



The Progress Report



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Focus Groups Probe Parental Involvement in Schools

Connecticut Appleseed has collaborated for the past 6 months with Appleseed Centers in Georgia, Illinois, Massachusetts, Texas, Washington State and New Mexico to examine the impact of the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation. The NCLB's testing policies and assessment requirements are driving school priorities and prompting public controversy. But less widely known – or studied – are the NCLB's dictates that schools inform parents about school performance and related entitlements conferred by the law upon parents that can help improve educational opportunities for their children.



Parents of Hamden, CT schoolchildren share their thoughts

A Focus on Improving Parental Involvement

Well-informed parents are critical to improving student education and school system performance. Key NCLB attributes are provisions that Title I schools which do not meet "adequate yearly progress" standards for two or more years must provide supplemental educational services to eligible students and offer students broader choice among a district's schools. Determining whether parents actually receive and understand messages about school performance, then act to take advantage of their options was so important to the

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Final CT Budget Approved: A Light at the End of the Oral Health Access Tunnel

Seventy-one percent of the children enrolled in Connecticut's Medicaid program do not receive any dental care. Throughout April, 2006 Appleseed and 7 other collaborating organizations tried to bring state budget-makers' attention to the oral health needs of these disadvantaged children. Our media campaign of newspaper ads and radio spots targeted the eyes and ears of the legislative and administration leaders who would be shaping the final state budget. These ads supplemented a grassroots letter-writing campaign to the key budget-making leaders from members of all 8 organizations in support of a large increase in the state's dental Medicaid reimbursement rate.

Down to the Wire, but A Win at the Buzzer

While the Appropriations Committee had agreed in early April to allocate \$10 million to raise the reimbursement rate, that sum was deleted in the final days of the state's month-long budget negotiations process. But importantly, the state budget negotiators did agree to settle the 6-year old Carr v. Wilson-Coker lawsuit over the state's dental Medicaid shortcomings and directed state officials to begin good faith negotiations with the plaintiffs.

The good news is that future state budgets will
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Mission Statement

Our Mission is to develop solutions for the causes, rather than the symptoms, of our state's social problems. We will deploy volunteer lawyers and other professionals to achieve systemic changes through legal and legislative advocacy, negotiation, education and other initiatives.



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CLICC Project Gathers Steam

During CLICC's ("Connecting through Literacy Inmates, Children and Caregivers") first two years, project manager Arthur White overcame innumerable obstacles and assembled an extraordinary team of collaborators. Grants from the Xerox Foundation, the Graustein Foundation, the Pitney Bowes Literacy and Education Foundation, the Donchian Family Foundation, the Wellspring Trust and the Toys R Us Foundation have enabled the complex project to evolve at a rapid pace.

Now, after successfully prompting the Federal Bureau of Prisons to develop proprietary ("TrueLink") email technology and recruiting volunteer mentors from local corporations and faith-based organizations, CLICC is moving quickly toward a September pilot implementation at the Federal Correctional Institution in Danbury, CT.

CLICC is enabled by TrueLink, a breakthrough innovation in secure e-mail technology developed by the Federal Bureau of Prisons. The Federal Bureau of Prisons was motivated to solve CLICC's technology riddle – how to allow inmates to communicate securely with their children at great distance – since it recognizes the importance of healthy family relationships. This recognition, in addition to the success and popularity of the TrueLink software, will help realize CLICC's potential to scale into 115 Federal facilities nationwide.

The Background

About half of the approximately 2 million individuals incarcerated in Federal and State prisons have one or more children, and more than half of these inmate parents don't receive any visits from their children.

Since separation from a parent is detrimental to a child's normal social, emotional and intellectual development, these children are the silent victims of the U.S. criminal justice system. Inmates' children frequently do poorly in school and are far more likely to drop out. Strained parent-child relationships and the child's lack of a positive role model combine with poor schooling to heighten the chance that the child will eventually repeat the inmate parent's pattern of criminal activity and incarceration.

CLICC's Purpose

CLICC places the child and inmate parent at the center of a web of support that addresses five key challenges faced by the children:

- Stagnated literacy and reading skills;
- Infrequent or altogether absent communication with their parent;
- The need by both child and adult for positive role models, mentors and teachers;
- Parents are poorly equipped to teach, motivate and guide their children; and
- The need for positive interaction with inmate parents reentering the family.

Program Description

Literacy Volunteers Stamford - Greenwich is developing a "family literacy" curriculum that will guide discussion between a participating inmate and their child. CLICC has made good progress in recruiting e-mentors for the children from participating corporations, and mentors for the inmates from faith-based organizations. An important third component is the family-by-family "case management" capacity, managed by participating family service organizations. In the Connecticut pilot, Family Services Woodfield ("FSW") will manage the mentorship programs, for instance, by linking appropriate mentors with participating children. Literacy Volunteers Stamford - Greenwich, in collaboration with the John Jay School of Criminal Justice, will provide assistance with program evaluation.

In essence, the CLICC program facilitates a family literacy curriculum that engages parent and child in discussing books. The family literacy curriculum is designed to increase the connection between incarcerated parent and child, and to reestablish the parent's role in educating the child so that upon reentry, the parent is a capable and committed caregiver who can reassume the role as parent. The curriculum recognizes that:

- All families have strengths
- Even inmate parents can positively affect their children's development
- Children benefit immensely from close ties with their parents
- Parents are their children's first and most important teacher

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Board Member Profile: Arthur H. White

If Connecticut Appleseed were asked to run the Oscar Awards ceremony, our first priority would be to give a Lifetime Achievement Award to Arthur White.

Prior to conceptualizing his "CLICC" (Connecting through Literacy Inmates, Children and Caregivers) project or joining the Appleseed Board, Arthur founded two successful national non-profit organizations: the Reading is Fundamental ("RIF") program of the Smithsonian Institute and Jobs for The Future ("JFF"). Arthur currently serves as Vice Chairman of RIF and interim Chairman of JFF, which since 1983 has been creating strategies for education and economic opportunity.

Arthur's CLICC concept dates to 1994, when President Clinton appointed Arthur to the National Commission for Employment Policy, an independent agency that advises the President and

Congress on employment and training issues. After being appointed by President Clinton in 1997 to the Federal Prison Industries Commission, Arthur still serves as Educational Advisor to the U.S. Bureau of Prisons.

Arthur's unique background and strong belief in redemption embrace the challenge of educating inmates and preparing them for re-entry into society. But only a person with Arthur's creativity could connect the seemingly disparate pieces of today's complex incarceration puzzle and conceive a healing vehicle that rests on literacy training. Only a person as irresistibly persuasive and well-connected as Arthur could undertake a project as ambitious as CLICC.

In terms of Arthur's "day job", he is also Vice Chairman and co-founder of Yankelovich Partners (formerly Yankelovich, Skelly & White). From

1959 to 1986, Arthur was a principal in the firm and directed more than 200 research and consulting assignments for corporations, government agencies, industry associations, media, universities and non-profit organizations. Arthur also served from 1975 -1991 as Chairman of the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority, Chairman of the Stamford Foundation and Vice Chair of the Stamford Housing Authority.

[As a Vice Chair and member of CT Appleseed's Executive Committee, Arthur regularly contributes his immeasurable gift - a willingness to share the innumerable relationships he has developed over his lifetime. Arthur seems to know almost everyone. If he doesn't know an individual, he knows someone who does. And if Arthur for some reason hasn't yet met you, rest assured that he will charm you when he does.

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WK Kellogg Foundation that it awarded \$618k to fund the research.

Connecticut Appleseed's piece of this 7-state project focused on the Hamden, Bristol and Bridgeport school districts and relied to an extraordinary extent on their cooperation. After the completed research has been compiled into a report next Fall, CT Appleseed will publicize the shared experiences from 21 school districts in the 7 Appleseed states. Project findings may help Connecticut better confront and reduce our persistent inequity in educational achievement among white, African-American and Hispanic students.

Challenges in Engaging Minority Parents

Hamden schools are struggling with the problem that some minority parents are intimidated by the school system and feel that they and their children lack respect from some teachers. Since their minority student population has grown much more rapidly than has diversity among the teachers, a racial imbalance between students and teachers has arisen. At the 2300-student high school which is 40% African-American, only 1% of the 200 classroom teachers are African-American.

May 10 Focus Group Urges Minority Parents to Initiate Teacher Dialogue

One focus group attendee complained that "the teachers in our school system don't understand us and don't understand our culture". Another criticized the schools for communicating only during parent conferences, saying "I want to hear the bad news when it happens, not 3 months later when I go to the conference". Some focus group attendees said that they had become discouraged in their attempts "to navigate the system" because they feel they aren't listened to and, in particular, don't feel comfortable at the virtually all-white PTA meetings.

Hamden schools' creation in late 2005 of a new "Outreach Coordinator" position to improve the participation of minority parents reflects growing recognition of serious problems and a determination to address these issues. While the school district has made correcting the racial imbalance among teachers a priority, progress is slow. But Hamden's willingness to sponsor the focus group may indicate that the district is no longer in a state of denial.

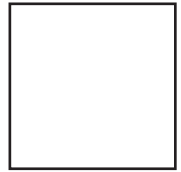
CLICC Project continued from page 2

- Parents have a deep and lasting impact on their children's success in school
- Children learn primarily from their parents' example

Children and inmate parents are both linked with personal mentors. A stable relationship and growing familiarity with a caring volunteer who shares information about his or her career and life experience can help youth to make responsible choices. The in-prison mentor helps support the parent's reading and literacy skills, assist the parent in reconnecting to his or her child, and assist the parent in understanding how he or she can be helpful to the child from within prison.

Current Needs and Status

The urgent need is for a more adequate funding structure. A request to support curriculum development is under review by the Pitney Bowes Literacy and Education Foundation. With major funding also needed to support development of the cooperative arrangement with FSW and the program evaluation/assessment tools by the John Jay School of Criminal Justice, an application will be submitted shortly to the Tow Foundation.



Introducing Claire Howard

On April 10, 2006 Connecticut Appleseed's Board of Directors voted to offer our new "Education Policy Associate" position to Claire Howard. Claire is a New Haven native, a graduate of Yale with a Master's in Public Policy from Carnegie Mellon and the former Executive Director for the Connecticut Charter Schools Network. Claire is managing Connecticut's participation in the No Child Left Behind collaborative project. She's also scoping future education projects and initiatives that can help improve public education in this state and broadly supporting Executive Director Bob Kettle. Finding and hiring an individual of Claire's caliber culminated a two-year period of prolonged focus on strengthening our finances and organization.

With this addition of our second staff member, CT Appleseed is gaining vastly improved flexibility to undertake more staff-led projects, to better support our Board member-led projects and to participate in additional collaborative projects. We're immensely pleased to introduce Claire to the Appleseed network!

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have to fund the resulting settlement. The price tag associated with meeting the oral health needs of Medicaid children up to age 19 is \$21 million. To be sure, the final settlement details could still fail to motivate private dentists to participate in the Medicaid program and accept Medicaid patients. But the state seems to acknowledge that it will take someplace between \$10 million and \$20 million to adequately fund the *Carr v. Wilson-Coker* settlement.

Appleseed Helped Achieve this Outcome

In late 2005 Appleseed Board member Peter Libassi challenged the parties to the stalemated *Carr v. Wilson-Coker* litigation to begin constructive settlement negotiations. His innumerable letters, personal meetings and phone conversations with both parties succeeded in prompting their first face to face meeting in nearly 3 years. Peter's initiative to meet with CT Office of Planning and Management Secretary Bob Genuario and educate him about possible ways to resolve the litigation may also have played a role in motivating the Administration to agree to settlement negotiations.

Other Appleseed Initiatives to Improve Access to Dental Care

For over 2 years Peter Libassi has guided Appleseed's program to broaden the oral health delivery system to more disadvantaged children, with the strong and active support of the Connecticut Health Foundation. Among the program's several elements have been:

- 1) Appleseed successfully challenged both the Connecticut State Dentist Association and the CT Society of Pediatric Dentists (CSPD) to mobilize their members and assume greater leadership on the Medicaid issue. Board member (and periodontist) Dr. Mike Perl gained the CSPD's written commitments to recruit pediatric dentists for the Medicaid program and serve these children if the reimbursement rate were raised.
- 2) Dr. Mike Perl continued to successfully recruit volunteers at the CT Health Services clinic in Hartford, where professional colleagues treated roughly 200 children in 2005. However, Mike had unexpected difficulty in recruiting teams of volunteers at similar clinics in Stamford, Danbury, Milford and Bridgeport.

He is researching a new "Mission of Mercy" project that features special events which provide free dental care in mobile dental units that are located for a day or two in large-scale facilities like auditoriums. With heavily advertised events that compress the time required from dental professionals, volunteers can accomplish a lot in a relatively short period of time.

What the Settlement Must Include to Solve the Problem

The scope of the state's oral health crisis among poor children may have proven too large to solve with volunteerism alone. But Appleseed and our collaborators will work hard to ensure that the final terms of the *Carr v. Wilson-Coker* settlement include, at minimum:

- Reimbursement rates as close as possible to the 70th percentile;
- Apply to dental services for children ages 0-19; and
- Adequately fund the state's dental Medicaid program.