

HEALTH

Group gives AIDS babies a good start in life

By Marian Wright Edelman
Special to Sentinel-Voice

What happens to babies who are HIV positive and have no one to hold them and love them?

Sometimes these infants are abandoned by mothers who are unable to deal with their own health problems, let alone their baby's. Sometimes birth or foster parents have a temporary crisis, health related or not, and cannot find anyone willing to care for their HIV-positive child.

One organization making a difference is Caring for Babies With AIDS (CBA) in Los Angeles. Opened in 1990 to address the tragic circumstances of "boarder babies," CBA has grown and diversified according to the community's needs, while never losing sight of its original charter to care for children who have AIDS, are HIV positive, or are in families where a member is living with the disease.

Children are referred to CBA from the Los

Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services when mothers or caregivers are too sick to take care of them, when there are legal problems, or if there is a child endangerment issue in the home.

CBA offers a residential facility providing a temporary "home" for the child until he/she can be returned to his/her family or caregivers, or can move on to a foster care situation if necessary.

"We structure our program to provide stability for the children as soon as they get here," executive director Ginny Foat said. "We try to make the houses into cheerful homes filled with familiar things and people."

A child is assigned only three caretakers who work in shifts and who can establish a relationship with the child.

Even volunteers are assigned to specific children with consistent times and days and volunteers who cannot make that kind of commitment help the center in other ways, such

as office work and fund raising.

CBA's first residential facility filled up immediately, and officials knew they had to do something to help the many more families in crisis in the community.

While expanding their residential facility, they developed a Family Support Services Program with the ability to manage more than 200 cases at a time.

Families referred to CBA, or who walk in or call in for assistance, are visited by a social worker who goes to the home to assess what is needed. The child is the client, and the child's interests are always first, but the family benefits from whatever help or referrals CBA can extend.

The center also started an education and advocacy arm that teaches foster parents and caregivers how to care for HIV positive children and how to negotiate government and managed care bureaucracies to get the best treatment.

Soon, CBA will open a child care center for

HIV-infected parents and/or children who will be provided with vouchers from AIDS services organizations. Care will be available for children during the day while parents are at doctors' appointments or getting social or psychological counseling. The children in the daycare facility will be monitored by Family Support Services professionals who will assess the children's needs and make referrals if necessary in cases of developmental or other problems.

CBA obtains about one-third of its funds from the government, one-third from foundations, and one-third from fundraising. Besides traditional fundraising, volunteers hold "baby showers."

We need more places like CBA. I'd like to see several such facilities in every community, providing loving, nurturing "homes" to children who have started life with so much to overcome.

Marian Wright Edelman is president of the Children's Defense Fund.

CDC report: Smoking may be deadlier for Blacks

Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON, D.C. — His remarks coinciding with a new surgeon general's report declaring minorities a rapidly growing group of new smokers, President Clinton on Monday called tobacco use "an issue of health, not politics," then pressed for an upgraded effort to curb the habit among minorities.

The president said Americans are losing the battle when it comes to resisting the lure of smoking and keeping

kids from becoming "replacement smokers," cited in tobacco company memos.

"They are our children. We can't replace them," Clinton said. "This has become an issue of health, not politics. If we know what the danger is and what the remedy is, are we going to do what it takes to save their lives and their future and their health, or not?"

The president received a report from Surgeon General David Satcher that said black men who smoke and get lung

cancer are much more likely to die from the disease than white males who light up, although death rates are lower among other minorities.

Satcher's report is the Clinton administration's latest salvo in Washington's election-year tobacco wars, as Congress struggles to agree on a policy that would reduce teen smoking.

The report also is more bad publicity for tobacco companies trying to convince Congress to reject proposals

the industry says would drive it out of business.

But lawmakers have been reluctant to go easy on an industry described by documents to have marketed their product to teens and minorities.

The study on minority smoking habits looked at four ethnic groups that together make up a quarter of the nation's population. It concluded that black men "bear one of the greatest health burdens."

According to the study, 81 percent of African-American men who smoke and have contracted lung cancer die from the disease, compared to 54 percent of their white counterparts.

A quarter of Hispanic male smokers with lung cancer die from it, about the same as the death rate among Asian male smokers stricken with the disease. Thirty-two percent of American-Indian men who smoke die from lung cancer, the study shows. Overall, the

number of adult smokers has declined this decade, according to the study.

Another report released earlier this month by the Centers for Disease Control showed that smoking by black students — once hailed as a success story for their continually low cigarette use — has almost doubled.

Smoking among black teens has increased 80 percent over the last six years, three times as fast as among white students, the study showed.

Children's group celebrates safety

Special to Sentinel-Voice

To help parents and caregivers fight the leading killer of children ages 14 and under — preventable injury — the Clark County SAFE KIDS Coalition will present "SAFE KIDS at Home at Play & on the Way" interactive safety events throughout the community.

As part of National SAFE KIDS Week, May 2-9, 1998, these entertaining interactive safetyfests will bring kids face-to-face with real-life hazards present in homes, in cars and on the playground.

The Clark County SAFE KIDS will be hosting a variety of free activities including a Drowning Prevention & CPR Demo on Saturday, May 2 at Wet and Wild; a two-day safetyfest at Ruby Thomas Elementary, starting with a kick-off relay at 9 a.m. May 4. The week will conclude with a Car Seat Check-up at Pat Clark Pontiac on E. Sahara on Saturday, May 9 from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

In addition, 52 Safe Key sites run by the City of Las Vegas Parks and Recreation have teamed-up with the SAFE KIDS to offer its more than 3,000 students a chance to win prizes by participating in the Check-America Safety Checklist.

"Each year too many children continue to suffer the tragic consequences of preventable injuries," said Barbara Ludwig, executive chair of the local Coalition. "We hope these events bring more than fun, we hope they bring recognition of potentially harmful situations and change behaviors for the better."

The local coalition is led by Sunrise Hospital with member agencies representing gaming, retail and industry. Their award-winning efforts have included providing car seats, smoke detectors and bicycle helmets to needy families.

For more information regarding the SAFE KIDS' activities, contact Jeanne Cosgrove, coordinator at 731-8666.

Preventing falls takes common sense

HOUSTON — Falls are the number-one cause of injury-related death for people over the age of 65. "Fractured bones that can result from a fall are a concern for older people, but it is the immobility caused by falls that does the most long-term damage," said Dr. Robert Luchi, director of the

Huffington Center on Aging at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston.

"Immobility affects virtually every system of the body and makes the normal effects of aging more pronounced."

Since most falls occur in the home, many of them are

Health, medications interrupt sleep

HOUSTON — Getting a restful night's sleep can become challenging later in life. Health problems, prescription medications and sleep disorders are just a few of the barriers to enjoying an uninterrupted night in the sack. "Many people with arthritis, for example, might have no difficulty initially falling asleep. But turning over in bed might waken them during the night and prevent them from falling back to sleep," said Dr. James Frost, a professor in the Department of Neurology at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston. Another common obstacle is medication. Many drugs prescribed for mature adults, including tranquilizers and antidepressants, can interfere with sleep. "The best advice is to maintain normal sleep patterns," said Frost. "Going to bed and waking up at the same time each day helps people sleep better."

preventable. Luchi suggests the following steps to help "fall-proof" a home: Do not use throw rugs; keep electric cords, telephone cords, newspapers and other clutter out of

walkways; make sure the home is well-lit; install grab bars or handrails in the bathtub; ask your doctor about doing exercises to help strengthen muscles.

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