulties faced by these foot soldiers in the trenches. The newsletter goes on to note, "Despite increases in reports of suspected child maltreatment, and in the number of reports investigated by the state, the number of confirmed (substantiated) cases of child abuse and neglect fell in the early 1990's and has remained relatively flat since that time. In 1989, the MFIA substantiated child maltreatment in nearly one-third of the cases it investigated; by 1998, only one in five investigations resulted in a substantiation.

This reduction in the confirmed incidence of child abuse and neglect - in the face of ever increasing complaints and investigations - is perplexing." I feel it is simply the human reaction to take the path of least resistance. It is no secret that the job functions of a CPS worker are fraught with stress due to the structural conflict. The very definitions of abuse and neglect are nebulous. Of course, a black eye is a black eye, and an investigation can possibly produce evidence of repeated bruising. But the majority of investigations are not so simple. I have seen many cases where the parents do not like their children. I feel a black eye may be a sin that is paid for, but rejection is a cancer that eats a child from within and is difficult to photograph. Neglect is another whole dimension that is not defined. I have also substantiated cases that, in my opinion, were abusive, only to find them expunged by my supervisor because the client loudly complained.

The opinions expressed are the author's and do not necessarily reflect those of MiPSAC nor APSAC.

The newsletter notes, "another possible explanation for the failing rate of substantiations is increased public and professional awareness of the problem of child abuse and neglect -and of the responsibility to report suspected maltreatment to the state - absent sufficient understanding of what legally constitutes abuse and/or neglect. In other words, the MFIA may be getting more 'bad' referrals, where there is insufficient evidence of maltreatment or a misunderstanding of the legal basis for state intervention". I have often wondered whose job it is to inform other professionals what is needed information for a valid referral. Community Mental Health workers continually make referrals to PS because their clients are not making scheduled appointments.

"Finally, the capacity of the MFIA to respond effectively to family crises and reports of suspected child abuse and neglect has been questioned. While there have been increases in the number of protective services workers in the last several years, over the last decade staffing increases were not commensurate with increases in reports of suspected child abuse and neglect. In addition, although there have been significant improvements recently in the training offered protective services workers, historically turnover rates have been high, and training minimal. Advocates have been concerned that failing substantiation rates reflect 'triage' on the part of overburdened workers who are unable to offer needed services even to families whose cases are substantiated. Further, there has been a flurry of legal reforms in Michigan relative to child protection that have had an impact on protective services workers. In a two-year period, the central office of the MFIA sent 74 policy change notices to county offices, and many of the new procedures adopted to protect children created extra work for protective services staff. These new laws can help make children safer, but only if there is an adequate number of well trained staff to implement them" There is a sad turnover of Protective services workers. Unfortunately people frequently attempt to cope with the effects of structural conflict with great hope and optimism, only to shortly realize great disillusionment. The difficulty with a conflict structure is that any actions one takes to solve the conflict only reinforce the experience of limitation and hence the structure itself. I appreciate that someone is noticing some of the conflicts in the system. It is my opinion that the top-heavy state bureaucracy MFIA cannot protect Michigan children. We know what measures must be taken to assure that a child will grow up safe, healthy, and able to fully participate in the community in which he/she lives. What do we do with unwanted children? We must first have a vision of what our children should have. Then, we need to rethink the ways and means by which we strive to reach that vision. The new millennium is here! Old ways that do not work must be seriously reconsidered. The cost to keep them is intolerable.

Book Review by Frank Vandervort, JD

James Garbarino, *Lost Boys: Why Our Sons Turn Violent and How We Can Save Them* (The Free Press, 1999, 274 pages)

I began my career as a lawyer working for a legal aid office in Detroit representing children in child abuse, neglect and delinquency cases. The cases ranged from fairly typical scenarios of child neglect rooted in parental substance abuse to appalling acts of systematic violence intentionally inflicted upon a child. In the six years I worked at that job, I saw a number of my abuse and neglect clients grow into the delinquency side of the court's docket. Naively, I was taken aback by court's institutional bias, children who one day were innocent victims were transformed by a simple act into predators and perpetrators, menaces to the community. The transition of children-particularly boys-from victim to perpetrator of violence is the topic of James Garbarino's 1999 book *Lost Boys: Why Our Sons Turn Violent and How We Can Save Them*. The author, who has studied the causes and effects of violence for a quarter century, has written a book of transcendent importance, one that should be read by every person (not just professionals) interested in the effects of child maltreatment on individual children and on our communities.

As the subtitle suggests, the book is written in two parts. The author begins by outlining the parameters of our current national concern about youth violence. Unfortunately, despite an otherwise impeccably researched book, he permits a bit of hyperbole to slip into his writing in the first chapter, "The Epidemic of Youth Violence." While violent acts committed by teens is certainly a problem which must be taken seriously, research does not support the assertion that it has reached "epidemic" proportions. After this momentary lapse, the author goes on to describe in measured language a proper concern, concluding, "66% of every violent teenager I've spoken to is an untreated traumatized child." Dr. Garbarino, Professor of Human Development and Co-Director of the Family Life Development Center at Cornell University, then sets out in Part One of the book to detail the processes by which children become violent. He does so by weaving empirical research findings with the anecdotes from boys he has counseled into a compelling and easily readable narrative.

Refreshingly, throughout the book Garbarino takes pains to look with a compassionate but objective eye at these boys and their behavior. The result is to humanize the boys whose acts of violence have captured our national attention, our imaginations and our indignation. In this regard, he seems to have made a conscious decision to weigh in against the visceral ranting of politicians like John Engler who have used children who commit violent acts as whipping posts to catapult themselves into office and to better position themselves in public opinion polls. Indeed, Garbarino makes plain that if our communities are to have any hope of bringing to an end the sad reality of violently destructive behavior by our youth, we must reject the politicians' and the news media's branding of these boys and their sound bite approaches to addressing the problem of youthful law violation. We must begin by recognizing the basic humanity of these youths. For this is precisely what they have lacked that has led them from victim of violence to perpetrator.

The author begins his examination of boys' descent into violence by examining the quality of their earliest relationships, those with mother and father. As he puts it, "there is no such thing as 'a baby'; there is only 'a baby in relation to someone else.'" It is through this most basic relationship that the child learns to relate to the world beyond the family. If the basic relationship between the child and a significant adult is somehow interrupted the child is at risk from his earliest days. Interruptions can result from any number of factors, the child is temperamental, the parent suffers from addiction and is physically or emotionally unavailable to the child, or the parent is simply absent. He concludes, "unsatisfactory childhood attachment sets in motion the chain of events that results in lethal violence when these boys reach adolescence." While the problem of violent children is rooted in the family, the author makes plain that the community can play a critical role in ameliorating the impact of poor parent-child relations. This, he argues, is done by the community providing supportive services to parents, therapeutic intervention to strengthen the parent-child bond, assuring continuity in relationships that are outside the family but crucial to the child (e.g., teachers). Finally, he argues that public policy must support the prompt stabilization of the child's life if parents cannot or will not provide the stability necessary for the child's long-term welfare.

Next, Dr. Garbarino describes how deprivation and abuse calcify into difficult behavior by teaching children that the very people who are naturally charged with their care present the most danger to them. In response to this recognition, he demonstrates, boys begin to numb themselves against all feeling as a defense against overwhelming perception of pain. When a boy can feel nothing he cannot empathize with others, he cannot imagine how his behavior hurts others. This intrapsychic development does not, however, take place in a vacuum.

All child development in America takes place in a current cultural context that repeatedly exposes children to actual violence, to violent images without consequence and to violence as a legitimate means of problem solving. In addition to being victims of violence, far too many children are exposed to domestic violence in their homes and violence in their communities in the form of and violence in the streets. Add to this the fact that the average teenaged boy has witnessed hundreds of killings on television and in movies, has spent countless hours playing video games where the object is to shoot realistic human figures and has listened repeatedly to songs that glorify various acts of violence. The result is that too many boys become desensitized to the effects violent behavior on others. It is through this cultural process of exposure to violence that boys rendered vulnerable by ruptured parent-child relationships may turn violent themselves. In Garbarino's terminology, they "discover the dark side" of humanity. Through this process, the poorly behaved child may become predisposed to violence in the teen years.

The children most likely to rely on aggression have the least in the way of internal resources to resist the use of violence to achieve desired ends. These kids are hypervigilant to negative social cues and possess a "code of honor" that requires every perceived slight to be addressed, all too often with resort to the violence the world has taught them is most effective in getting what they want. Thus, such boys have ample opportunity to vent their pent up internal rage in the form of assaultive crime. All of these psychological and cultural phenomena are played out in a society where children have ready access to guns, what the author describes as a "gun culture." This combination has resulted in the recent increased lethality-rather than incidences-of the teenage violence.

For those who make a habit of staying in touch with the literature describing the connection between child maltreatment and subsequent delinquency (e.g., 1997's *Ghosts From the Nursery*), the book to this point, while well worth reading, is not the stuff of revelation. The true strength of the book, what is revelatory, is Garbarino's consideration of the moral and spiritual implications of violent behavior upon these boys. He first describes the morality, the code of ethics of violent boys and then sets out a coherent and non-judgmental moral and spiritual response to such behavior. But isn't this an irreconcilable paradox? What moral standards could drug dealers, rapists and murders have? While the popular image of child perpetrators of violence is that they are godless and singularly immoral actors, "punks and thugs" and "superpredators," the author makes clear that these boys indeed do have a morality, albeit one that is dramatically skewed by their life experience. It is in this spark of morality, this "code of honor" that the possibility of redemption lies. Generally, even the most violent boys have a "moral circle," a sense of what behavior is acceptable and what is not. The distinguishing feature between kids who commit violent acts and those who do not is that violent actors have a small "moral circle." In the second part of the book Garbarino argues that by creating safe spaces for these youngsters to reflect upon their actions and work through the emotional antecedents of those actions boys who commit even the most brutal acts of violence can be rehabilitated. The key to doing so, however, is at odds with our current public policy. Rather than dehumanize these youth by name calling or putting them in correctional settings designed to dominate and control them through the assertion of power (e.g., juvenile boot camps) as is vogue, Garbarino argues that we must create and maintain monastery-like facilities that provide physical safety, skilled therapists and the opportunity for quiet reflection. By doing so we can expand the youth's "moral circle," that is, teach him empathy for others, which is the key to inhibiting future violent acts.

James Garbarino has written an important contribution to the literature of child maltreatment and its implications for individuals, families and communities. *Lost Boys* should be read by protective services workers, therapists, lawyers, policy makers, and, perhaps most importantly, by members of the community who seek to understand how our streets and schools are being threatened and what we can do about it.