

About AHA's Front Porch Project®

By Leslie Wilmot, M.S.S.W.

In the past 20 years, the U.S. has seen a threefold increase in the number of children who have been seriously maltreated or injured by their caregivers. In 1998, nearly 903,000 children were victims of some type of abuse or neglect (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1998). Some of these children live in your community.

The American Humane Association (AHA) believes that it is time to bring community citizens back to the work of protecting children from abuse and neglect. Our goal: to thoroughly effect large-scale, enduring, and systemic change. Responding to families in trouble must blend the provision of existing governmental child protective services with leadership from the broader community. Toward that goal, AHA's Front Porch Project, a community-based child abuse/neglect prevention program, reflects the belief that everyone can and should become more aware of how to help protect children in their own community. This concept is much the same as a good neighbor sitting on the front porch who, in years past, would have been aware of and involved in solving problems affecting families they knew. American front porches were more than convenient sitting places; they served as networking centers where concerned friends could share information and devise support systems to help each other through difficult times. Although problems today stem from issues beyond the architectural decline of the front porch, there is great benefit in recapturing a community's sense of responsibility for the welfare of children.

The Front Porch Project advocates for increased involvement in each other's lives, the power of one person to make a difference, and the application of strategies for intervening when necessary to help protect children and assist families. By training citizens on how to respond to possible child maltreatment, AHA delivers the basic elements of the Front Porch Project to interested communities. The topics and activities covered in Phase I include:

Training Day 1

- Identify and utilize problem-solving strategies.
- Positive parenting strategies.
- Definitions and dynamics of child abuse and neglect.
- Effective intervention and personal safety strategies.
- Workings of the public child welfare and court systems.
- Methods of discipline and basic child care practice that may make children more vulnerable to maltreatment.
- Model and role-play possible

interventions.

- Develop personal action plans (personal intervention strategies and target dates).

Training Day 2

- Process trainee action plans and interventions taken.
- Discuss barriers to intervening, and methods to circumvent these challenges.
- Discuss the impact of cultural and gender issues on intervention.
- Explore the need for prevention and the fostering of resiliency.
- Model and role-play possible interventions.
- Discuss with trainees the kinds of follow-up support and assistance that may be available.

The topics and activities covered in the Train-the-Trainers Phase include:

Train-the-Trainers Day 1

- Positive training experiences.
- How to set up a training.
- Detailed review of the curriculum, from a trainer's perspective.
- Successful and skillful training techniques.
- Exploring personal weaknesses and fears regarding training.
- Preparation to practice training on Day 2.

Train-the-Trainers Day 2

- Practice training, with constructive feedback from fellow participants and facilitators.
- Process practice experiences, including feedback.
- Discuss next steps for new trainers to conduct trainings themselves.
- Final recognition activity and evaluation.

The article that follows is a description of one community's investment in tackling the need for child safety and family support. Devereux Kids, Inc., has created a unique combination of community support and engagement through training, including its own Devereux Kids' Capacity Building Curriculum and AHA's Front Porch Project, to achieve a more humane and safe community for children and their families. For information on the Front Porch Project, call 303-792-9900 or visit AHA's website: www.americanhumane.org.

References

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (1998). *Child maltreatment 1998*. Washington, DC: Administration on Children, Youth, and Families, Children's Bureau.

Supporting Families Makes a Difference: A Partnership for Prevention and Well-Being

By Marcie Biddleman and

Ann Doyle, M.A.

Devereux Kids, Inc., is a community-based prevention program in Florida that organizes and develops individual and group advocacy efforts for the safety and well-being of children and families. Devereux Kids, Inc., is collaborating with the American Humane Association's (AHA) Front Porch Project to increase child safety, parent involvement, and neighbor-to-neighbor support. This partnership links education, advocacy, and relationship development with the personal involvement of parents and neighborhood residents to foster a community-driven process that focuses on child safety and networking within a community. In fact, through this joint endeavor, Devereux Kids, Inc., has worked to create a parallel system of support for child safety and well-being alongside the child protection system.

The Devereux Kids' Capacity Building Curriculum and AHA's Front Porch Project training program are developing an effective way to access parents and community residents. Both programs share a common belief in the need for community-based involvement and have expertise in community education, training, and evaluation. Devereux Kids' core philosophies and practices include strengths-based data collection, networking through relationship building, ethnography (insider perspectives), and

facilitation techniques to connect people to each other and to community resources and activities. This collaborative effort brings national and local models together to strengthen respective training strategies, expand upon shared vision and principles, and enhance the outcomes for all participants.

Background

Barnard and Farestad (1998), discussing the Front Porch Project, pointed out a potential process to access and engage parents and community residents in the prevention and community-based advocacy activities occurring in Florida. Years of experience in community work brought the staff of Devereux Kids, Inc., to the realization that gaining true resident participation is extremely difficult to accomplish, but needs to be done. The staff also believed that in every community there are concerned citizens who want to do their part to help children and protect families, but they do not always know what to do, how to do it, or what opportunities are available. To meet the challenge of gaining resident participation, the staff focused on facilitating education for developing relationships, initiating trust through personal participation, and creating an insider/expert forum for peer learning. They are validating that AHA's Front Porch Project and the Devereux Kids' Capacity Building Program are successfully creating opportunities to connect and partner with community people of all ages, economic status, race, and culture. Participants are being empowered by sharing their information, skills, and techniques to help each other strengthen and develop their community's capacity to protect children and support families from within their own neighborhoods.

Bringing the Front Porch Project to Florida

“Through my association with the Parent Teachers Association, I have had the opportunity to take many training courses – officer training, family involvement, positive discipline, legislative lobbying; and together they have provided me with many valuable child advocacy skills. However, no other training compares to my Front Porch Project training. Unlike other training courses where the information is learned and filed away for future use, from the day of my first Front Porch training, I was able to walk out the door and apply what I had learned. It was as if a new pair of glasses made the world look different to me. I was inspired with the knowledge, the confidence, and the courage to make a difference in the lives of the children and families in my community. My new intervention skills could be applied immediately and have been, continuously, to this day.”

(A Front Porch Project participant)

The efforts to bring the Front Porch Project to Pinellas County, Florida (an urban county in the Tampa Bay area of Florida's gulf coast) began when Devereux Kids, Inc., staff first made contact with the American Humane Association in February 1999. Devereux Kids, Inc., was just starting as an agency focusing on primary prevention (prevention before a problem actually occurs) and was committed to involving a traditionally overlooked segment of the community – the parents and residents. Devereux staff believe that parents and residents who interact with children on a daily basis are key resources in neighborhoods, and are vital to keeping children safe and families supported. Individuals who assume personal

responsibility for knowing their neighbors, keep their eyes and ears open, and offer support and assistance to parents experiencing stressful situations are fundamental to the development and the maintenance of a child safety and family support network.

Believing strongly in utilizing available resources and not “reinventing the wheel,” Devereux staff set out to see how and when they could bring the training to Pinellas County to include in their prevention and capacity-building project. After a few false starts, they partnered with Family Service Centers of Pinellas to use community education funding (provided through the Allegany Franciscan Foundation) to sponsor a local two-day training.

Devereux staff invited a broad-based representation of local organizations, civic associations, and providers to participate in the training and to become trainers through a Front Porch Project Train-the-Trainer session, a session to train individuals who could then continue the Front Porch Project training in their communities. In March 2000, 27 representatives of 19 organizations and community groups began the first Pinellas County two-day core training. The Front Porch Project Train-the-Trainer course was then completed in July 2000, resulting in 17 trainers from 14 groups becoming volunteer Front Porch Project Trainers. The trainers represent the Parent Teachers Associations, local funding organizations, county extension services, home-visiting programs, statewide advocacy and research organizations, community-based grassroots organizations, and local providers. The training exceeded expectations for involvement and reinforced the original intent to use it as a bridge for access to nontraditional participants. It has helped to solidify the other components of the Devereux Kids, Inc., prevention program and

has become a cornerstone to prevention efforts. It is also a steppingstone to advocacy development, and a systemic approach to the design and development of connections for a prevention stakeholder network.

“It was so amazing when I did my action plan.¹ The manager of the store really listened to me and took the action to remove the display from blocking the sign about not leaving children in the car in the heat. I know that hundreds of people were helped by what I was able to do.”

(A Front Porch Project participant)

Taking the Front Porch Project Into the Community

The strategy for taking the Front Porch Project to the community actually began as Devereux Kids, Inc., staff selected participants for the first training – participants who would eventually become trainers. Staff sought participants who were comfortable in providing training, reflected the diversity of the community, and had a strong sense of the importance of community-driven work. People who would help reach the many individuals, neighborhood representatives, faith community members, parent groups, and civic associations in the communities were sought. Staff also included in subsequent trainings the representatives of statewide child- and family-focused advocacy groups (e.g., TEAM Florida Partnership, Family Source of Florida, Neighborhood Partnership staff, other collaborative group representatives).

As part of the “next steps” for the first Train-the-Trainer agenda, Devereux Kids, Inc., invited potential trainers to form a workgroup to develop a plan for taking the training into

the community. At the same time, it committed to allocating 25% of its community facilitator’s time to coordinate the workgroup and to provide ongoing support and resource development for the Front Porch Project in Pinellas County. It also committed to finding the resources to cover the cost of training supplies, equipment, materials, and refreshments for the coming year.

The Trainers’ Workgroup meets quarterly and has been responsible for the development of a local “tag line” for the training, “Neighbors Supporting Families Make a Difference.” The workgroup has also been responsible for developing a marketing plan, and a strategy for reaching diverse communities within the county. There are at least two co-facilitators at each training to insure quality training and diverse experience for the trainings. Staff have found that the volunteer trainers and trainees have become Devereux Kids, Inc., ambassadors in the community, often telling others of their experience in the training, and connecting the agency to other groups interested in receiving training. Twelve of the local trainers have taken an active role in outreach, scheduling, training support, and/or co-facilitating training.

The marketing plan includes a 15-minute overview of the training and a one-hour presentation that gives the audience hands-on experience for the training. Awareness begins immediately; and even this short presentation makes a difference in developing an understanding of the importance of personal responsibility and the safety of children. These presentations, especially the one-hour presentation, begin to break down people’s initial hesitancy to commit to a full two days of training. Many see value in the training and are able to see how they are significant to enhancing child safety and well-being. This recognition increases their willingness to take

the time to participate in the full training program. People not only learn that they can help, but they learn how to do it; and in the process, they share their expertise with others. The process is interactive and a true peer learning/teaching forum for everyone who participates. The marketing plan also includes a willingness of trainers to be flexible with groups to find the time that best meets their busy schedules (including nights and weekends). Recently, Devereux staff offered the one-hour interactive presentation as part of conference workshops to further promote the training and local prevention efforts.

The Front Porch Project, along with the Devereux Kids' Capacity Building Curriculum, is a "front door" for community members to become involved in protecting children, supporting families, and connecting community resources for prevention and well-being. People leave the training with information and new skills for making a positive difference for themselves, their families, and their neighbors. One participant remarked, "This training is like no other I have attended. I left the training a different person, and it has impacted my life forever."

The Results

In November 2000, Devereux Kids, Inc., received funding from the Allegany Franciscan Foundation to support the Front Porch Project in Pinellas County. The funding covered a portion of the salary of the community facilitator, administrative support for training, training materials, evaluation, and another Train-the-Trainer session. In December 2000, staff began the first two-day training. Since that time, they have completed the training for eight groups, trained an additional 17 trainers, and provided 11 one-hour presentations. A total of 660 people were either trained and/or participated in a presentation.

Devereux Kids, Inc., staff use the evaluation methodology established by the American Humane Association to assess the results of each training day, and to conduct six-month follow-up interviews (on a random sample of trainees) to determine the long-term impact of training. Staff have also hired an independent evaluation consultant to compile the Day 1 and Day 2 evaluations and to conduct the interviews. An empowerment evaluation protocol (required by the funder) is used to evaluate success in meeting expected outcomes. Expected outcomes are:

- 75% or more of the participants of the two-day training indicate that the topics covered and information presented were very or somewhat useful.
- 75% or more of the participants of the two-day training agree that their knowledge and understanding of ways to protect children increased upon completion of the training.
- 75% or more of the participants agree that they are more comfortable with intervention as a result of the training.
- 75% or more of the participants indicate that they are more likely to intervene as a result of training.
- 80% of the participants will achieve one or more of their goals of the individual action plan.
- At least 800 people will be impacted by the direct or indirect actions of each group of 25 people trained.
- 12 or more new trainers will complete AHA's Train-the-Trainer curriculum, so that they can provide the training in Pinellas County.
- 50% will indicate additional actions six months after completion of the training.

Initial evaluation results indicate that all indicators have been met or exceeded, with the vast majority having a result of 90% or

better. The 56 participants who completed the six-month follow-up interviews prior to July 2001 indicated that 1,932 people were impacted as the result of their individual actions. To date, 100% of the training participants have indicated that they would recommend the training to family and friends.

These results and the enthusiasm that the Front Porch Project has generated go far beyond the training. Participants have introduced Devereux staff to new groups, written articles on behalf of the project, and arranged a public services television spot in which two participants acted out a scenario from the training. The results are also reaching beyond Pinellas County. The Florida Department of Children and Families sponsored a two-day training and the Train-the-Trainer session for its Promoting Safe and Stable Families and Community Partnership staff from across the state. Devereux Kids, Inc., and the American Humane Association partnered in these training sessions. Devereux staff intend to assist statewide trainers in providing training to their communities, and to collect statewide evaluation results.

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"I found myself in a situation with a big street fight going on. I was completely unable to do anything to stop the fight or take action at the time. I was just too intimidated. What I did was file formal complaints by talking to the community police officer and the head of the community association. I also e-mailed a letter to the City Commissioner. They sent a letter back from the Code Enforcement Department and they are going to take action on some of my complaints. Two hundred people living in the area will be impacted by the actions taken by the Code Enforcement Department."
(A Front Porch Project participant)

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Implication for Prevention

As stated previously, we have integrated The Front Porch Project into the Devereux Kids' community prevention strategies. In the Capacity Building Training, Devereux staff build on the key messages of AHA's Front Porch Project: personal responsibility, comfort zone, and the power of one. Devereux staff have designed a curriculum that develops strength-based thinking, ethnography, wellness, and advocacy as part of an individual, family, and community development model. There is a great degree of trust, relationship building, and increased awareness of personal responsibility developed in the Front Porch Project training groups. Out of every group of 20 to 25 participants trained in the Front Porch Project, Devereux staff expect that at least 25% want to use what they have learned to become advocates and to do more in their community. Staff take this opportunity to develop trainees' sense of responsibility, and to encourage their participation in neighborhood, civic, or personal community work through some form of advocacy (to a degree that is comfortable to them and will strengthen them, their families, or their community).

In addition to the training, Devereux Kids, Inc., uses every opportunity to collect information from community residents on how, when, and where they connect to resources, either for themselves or for family and friends. Staff do this to show that providing input and voicing one's opinion are the first steps in advocacy and in taking actions to help others strengthen their community. Staff also collect information to gain knowledge about the many formal and informal resources in the community and to connect service providers for prevention and well-being efforts. The community facilitators use this information to identify and sustain

existing links, support stakeholders, and create or strengthen connections between people as a way to form a network of prevention and well-being resources.

The long-term benefit of collecting data and anecdotal experiences is to provide concrete and empirical source material in their cultural and social contexts to demonstrate the effectiveness of primary prevention activities. Documenting prevention activities that nurture children and their families, save lives, and prevent harm is a fundamental step toward demonstrating the cost effectiveness of prevention efforts. It is also a fundamental way to increase financial support for the prevention programs throughout Florida.

Early Barriers and Lessons Learned

Early in the efforts to bring AHA's Front Porch Project to the community, Devereux staff found themselves faced with a number of challenges that included time constraints, limited financial resources, and the fact that Devereux Kids, Inc., was a new prevention program within the community and the organization. Each of these hurdles had to be considered and addressed in order to move forward effectively. Fortunately, the Devereux Foundation incorporated startup monies and first-year funding into the organizational budget to help launch the project. The Allegany Franciscan Foundation also contributed financial resources to support the endeavor.

Given the hope for breadth of the project, Devereux staff also found that the design and development process took longer than anticipated. It took a substantial investment in time to organize it from early conceptualization to actual implementation. One of the critical tasks was to undertake an exhaustive effort to disseminate information about the project throughout the community

and to build important community relationships. It took one-to-one contact and a year or two of relationship building to create a bridge into the neighborhoods. Trust takes time, and Devereux staff made the commitment to build on what already existed, support neighborhood leaders, and *create with* them rather than *provide for* them. This was an investment in all of the resources, and has been critical for success.

Continuing the Momentum

The Front Porch Project is an extremely effective training program, and has the potential to reach a large number of people in communities throughout the United States. However, it is apparent that it takes local commitment and resource development to make such a program viable for resident involvement on a scale sufficient enough to make a positive community-wide impact on child safety. Scheduling and facilitating the training requires local support to identify participants and to make it a quality training experience. Because the intent of the training is so closely aligned with the Devereux Kids, Inc., mission, Devereux staff made a commitment for training in Pinellas County, and are now expanding their efforts to other communities in Florida.

The strategy to initially use volunteer trainers worked well, helping to attain startup goals and get past the design and planning stage into the hands-on training. Devereux staff successfully recruited volunteer trainers among people who linked the relevance of the Front Porch Project to their own job responsibilities. Staff are now working to identify potential Front Porch Project Train-the-Trainer participants from the pool of parents and neighborhood residents who participated in the initial core trainings. This will enable staff to use these participants as

co-trainers in future deliveries of the Front Porch Project training.

Devereux staff have developed proposals to fund training at no cost to grassroots programs, faith communities, startup agencies, and community individuals and groups. Efforts have been successful. Devereux Kids, Inc., received funding to hire a full-time trainer and to expand the community education program (using the AHA Front Porch Project and the Devereux Kids Capacity Building Program) into other counties in Florida. Staff have continued to enrich the training by incorporating realistic and practical techniques that participants share with each other as part of the training format. They involve individuals that have completed training to be advocates for in-kind resource and fund development; and selected parents and residents will be asked to participate in an additional 16-hour Train-the-Trainer program to become community trainers, training support, or training assistants. Both training curricula catch the heart of people who have always wanted to help, and teach them information and skills so that they can. A Train-the-Trainer model is used for both curricula and is integral to the growth and sustainability of this within-community education and involvement model.

Devereux Kids, Inc., staff access and engage parents and community residents through education and training. This has evolved into the first step toward building capacity for child safety and well-being in communities throughout Florida. The education components are linked to involvement using a community facilitation process, such as individual community facilitators, neighborhood partnership coordinators, or community involvement teams. The community involvement process is designed to provide advocacy training, identify

and use existing resources, support active community membership, and involve parents and residents in the design and implementation of new services.

Outcomes

The documentation and evaluation process is being designed to demonstrate that prevention efforts are effective for the development of safety and well-being for children and families, and that prevention itself is cost effective. The goals are to:

- Establish a community standard for prevention efforts toward the safety and well-being of children and families.
- Empower and increase citizen participation in safety and well-being activities.
- Increase traditional and nontraditional resources for safety and well-being in neighborhoods.
- Increase safety and well-being for children and families from within their community.

The partnership between the American Humane Association's Front Porch Project and Devereux Kids, Inc., is an opportunity to expand, engage, nurture, and sustain primary community assets – the parents and residents – to become more involved in protecting children and families. This combined project brings the opportunity to reach diverse groups within the community and to develop a community-based network of advocates connected to each other. Actions taken by parents and resident advocates will range from personal education to public support of community issues, and will be enhanced by knowledge, support, and hands-on practice. All parts of the local community will be included in the design that expands itself easily through a simple individual- and group-

connection process. Shared commitment and understanding are the first steps to any collaborative process. Beyond this, the possibilities are limitless.

Marcie Biddleman (Administrator) and **Ann Doyle** (Community Facilitator) are the principle staff overseeing both the Front Porch Project and Capacity Building activities at Devereux Kids, Inc., in Clearwater, Florida. For more information, contact Marcie Biddleman: 727-538-4198 (office), MarcieB@aol.com (e-mail).

Reference

Barnard, S., & Farestad, K. J. (1998). The Front Porch Project: Key elements of AHA's community-based initiative. *Protecting Children, 14*(1), 7-10.

Note

1 Personal action plans are used during training to help participants define their personal intervention strategies and target dates for completion.

