



November 22, 1995

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Molly Brostrom
Old Executive Office Building
Room 207
Washington, D.C. 20500
202-455-5561

Dear Ms. Brostrom:

Thank you for calling the Urban Family Institute today about your visit with Carol Rasco to the Kids House and future site of the Community of Learners on December 5, 1995. We look forward to your visit and to talking further about the Institute's vision for revitalizing America's disconnected inner-cities.

I am enclosing some information on the Institute, its President, Kent Amos, and the strategies on which we are currently working. If I can be of further assistance before December 5, please feel free to call me at **202-234-KIDS.**

Sincerely,

Stephanie Sigelman
Program Specialist

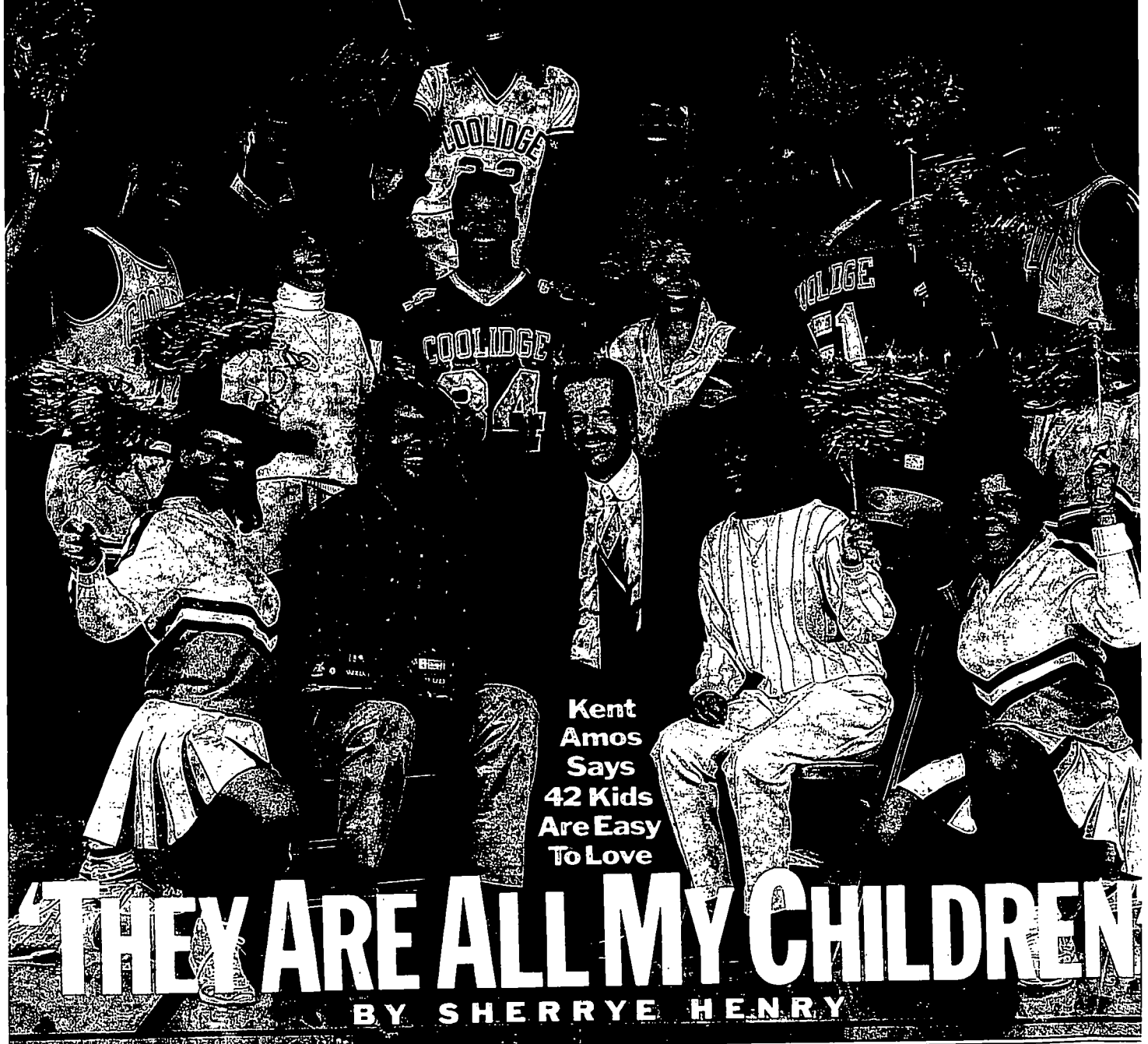
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Schneider

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Caitlin Schneider

SUNDAY, MAY 3, 1987

PARADISE



Kent
Amos
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Are Easy
To Love

'THEY ARE ALL MY CHILDREN'

BY SHERRY HENRY

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Milton Newton was one of them. He had spent most of his life getting into trouble—until he met Kent Amos. “Milton needed a lot of help,” Amos recalls. “I’m not sure where his father was. His mother was in the Virgin Islands. He needed family. He’d failed eighth grade and was having a rough time with ninth after his grandmother had sent him to live with an aunt here in Washington. I took a liking to him. For the last five years, he’s called me Dad.”

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And it is a program now. At the beginning of 1986, Kent set up his own management-consulting firm, The Triad Group. Concurrently, with a major contract from Xerox, he orchestrated the nonprofit Urban Youth Investment Program, which already has installed \$250,000 worth of computer equipment in Coolidge High to train students for skilled jobs. Kent not only intends to expand his own parental responsibility to 200 children, but he also hopes to provide a concrete programmatic model for others who might wish to pursue his vision.

After dinner, Kent savors the quiet as the children study. Among his successes is Derrick Davis, 20, who once faced glum prospects. Just two years ago, Derrick was going nowhere. Then Kent arranged living space for him in a good home and took him into the Amos program. Today—after leading Coolidge High’s basketball team to the city championship and being named all-American—Derrick is a freshman at Oklahoma State University, which granted him an athletic scholarship.

Derrick remembers the dark days, before Kent Amos helped him: “I was a street hustler. I wanted to make fast money. I was living with my father, and things weren’t going right between us. I had a girlfriend...she had a baby...When I first came to Coolidge, I didn’t have anything on my mind but cutting class, hanging out with the boys who didn’t go to class. Then Mr. Amos came to and asked me what kind of life did I want. He said if I went to school, enhanced my study habits, I could have that. What I said I wanted—what I want—is a nice job, a nice family and to raise my own kids someday. After he talked to me, I said: ‘Why throw that away when I can give it a chance?’ and they say, ‘Yeah, that’s good.’ Good that I’m trying to make something out of myself. Since my father’s seen some of these people trying to help me, he’s been coming back. This program made a big difference for me. Now I can dream of being like Mr. Amos—helping young people.

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URBAN FAMILY INSTITUTE
June 1995

BE IN BY DARK!

Does the phrase "Be in by dark!" mean anything to you?

When speaking across the country, this is a question that never fails to bring a smile to the faces of "grown-ups" in the audience. It is often responded to with knowing laughter and looks of recognition and remembrance. "Be in by dark!" conjures up memories of dinner time with Mama and Daddy or the adults of your life asking you what you did today. It conjures up a time when you had a bedtime; when you got so old you didn't understand why you had to go to bed even though sometimes it wasn't dark out yet. You were grown, or at least you thought you were. You are fortunate to have such fond memories.

Many of our children, particularly those living in our inner cities are not so lucky. For these children, "Be in by dark!" has no meaning. For these children, it is not always safe to go out in the daytime. Fear of gangs, drugs, and random gunfire keeps many children inside regardless of whether it is light or dark out. In certain neighborhoods, danger lurks even in the schools. And most tragically, some of our children are not safe in their own homes.

THE NEED

Our children are crying out for help. Our children are being abused, violated and neglected. Our children are growing up in crime and violence ridden, drug infested neighborhoods under impoverished conditions with no hope for a future. Consequently, crime, violence, substance abuse, teen pregnancy, unemployment and apathy resident in "high stress" neighborhoods are symptomatic of the fear burning inside our children and ravaging our families. These symptoms have created a self-perpetuating cycle that threatens the fabric of our nation. On any given day across America:

- 6 children commit suicide.
- 13 children die from guns.
- 27 children -- a classroomful -- die from poverty.
- 307 children are arrested for crimes of violence.
- 1,234 children run away from home.
- 5,703 teenagers are victims of violent crime.
- 7,945 children are reported abused or neglected.
- 100,000 children are homeless.
- 1,200,000 latchkey children come home to houses in which there is a gun.

THE RESPONSE

The Urban Family Institute (UFI) was established in 1991 as a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization devoted to creating urban neighborhoods in which no child grows up without the close guidance, nurturing, discipline, and support of caring adults. Drawing upon the wisdom of the African proverb, "It takes an entire village to raise a child," the Institute's mission is to restructure the way communities care for their children throughout this nation, by re-involving extended family, neighbors, and other willing adults in the lives of children. To accomplish this, the Institute uses a combination of direct service, public education, community organizing as well as local and national advocacy. UFI serves as a catalyst for action: within the communities it serves; at all levels of federal, state and local government; and in the boardrooms of for profit and not-for-profit institutions.

NURTURING VILLAGE STRATEGY: RESTRUCTURING COMMUNITIES

A Nurturing Village is a large, urban neighborhood in which schools, churches, parents, local residents, child-serving organizations, and a variety of other entities coordinate their actions in order to create safe and nurturing environments for children. A model Nurturing Village consists of a complete matrix of developmental opportunities and services for children and families.

This includes a sufficient number of **Kids Houses** (safe places for children to develop and grow when they are not in school) to serve every child. A Nurturing Village also includes several **Corridors of Care** (small areas where all services are linked to provide comprehensive support to families). If necessary, a Nurturing Village could also include several **Residential Kids Houses** (short-term, family style residential care within the neighborhood for children with extremely difficult home situations). Residential Kids Houses are not intended to be a solution to the current child welfare crisis. Rather, as a part of the comprehensive Nurturing Village strategy, they are one method that can strengthen and renew distressed urban communities. Finally, a complete Nurturing Village might include a **Community of Learning** (a residential learning community encompassing Kids Houses, Residential Kids Houses, adult and family dorms, and a range of comprehensive family services, delivered in a University-like setting).

The Nurturing Village strategy strengthens communities by using volunteers to re-create the extended family that historically supported and sustained children. Our volunteers are primarily local community members who become "family," and who begin to feel a sense of responsibility associated with being a part of a family. In addition, volunteers from neighboring suburbs are also encouraged to contribute their time, energy and skills. The Urban Family Institute embraces and trains these untapped resources, ranging from young adults to seniors, to sustain the neighborhood. This empowers communities to transform their will into the capacity to effectively care for their children. It is our belief that children who grow up in "nurturing villages" form a

bond with their community that contributes to the long-term stability of the neighborhood and the nation.

KIDS HOUSE: A ROLE FOR THE COMMUNITY

The Urban Family Institute uses a proactive approach to fostering Nurturing Villages, by creating safe environments for children called Kids Houses, led by child-centered adults. A Kids House may operate in a private home, a church, a school, a recreation center, or a public housing development -- anywhere that appropriate space exists. Local residents interested in opening Kids Houses must demonstrate that their commitment is positive and unwavering. Although the Institute offers intensive training and support, it is vital to our philosophy that local residents take ownership for their own Kids House and for the children of that community. The Kids House/Nurturing Village strategy promotes long-term self-sufficiency of families and neighborhoods, without requiring new financial resources from government or private sources.

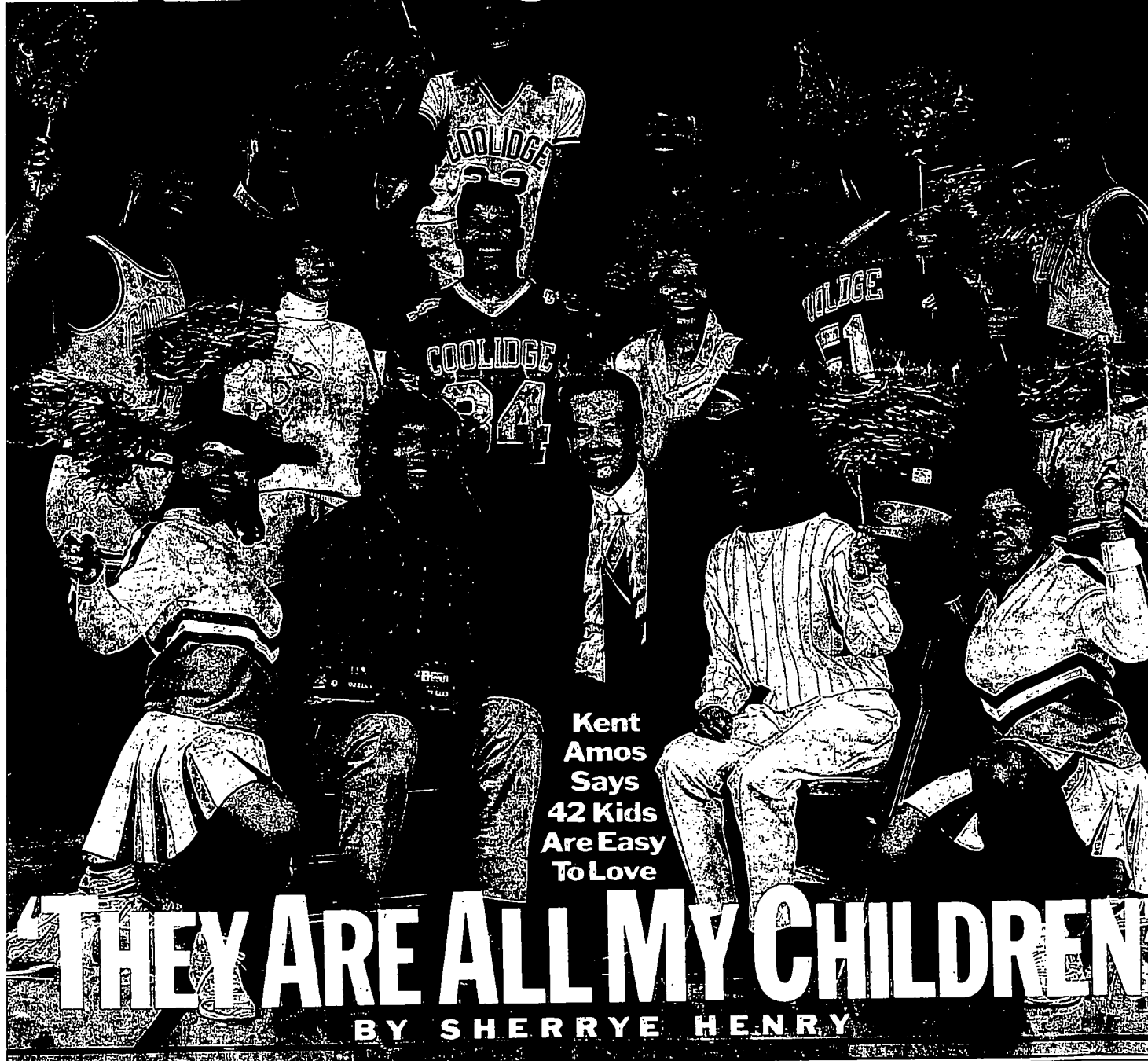
Kids Houses support and enrich children's educational, social, health, and spiritual development. Particular focus is on developing reading, language arts and analytical skills. Kids Houses should be equipped with computers and other state-of-the-art learning tools. To enhance their social and spiritual development, children engage in activities to promote self-esteem, self-awareness, non-violent action, and an understanding of one's place in the circle of life. However, each individual enrichment activity is not as important to a child's social development as is the constant support, guidance, and love provided by the regular "extended family" of each Kids House.

The centering point of Kids House is the dinner hour. Historically, dinner has been a time when children and adults came together to share and reflect upon the day. Preparing the meal, setting and clearing the table, and washing the dishes provided opportunities for every family member to contribute. At Kids House, not only do children receive a nutritious dinner meal, but they also experience the meaning and value of "family."

Kids Houses operate, at a minimum, five days a week. Children go to their "House" in the afternoon, finish their homework, eat supper, engage in discussions and activities with nurturing adults, and return, escorted by an adult, to their place of residence. Kids Houses provide a resource to parents and families by providing alternatives to formal child care for working parents, by offering parent development workshops, by providing parents with opportunities to enhance their neighborhood, and by helping to raise children into productive adults.

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Milton Newton was one of them. He had spent most of his life getting into trouble—until he met Kent Amos. “Milton needed a lot of help,” Amos recalls. “I’m not sure where his father was. His mother was in the Virgin Islands. He needed family. He’d failed eighth grade and was having a rough time with ninth after his grandmother had sent him to live with an aunt here in Washington. I took a liking to him. For the last five years, he’s called me Dad.”

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URBAN FAMILY INSTITUTE

Communities of Learning* Concept Paper

Vision:

The Community of Learning (COL) is a residential University-based model with the goal of enabling families to become independent, stable, healthy and functional in the larger community. Graduates of the Community of Learning will be able to secure jobs, move from public housing to independently supported housing, become good neighbors, and nurture and support their children in a way which promotes positive development and growth. A successful Community of Learning will raise entire communities from poverty and dysfunction to become stable, peaceful and economically viable neighborhoods.

Summary:

There are four components to a Community of Learning, including residential life, academics, economic development, and health and social services.

Residential Life:

Eligibility and Location: A Community of Learning will be located in a public housing project. Participation will be voluntary with priority going to families already living at the selected project. Other families who would be eligible include: families currently living in public housing elsewhere in the city, homeless families who are eligible for public housing but not currently in such housing, and a small number of families (percentage to be determined) who are not eligible for public housing, but who have something to contribute to the community. These residents would include police officers, nurses, teachers, and social workers - some of whom may serve as professional staff at the Community of Learning.

Dormitories: There would be family dormitories which would consist of single unit family apartments. There would be a residential living dormitory for children whose families needed additional support to help them care for their children. Parents whose children stay in the children's dorms would reside in the adult dorms. When appropriate, parents and children would be able to spend supervised time together at the children's dorm or another appropriate environment. After parents have gone through drug rehabilitation and counseling, and are functioning at a level appropriate for child care, there can be a phase-in process to reuniting families.

* The Community of Learning model is based on the Family University concept of Consultants for Empowerment of Organizations in Racine, WI and is expanded on in this paper with permission from the author.

Academics:

Adult Academic Plan: The Community of Learning offers a course of study which spans two to six years. The time frame depends on a number of factors including the level at which the community and the individual are functioning at the beginning of the process. For example, one learner may begin with courses in basic literacy and math, one may start with a GED preparation course, and another may be ready for classes at a higher level. The academic program is run jointly by the Community of Learning management and by a local accredited four-year college or university. Completing a basic course of study at a Community of Learning results in certification at the Associates Degree level, with a specially created degree such as a Community Development or a Child and Family Development degree.

Child Academic Plan: School-aged children residing at a Community of Learning will attend the local public schools. Pre-school-aged children will be enrolled in existing Head Start programs whenever possible. Babies and very young children as well as pre-school-aged children who are not served by Head Start will be cared for by a child care cooperative on campus at the Community of Learning. All children will attend an on-campus **Kids House** during the non-school hours. A Kids House is a family-like environment where children can receive constant guidance and nurturing when they are not in school.

Economics:

Cost-Benefit Analysis: The Community of Learning strategy promotes long-term self-sufficiency of families and neighborhoods, without requiring new financial resources from government or private sources. The overall cost of one family attending a Community of Learning will be lower than public sector costs for that family would have been. Funding will be redirected from less effective, fragmented programs serving similar populations.

Economic and Community Development: Everything from home-building, to child care, to grounds maintenance will be carried out with a maximum of direct support from the residents. Residents will be required to contribute "sweat equity" as well as subsidized rent and other expenses on a sliding scale according to ability. Residents will be trained in all aspects of community development.

Health and Social Services

One-Stop Shopping: An on-campus Community Center will house multiple health and social services for a "one-stop shopping" approach. Families will receive course credit for participating in physical, social, or mental health "classes," (training and development sessions), which will include anything from pre-natal care to good nutrition to drug rehabilitation. The Center will contain a health clinic, a library/technology center, substance abuse treatment services, common eating areas (such as a cafeteria), recreation and fitness facilities, and family and individual counseling. The focus of the Center combines healing, teaching/learning and prevention.

REAL ESTATE

Cisneros Backs Live and Learn Housing Plan

HUD Proposal Would Put Classrooms in Developments

By Maryann Haggerty
Washington Post Staff Writer

Public housing developments would be places to learn as well as to live under a program announced this week by Housing and Urban Development Secretary Henry Cisneros. And the District, he said, would be an place to demonstrate the concept.

Cisneros said he envisions housing developments modeled after college campuses, with units wired for computers and all residents required to attend classes each day—in training, educational day care, high equivalency sessions or seminars for the

The classes could take place in new class-buildings or at existing schools folded the development, and local educational institutions would provide some faculty and other support.

The program, which Cisneros called "communities of learners," is in the early stage of development. No locations have been chosen, are no pilot projects to evaluate and no specific amount of funding has been set aside.

It's part of a larger \$1.5 billion program, called "HOPE VI," under which local housing authorities get federal money to help demolish the worst of the nation's aging public housing developments and replace them with redesigned developments integrated with social services.

At the press conference where Cisneros announced the new education idea, he also reviewed demolitions that have taken place this year and are planned for 1996 under HOPE VI, which is the sixth in a series of federal programs formally christened Homeownership and Opportunities for People Everywhere.

So far, dilapidated housing developments have been torn down in Baltimore, Philadelphia and other cities. In Washington, the Ellen Wilson Dwellings on Capitol Hill, built in 1941, are scheduled for demolition in December.

Cisneros said he has invited the 32 public housing authorities that have been awarded HOPE VI grants, as well as others that have applied for them, to consider the educational complex idea as an option when they rebuild.

See LEARNING, E7, Col. 1

Living and Learning Program Proposed for Public Housing

LEARNING, From E1

The goal is to help people better their prospects enough to move out of public housing altogether.

At HUD, one of the favorite targets of congressional budget cutters, there is not a lot of extra money lying around, but Cisneros said the agency will provide some additional grants to cities that participate in the new program.

"I'd love to try it in Washington, D.C.," he said. "We have HOPE VI in Washington, we have a new housing director. I'd love to do it in Washington, where everybody could see it."

Cisneros said he has had discussions with David I. Gilmore, the court-appointed receiver who this summer took over the D.C. Department of Public and Assisted Housing. Gilmore, he said, is interested in trying the concept at the Park Morton complex in Northwest Washington, near Howard University.

Gilmore was on vacation this week and not available for comment. Other D.C. housing officials also were not available.

A number of other public housing authorities also have expressed interest in the program, Cisneros said. Among them, he said, was New Orleans, where the infamous Desire housing development was demolished this week.

Because details on the proposal are sketchy, public housing advocate Deborah Austin said she couldn't comment at length, but that generally the idea is good.

"It sounds to me that it's not a bad idea, but I wonder if the dollars are there to make it happen," said Austin, director of legislation and policy at the Washington-based National Low-Income Housing Coalition.

Cisneros's proposal calls for wiring homes in these "communities for learning" for computer use. Austin said, "That would be a very progressive move. I don't see a downside to it except getting the dollars."

Her organization, she said, is more concerned about ensuring the public housing units being demolished with HOPE VI money are eventually replaced.

That's a particular worry in a political climate where HUD is in danger of shrinking drastically or disappearing completely, with much of its authority going to state and local governments.

There's a lot of demolition being talked about, but who's going to be around to see that the second half happens as it's supposed to?" she asked.

In an interview, Cisneros elaborated on his educational community proposal. The idea, he said, came from a

The goal of the HOPE VI program is to help people better their prospects enough to move out of public housing.

D.C. resident, Kent Amos, who over the years has tutored and mentored scores of underprivileged children.

"He came to me with this idea," Cisneros said. "You've heard of a conceptual blockbuster. He said, 'Don't think of public housing as public housing. Don't think of it as just a living space.'"

Instead, he said Amos told him, a concentration on all stages of education could turn a complex into a launching pad for people to improve their lives.

The idea has never been tried at the scale Amos and Cisneros envision it, Cisneros said, although some cities have attempted less ambitious public housing developments.

For instance, one assisted-housing development in Denver requires all residents to be in educational programs, but the classes are not offered on site.

Cisneros said he believes the new program can work. "Housing authority residents, housing authority officials, mayors—they all know this can be put together," he said.

"What really convinces me is the lifting effect on people. . . . If you give people the tools to improve themselves, most will take them," Cisneros said.

A Whole Village for The Children

I've always admired Washingtonian Kent Amos because he strikes me as a man who "walks his talk."

Thirteen years ago, the former Xerox official was alarmed when he saw the devastating effect of the migration of the middle class from Washington.

So, he and his wife turned the living room of their Northwest Washington home into a daily dining and work room for youth from deprived circumstances.

Over 11 years, they became "parents" to nearly 100 children, tutoring, mentoring and loving them. Thirty-nine of their children finished college, and 27 currently are enrolled.

But they also had serious setbacks. Failures. They've sent Amos walking as fast as he can—in another direction.

"Every day I think of Andre, one of my first boys, who was shot to death," Amos said over lunch the other day. "And I think of Anthony, who died by self-inflicted gunshot wounds. . . . That means I didn't do something right."

What Amos wants to do is focus enough on changing how a community nurtures young people like his "children."

"Ours was an isolated effort. . . . The kids still had to go back to a world dominated by others," he said. "There was only so much preparation, insulation and protection we could give."

Amos, along with others, now is turning his vision toward devising a "nurturing village"—a totally protected and safe zone for youth and their families in Washington's Shaw area.

Shaw has 8,000 children, three high schools, four junior high schools, at least 19 churches, Howard University and Howard University Hospital, two Boys and Girls Clubs, a YMCA and several economic development programs and social service agencies.

"But they don't operate as a continuum," Amos said. "There's no synergy, no relationship between them, except physically."

Amos envisions bringing these resources together in a structure with a common agenda. He wants all

See GILLIAM, G5, Col 4

METRO

DOROTHY GILLIAM

Building a Village of Hope

GILLIAM, From G1

these institutions to reconfigure themselves into a nurturing village.

"Shaw Village" would have designated areas that would be called "corridors of care," making use of all the combined services and resources already there. Under an agreed-upon plan, there would neither be duplication of services nor competing interests.

The overall aim, said Amos, would be to put into place a process that prepares children for life.

"Developing adults includes educating children in a formal sense, but goes well beyond that," he said. "Unlike the generation of us who are over 40, our society no longer has a process in place by which we prepare [these inner-city

youngsters] to become responsible adults."

For seven or eight months, Amos has been working with the Urban Family Institute, the Washington Parent Group Fund, the heads of several schools and churches in Shaw, the Greater Washington Research Center and others to develop a common strategy and activate the concept.

The collaborative effort is in the embryonic stage of development, but Amos said plans are moving rapidly.

One of the most significant aspects of this plan is that it will not require new money, he said.

"I don't think it's a money issue," Amos said. "The question is whether we're willing to reorder how we spend money."

Fighting violence with 'all the mushy stuff'

More than 1,400 children die each year from guns — a toll that has more than doubled over eight years. On this and the next page, USA TODAY looks at the deadliest counties (most in the South), the lure of guns, and programs trying to counter violence.

By Richard Price
USA TODAY

At age 11, Patricia Miller has weathered the violence on the streets of central Harlem. "Rougher and rougher every day" is how she describes it. "When I go to church, say violence is not the way — and it's not — but when somebody beats you and picks on you, how are you going to defend yourself?"

Across the nation, the all-too-common answer to that question is a gun. But this summer, Patricia may find a different answer.

She's one of 50 kids from Harlem between the ages of 8 and 13 heading for Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine, to learn the same negotiating skills that diplomats and generals use in settling wars around the world.

The goal: Bring those skills back to New York's streets as a "peace-maker" who can defuse the conflicts that lead to gunfire — and then train others to do the same.

"It's tough negotiating peace in New York, but it's tough negotiating peace on 143rd Street too," says program creator Geoffrey Canada, president of the Rheedlen Center for Children and Families. "You can die in both places."

A tiny island of hope in a vast sea of death, Canada's program is among the last of small and largely disconnected efforts emerging across the country.

Their aim: to stop the violence that claims the lives of seven children a day and maims or cripples many times that number.

Born largely out of desperation, these programs come at the problem from every angle — from midnight basketball leagues and after-school activities for latchkey kids to religious instruction and lobbying of the V and film industry to cut violent programming.

But the hottest approach now is conflict-resolution training that teaches kids to talk instead of shoot. Like Canada's program, go to the streets for recruits. Many work rough the classroom.

The people involved in all these programs generally agree that each child encourages every new idea. But what many really want is a cultural revolution against the tremendous social forces driving the violence, particularly the breakdown of families and communities nationwide and the glorification of violence.

"We're talking about a profound paradigm shift here," says Marian Wright Edelman, president of the Children's Defense Fund. Her organization is coordinating an anti-violence network of more than 100 programs, sifting through them for a policy change that can be sweeping and do it.

"We glorify violence in our culture," Edelman says. "We invest in it. We sell violence in entertain-



GIVING PEACE A CHANCE: Patricia Miller with Geoffrey Canada of Rheedlen Center for Children and Families, which stresses conflict resolution.



By Timothy A. Murphy
AMOS: Piecemeal efforts aren't getting us anywhere in struggle to save kids.



By Steven Savino, AP
PROTHROW-STITH: 'We've hit the jackpot on violence'

ment. We're violent in our homes. Obviously we have to deal in a very big way with forces this fundamental."

Deborah Prothrow-Stith, assistant dean at the Harvard School of Public Health and one of the nation's most respected experts on this subject, likens the roots of violence to the windows on a slot machine.

"We've hit the jackpot," she says. "But instead of a row of oranges, we have a row of problems, including guns, poverty, alcohol and drug abuse, violence in our media, the breakdown of the family and a make-my-day ethic. We have to deal with all those..."

"This nation's favorite answer to violence is tougher laws and more prisons, and that won't fix this."

In the middle are people like Carl Taylor of Michigan State University. As a criminologist, he supports strong penalties — "kids who wind up predators have to understand the consequences of that behavior" — but as someone who grew up in Detroit and works with the violence there, he says prevention is the real answer.

"I believe in all the mushy stuff. In hugs. In teaching values. In connect-

ing kids with something positive. Only adults can do that."

He probably would be impressed with what Kent Amos is doing.

Arguing that "all these piecemeal efforts aren't getting us anywhere," the founder and president of the Urban Family Institute has undertaken what may be the nation's most ambitious project against violence.

He has created an entire "village" of 27,000 people that attempts to pull every person, every institution, every agency into a single force aimed at saving kids.

Amos has adopted 87 teenagers since 1983, and lost five of them to violence. He established his village by arbitrarily drawing a line around it on a Washington, D.C., map.

It includes 10,000 children, 17,000 adults, a hospital, a university, 17 schools, a YMCA, two children's clubs, dozens of churches and a long list of government agencies and non-profit organizations that deal in some way with family issues.

Now he is organizing all of them around what he calls "corridors of care" — central places like a school or a recreation hall — in which children can eat, learn and play, and receive all the benefits of an entire

Sleek, and tempting, by design

Critics: Gunmakers target young buyers

By Richard Price
USA TODAY

For about \$100, teen-agers today can buy a weapon that looks just like the killing machines glorified in action movies and video games.

Sleek by design and with catchy names like "Viper," the firearms of the '90s often come with fanciful extras — laser sights, plastic stocks and detachable magazines — that appeal to children's age-old fascination with guns.

"We're at the point now that kids are so sophisticated about guns that when they hear a shot, they can identify not only the weapon — an AK-47 or whatever — but which kid on the block it belongs to," says Carla Sanger, executive director of L.A.'s Best, which works with children at risk.

Few who deal with the issue of guns and kids are cheering wildly over last week's House vote banning 19 assault-style weapons. They're happy with the results, but with guns being used in an average 120 slayings of children each month, many critics also want an outright ban on handgun sales and a federal program to collect those already in circulation.

The National Rifle Association says the issue is an empty one.

"As usual, these people are trying to pass one law upon another," says spokesman William Powers. "The fact is that it's already illegal to sell guns to kids. Any federally licensed dealer who did that would go straight to jail."

But critics point out that gun dealer licenses are relatively easy to acquire. With the exception of convicted felons and a few others, almost anyone can get a 3-year license. And 75% of the estimated

Numbers tell a grim story

A survey of 1,600 male students in 10 inner-city high schools found 22% owned at least one gun. The most common weapon was a semiautomatic handgun. Of youths who owned guns, the percentage owning the following:

Semiautomatic handgun	82%
Revolver	58%
Shotgun	45%
Sawed-off shotgun	41%
Target, hunting rifle	36%
Military-style rifle	27%
Single-shot handgun	18%
Homemade handgun	18%

Where kids get handguns

Friend	38%
Family member	23%
The street	14%
Gun shop	11%
Drug addict/dealer	8%
Stolen/other	6%

Source: National Institute of Justice

250,000 licensed U.S. dealers operate out of homes, cars and other businesses — an army "far too large to regulate effectively," concluded a report released in February by the Violence Policy Center.

Geoffrey Canada of the Rheedlen Center for Children and Families in New York says the problem goes further than a few unscrupulous gun dealers.

"It's a marketing strategy by the gun industry, and it's aimed directly at youth," he charges. "More gadgets. More bullets in the clip. It's the same thing that happened in the sneaker industry, which keeps adding things like air pumps and little lights to attract kids. Gun manufacturers have discovered that concept."

Manufacturers say they have no

More on kids guns
► Index of coverage, 2A

control over criminal gun trafficking, and characterize as absurd notion that they would develop marketing strategy on assumption that some gun dealers are selling to children.

"No such strategy," says Ken Jorgensen of Smith & Wesson. "The fact is that it's illegal for us to sell to children, so why would we target them in our marketing?"

Indeed, most of the critics: not focused on traditional companies like Remington or Smith & Wesson, but on smaller firms around the country.

The Violence Policy Center study, titled "Cease Fire," found that some gun manufacturers are targeting youth directly, selling in the early 1980s when facing slumping sales. That coincides with the start of significant increases in gun deaths among children.

"Cease Fire" co-author Joshua Garmann says the time to reveal all that finally has arrived: "The nation seems to operate in 10-year windows with its issues, and we've reached our window."

While some call for an outright ban on handguns, Tom VandeBerk, president of the Illinois-based Urban Children's Home, would settle for "a sensible policy."

"I don't want gun control, but I do want regulation; that is, I'm trying to take guns out of the hands of hunters. I just want the industry held accountable," says VandeBerk, whose son was shot to death two years ago.

"They should have to sell out a respectable store, pay a respectable license fee and pay a stiff penalty for selling to minors — just the way we handle alcohol

community of adults working in harmony.

The central premise in his thinking: Children need adults, rising from the African expression that it takes an entire village to raise a child.

And he wants that thought to guide

national policy.

"What we have to do is come together around a set of principles," says Amos. "That no child in America goes home to an empty house. That every child in America has dinner every day in dialogue with an

adult. That every child in America has a bedtime and rules and discipline about what's expected, must rebuild the nurturing environment that once functioned in this. We must create a seamless web of care around our children."

'Children at the Center'

WASH. Post
10/1/93

Talk to Washingtonians about the out-of-control violence now plaguing the city, and sooner or later you'll hear some version of: It's the parents; they're not controlling their children, not teaching them respect—just letting them run wild.

Talk awhile longer, and it will become clear that the specific reference is to *young* parents, and especially mothers who gave birth when they were 15 or 16 and innocent of the skills involved in being effective parents. Their children grow up similarly unsuited for parenthood (though almost all of them will have children), and the cycle repeats and worsens.

Kent Amos believes the diagnosis is correct—if you are careful not to limit your definition of "parent" to biological terms. It's the remedy, though, that was occupying his thoughts when we spoke the other day.

"We adults," he said, "transfer the burden of the problem from ourselves to somebody else all the time—to schools, to government, to the police, to the kids themselves. More and more states are lowering the age at which kids can be adjudicated into adult courts. Who are we kidding? They are still children, no matter if they have committed the most heinous crimes."

Amos, who over the years, has taken scores of young people into his home and who now runs something called the Urban Family Institute, is no soft-on-crime patsy. He is, in fact, a level-headed realist who understands better than most the futility of any society-saving approach that doesn't put children at the center.

Yes, even the monstrous children who could kill you at noon and sleep soundly tonight.

"These children don't just drop out of a tree," says this former Xerox executive. "They, like all of us, are products of a process, only in their case it is a process that values violence and devalues respect for others, a process that provides no basis for hope for the future, a process that turns our most precious values on their head. These children can be redeemed, but they have to be deprogrammed and reprogrammed—put in another, more productive process."

And who is to do it? We are, says Amos. There is "a disconnect between the people who have the skill, the will and the resources to be parents and the children who need



BY NANCY ANDREWS—THE WASHINGTON POST

We have to provide security even in the most violent parts of town.

parents. It's no good getting angry with these young people who don't have even the rudimentary parenting skills. We have to step in and help."

Amos, who has been thinking about these matters for a long time, sees intervention along four separate lines.

First, you have to control the youngsters who are committing the violence. That means keeping them behind bars even while working to change their outlook.

Then you have to provide security for the others, especially in the most violent parts of town. "We have to create corridors—brightly lit and safe, with police officers stationed every five feet if necessary—so our children can get to school and home and play in absolute safety. This could be an excellent use for the National Guard—not catching crooks but protecting the children."

Amos is aware that Mayor Kelly has been ridiculed for considering calling out the Guard. "It's not uncommon to have neighborhoods that are protected and safe, where you need a permit to come in. The only difference is that these are usually places where rich people live. It's not unusual to have educational facilities that are well managed and secure; that's what boarding schools are. I see no reason why we can't use public resources to do for poor children what gets done for rich children all the time. This is a way of telling the children that the adults of the community value them."

Third, he says, we need to "surround our children on a daily basis with the kind of care-giving that helps them to develop properly—making them understand that we care about them and believe in their ability to learn. We have to get young

people to adapt certain norms that we know will work: respect for adults, reasonable bedtimes, reduced television viewing, with a maximum of five hours a week, mostly on weekends, as the standard."

And finally, says Amos, it will be necessary to teach the biological parents how to be more effective parents. "The adults could come to the schools at night to learn literacy skills, child rearing skills—whatever they need, including the proper way of talking to their children."

"If hundreds of adults start to change their language, the *community's* language changes. And behavior changes. This can't be done on an individual level. We have to redefine what's normal and abnormal. We can make this city a safe place for children again."

Oct. 2, 1991

Covenant of the Tribe

Kent Amos, a committed family man, wants to say a couple of words on behalf of families: Back off!

Parents—especially single mothers—are getting an undeserved rap for what is happening to our children, he believes, when an important part of the blame may lie closer at

"You keep hearing about what families and parents are doing, or not doing, and how this is the reason today's children are so terrible," he was saying the other day in response to a column I had written on the importance of family.

"I agree with what you say, but take a step back and look at the process by which children have been raised historically. That process is the tribe. Even going back to Biblical times, you read of the tribe of this and the tribe of that. All people on this Earth were once tribal, and it was in this context that we historically raised our children.

"The problem with today's children is that the tribe is no longer functioning."

The tribe as he sees it—villages are nothing more than stationary tribes—embodies four vital elements: the core family, the wider community, the political leadership (village elders, councils, mayors) and the religious leadership (medicine men, soothsayers, priests). The unwritten understanding has been that all four elements played a role in bringing children to responsible adulthood.

"That covenant," he says, "has been broken—not so much by the family as by the rest of us."

Amos, a one-time Xerox executive who for 10 years has been "father" to a constantly shifting group of D.C. teenagers, evokes the image familiar to adults of his generation.

"I was just in Texas, listening to a white executive talking about growing up on a farm in the middle of Oklahoma, where if he threw a stone and hit somebody, there was always some adult to say, 'Boy, I'm gonna tell your mother what you did.' Well, the same thing happened here in D.C., where I grew up, and all across America. There was always someone to tell your mother or to admonish you directly or to tell you: 'Now, you behave yourself; you know the Amoses are not *known* for that.'"

But those were the days when adults disciplined (and were respected by) all the children in the community, when families stayed put for years and when churches served the neighborhoods in which they were located.

"Now," says Amos, "adult neighbors often don't know each other, let alone one another's children. Families are dispersed. There are no neighborhoods and communities as before. The church community is scattered, parishioners often driving many miles to service and then back home, and the churches themselves may be dabbling in everything from politics to real estate development. The government has lost its ability to serve the needs of its constituents in a covenant relationship, as opposed to a process relationship.

"Even our language suggests distance that keeps us from touching. Instead of taking care of children, we put them in programs. We call

them 'youths' rather than children, and if we really want to put distance between us, we call them something like 'at-risk youth.'"

None of what Amos is talking about diminishes the importance of parents in the child-rearing enterprise. Their role was always vital, but, as he reminds, it was seldom exclusive. The most competent parents almost always had a hand in guiding and inspiring the neighbors' kids; the least able parents could at least exert tell-your-mother discipline.

If we could restore some of that attitude—and Amos believes it is possible—it might be the best thing that could happen for single mothers struggling to raise decent children in a frequently harsh environment.

"Some of it still exists," says Amos. "If you go into the most drug-infested and violent neighborhood in the city, you'll find children who come through in reasonably good shape. Follow them back and you will find a covenant kind of environment, where families and neighbors work together to help bring the children up right. These kinds of environments exist all over the place. We need to hold them up and do what we can to reinforce them."

Of course we do, and we need to do something else as well. We need to recapture not just the old arrangements but the old attitudes that made the well-being of children the number one priority: not to pamper them but to recognize that our children are the means through which we reproduce and preserve the best of ourselves.

Turning a School SEP 17 1990 Into a Community

In a few days, the Northwest Washington home of Kent and Carmen Amos will be buzzing again with the purposeful sound of teenagers at study.

The sound won't be as loud as it has been. The Amoses have decided to "adopt" only six new children this fall. In earlier years, easily twice that number have joined the Amos "family" for nightly study and talk sessions that focus on values. One year there were 25—so many, in fact, that Carmen Amos had to defer her hostess/cook role to the home economics department of Coolidge High School, where many of the youngsters are enrolled.

But if Kent Amos is cutting back on his unpaid efforts to get Washington's at-risk youngsters off to a solid academic and ethical start, he's doing it in order to expand its impact.

"As much as I try to do with these youngsters [the former Xerox executive estimates he has spent as much as \$250,000 of his own money on outings, vacations, financial assistance and food since he started his informal program nine years ago] the numbers are just overwhelming. One person just cannot do enough. If we are going to change the course our children are on, we are going to have to find ways to affect large numbers of them dramatically."

He thinks he knows how. What he has in mind is the transformation of school clusters into hothouses for the nurture and protection of children—a recreation of his own LeDroit Park childhood in which a neighborhood's children were the neighborhood's concern. He wants to surround the children with what he calls "ozone."

"The value of ozone," he told a recent meeting of teachers at Brightwood Elementary School, "is that it protects you from things that can destroy you while miraculously letting through the things that are necessary for life. That's what school can be, if you are willing to undertake what's necessary to make it so."

He talked about school as a place where children can inculcate the values that are necessary for black survival in an often hostile environment, as a place where values are both taught and modeled, where children learn from how the adults in charge of them treat one another.

But he didn't give them the whole spiel. And, though I have known this former Xerox executive for some years, I hadn't heard it either until a subsequent interview. Here's what he

"We have to learn to look at schools as holistic development centers for our youth and our future—not just medical services and day care, but values instruction. As a matter of fact, I don't think much of the current trend of putting nurseries in schools to take care of students' babies. We need to be building into our children why having babies prematurely is detrimental to their development. We need to bring the family, the home and the community—all the things that affect a child's development—into the school."

His dream—no, his *plan*—is to fashion neighborhood schools into seamless webs of love and learning, perhaps starting with the cluster that includes Brightwood, Paul Junior High and his own alma mater, Coolidge.

His vision: the school day would begin at 8 with an hour of "mental preparation time," during which children would meet in a home-like lounge to talk, read the newspapers and go over the day's assignments. Then, after a day of classes, they would break for dinner (in "family" groups of 30 or 40, including children from all three schools), prepared and served by neighborhood parents.

Finally would come two hours of study, organized recreation, a break during which the children could discuss personal problems with volunteering adults, and transportation home.

"If our children are to be saved," he believes, "they have to have a controlled and structured environment that reinforces the values that are necessary for black survival. The problem is that for many of them, home is not a positive environment. It's not that there aren't people at home who love them; what they need is interpretation, some way to help them understand the vast amount of information that is coming after them and build a value system that will help them make choices. We need to take the children off the streets and put that ozone around them."

It seems such a pie-in-the-sky scheme that normally I wouldn't bother writing about it. But I've seen Kent Amos in action, and I take him seriously.

He says his intention is to recruit foundations and corporate sponsors for a prototype of his scheme—someone who'll say here's X number of dollars—take the money and test your model." He is prepared to take the time from his consultant firm to "architect, manage and father it all." He expects to start as early as next fall, and I wouldn't bet against his success.

"It's really just a management issue," he says. "It's manageable. The fundamental question is whether we are willing to look at educating our children in a holistic manner, whether we have the will to make a difference."

William Raspberry

Children Who Shouldn't Go Home From School

Kent Amos, having finished his remarks, had a question for the school principals in his audience.

"How many of you have children in your schools who really shouldn't go home? Stand up, please." Every principal in the room stood up.

Amos already knew what the principals were acknowledging—that most schools have at least a few students whose homes are not fit places for children. But he wanted to drive the point home.

"If you have as many as 10 percent of your kids who shouldn't go home, keep standing," he said.

Nobody sat down.

As he raised the ante to 20 percent, and then 30 and 40, more and more of the principals took their seats. But, he told me later, at least a few were still on their feet in acknowledgment that as many as 80 percent of their students live in severely dysfunctional homes. Then:

"How many of you know about Newt Gingrich?" Everybody did. "How many of you agree with his proposal for orphanages?" Nobody did.

"Well, what do you propose to do with these kids who you say shouldn't go home? These are our kids, in our classrooms. Don't we need to go beyond criticizing Newt Gingrich and come up with a rational answer for these kids? You know very well that if we don't, a lot of them will die—and you can't blame their deaths on Gingrich."

Amos, a former Xerox executive, has made a virtual avocation of saving children from the perils of mean streets and dysfunctional families. His home has, for years, been their home: their haven for studying, inculcating values, thinking about their future. He now runs the Washington-based Urban Family Institute.

His purpose the other day was to tempt his audience to consider a vision he's had in his head for some time: of a community committed to its children, with institutions designed to further that commitment.

"When you and I were growing up," Amos explained later, "the child who got into difficult circumstances didn't have to leave the community. He was just taken in by neighbors until the situation cleared up. Now suppose these principals had some place within walking distance of the school where they knew they could send their troubled kids to stay for a while, where they would be taken care of by neighbors—where even the adults might get some help in sorting out their problems. There could be supervised study, recreation, everything—right in the neighborhood."

But first, he says, we need to get over our aversion to residential facilities for children, an aversion based on bitter memories of correctional institutions or such custodial facilities as the mercifully closed Junior Village in Washington. Such environments repre-

sent one possibility. Boarding schools represent quite another.

The second requirement, though, is to come up with the money to fund the sort of arrangement Amos has in mind.

"We have to think of problem-solving from a zero base," he says. "Assume there won't be any new money, and you get quickly to two ideas we're not used to dealing with: How to better spend the money you do have, and how to develop a fund-out strategy—a plan for working people out of the system."

The neighborhood emergency residence is just a start. What he really envisions is a technically sophisticated campus-like setting with the express goal of moving young people from troubled childhood to responsible, independent adulthood.

"We never think of helping troubled young people to change their lives, by

"Don't we need to go beyond criticizing Newt Gingrich and come up with a rational answer for these kids?"

—Kent Amos

giving them the guidance and education and training they need. Instead, we think punitively: Three strikes and you're out, two years and you're off welfare—even if you have no place else to go.

"But if we think in terms of a residential urban university that teaches everything from academics and job skills to how to be a good neighbor, you could transform lives. A single such university could accommodate children, families and single adults, with children spending some time with their families, some time in their own dorm.

"You might even convert a public housing complex into an urban family university, where residents—who would have to apply for the opportunity—could create their own safe and functional communities. There could even be a scheme by which they could move to owning their units. . . ."

Amos will spin his dream as long as you care to listen, but his fundamental point is critical: Most public housing residents and welfare recipients don't like living the way they live; they just don't know how to make it better.

Instead of lapsing into political warfare over Newt Gingrich and orphanages, some of us might usefully spend time figuring out how to use available resources, not to subsidize dysfunction but to help people transform their lives.

Holding Kids to a Higher Standard

It started nine years ago when Kent Amos's son, newly enrolled at Coolidge High School, came home with a couple of new friends.

"The boys were OK," says Amos, who heads a Washington consulting firm, "but they just weren't the kind of kids I thought my son ought to be spending his time with. I mean they were rude and poorly spoken; they weren't interested in academics or anything else except sports and running around."

His first thought, he says, was to forbid Wesley to associate with these rough-cut youngsters lest they drag him down. Then he had a second thought: Why not lift them up to where they ought to be.

The upshot was the Amos "family," a group of high school students who meet nightly at Amos's Northwest Washington town house to study and talk. Since those early days, the "family" has embraced 57 young people, most of whom have cleaned up their language and attitudes, abandoned the path that was leading to wasted lives and prison, and, most important to Amos, embraced the

values that produce decent behavior and success.

Values. The word crops up in virtually every serious conversation Amos has. Talk to this former Xerox executive about the problems young Washingtonians face and he'll tell you lack of constructive outlets for their energies, or the dearth of decently paid legitimate jobs, is only a minor part of the trouble. The main source, he says, is that the youngsters have not been taught the values that will help them withstand the temptation to trouble.

Talk to him about the trial of D.C. Mayor Marion Barry, and his comments are not about what the judge or the prosecutor or the jury did but what the failure of the decent blacks to hold public officials to a higher standard of decency has done to the values of our children. Talk to him about his adopted "family," and he talks about values.

"I try to help these youngsters enjoy themselves in positive ways, but I also insist that they devote serious time to study," he said in a recent interview. "I insist that they work when they're not

in school, and that they do something positive for their communities. . . .

"We try to make our children believe that we are in control, but it's not true. The children themselves have the ultimate decision on almost everything they do, starting at a very young age. All I am doing is trying to get them to internalize a set of values. . . ."

It doesn't always work. A few kids yield to peer pressure and outside temptation and drop out of the Amos "family." Some get into trouble and have to start over again. And once or twice, parents have questioned Amos's intensive approach.

"One mother who didn't even live in the area called me disturbed about what I was doing with her child," he recalls. "That was during his second year in the program. I reassured her that I was only interested in letting the young man reach his potential. We later met—at his graduation, with honors.

Most parents, though, are pleased to have their boys and girls join the Amos family, once they learn how seriously Amos takes his self-appointed mission. (Not only has he spent an estimated

\$250,000 of his own money on the program, but he has also enlisted his wife, Carmen, as hostess and cook for the study sessions.)

"I really do take the position that these are my kids," he told me. "I'm available to them around the clock. Just last week, one of the older boys tore up his knee playing basketball, and he has no insurance. I called my friend Tom Rankin (an orthopedic surgeon) and Tony took care of him for me. I have cried at their family funerals, and I have gotten kids out of jail. Once I was called away from Constitution Hall, where I was attending graduation exercises for some of my kids, to come get another one out of jail. That kid has now graduated from college."

It was no surprise to Amos that the values he had taught finally kicked in.

"The best thing that serious concerned adults can do for our children is to give them a clear, unequivocal set of values," he says. "Values are like ozone. They protect you from the things that can destroy you, while miraculously letting through the things that are necessary for life."

KENT AMOS

PRESIDENT OF URBAN FAMILY INSTITUTE HELPED RAISE NEARLY 100 CHILDREN

AS TOLD TO SOLOMON J. HERBERT

Kent Amos is president of the Urban Family Institute, a Washington D.C.-based organization he founded nearly one-and-a-half years ago. Amos describes the Urban Family Institute as a catalytic organization designed to create strategies for raising children in large numbers. The goals and objectives of the institute are: to ensure that no child grows up without the support of shepherding adults, to set high standards and expectations for the children that elicit their full potential, and to rekindle the American spirit of community service and sense of joint responsibility for the rearing of children.

Amos spent 15 years with Xerox as director of urban affairs. Seven years ago, he retired and began building an extended family. Since that time, he's helped raise nearly 100 young people, over 35 of whom have graduated from college, four with advanced degrees. Twenty-eight more are currently in college. The experience has given Amos some decidedly different views on parenting.

Amos and Carmen, his wife of 11 years, have two children of their own. Their daughter was nine and their son 16 at the time their family started to extend. The formation of the extended family was something that just slowly evolved, he says, as his children's young friends began spending more and more time in the Amos household. And while these extended family members had loving natural parents and maintained residence with these parents, Amos explains that he and his wife were obviously adding some extra nurturing to their lives that they needed.

Our family began to expand in 1981 when we were faced with the question of what to do about children who were visiting our home and were going to influence our own children. Either we could run from them or run to them. We decided to run to them. In other words, we were going to surround these kids, who were in the house every day, with the kind of support, love and nurturing that we felt was necessary, so they would be successful, and therefore would not pull down or alter the course that we'd set for our own children.

We started out with three, but within

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a few short months, we'd gone to nine children, with what we called 24-7-365—24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. We didn't really get to 24 hours because they didn't sleep at our house, but the rest of the time they were visiting. And, before

long, we went from nine kids to as high as 23 kids every single day. We've done that with almost 100 children now.

We supplemented what they were getting elsewhere with the structure, organization and direction that they needed. I'm not going to say that some already had it or some didn't. That's really irrelevant. The main point is that they always had somebody actively engaged in their lives.

Let's assume that there are three "work shifts" required to raise a child. If their natural families were shift one, we had to take shifts two and three. If their families took shift one and shift three, we took shift two. Whatever that child needed, we were prepared to provide. But what we were clear about was that if they needed it all the time, we were going to do it all the time.

Why are so many young people having a difficult time coping? Because society has placed too many demands on children. We truly are asking our children to be something other than children. That's unfortunate and unfair.

You have to go back to a basic principle: Historically, who saw to it that children became adults? It has never been, in our estimation, simply families. It has always been a collective. That notion that it takes a village to raise a child is very real. I don't care who or where you come from. If you are at least 40 years old—some even younger—a village structure still was in existence when you were a child. And by that I mean that not only was your immediate family involved, but the extended family and the community, all took a part in shaping the child's development into adulthood.

There's the story about how you walked down the street in a community and people called you by name. Teachers lived in the neighborhood. Everybody operated around children in a family way, in a village way. When our housing patterns changed and we stratified economically in the '60s and '70s, this thing broke down.

It's hard to indicate what our impact on our children has been. I can only say what the outcomes have been and compare that to the norm. Many of our children would have been described by sociologists as "children at risk." Now, let me say this unequivocally and categorically: Do not call my children "at risk." I hate that term. What we prefer is the phrase "disconnected child," although I hate putting labels on young people like that.

In any event, we had a large percentage of children who had the kind of characteristics and environments that could have caused them to end up with negative outcomes. But when you look at the results—for instance, two kids with advanced degrees who had very different childhoods—it's difficult to imagine that people would have written them off. These two were teenagers—one of them in his very late teens—when they became a part of our lives.

So we tend to write children off very, very early. It's unfortunate that some people think that if you don't get to a child by the time they're in the third grade, you can forget it. That's obscene to me that we write off a child at seven years old. Is their life so formed that there's nothing you can do to change it? That is abdication of adult responsibility of the highest order as far as I'm concerned. The truth of the matter is that parenting is the only process that I know of that is significant to the survival of humankind for which there is no formal instruction. Historically, it's all been done informally. You learn parenting skills by how you are parented.

I define parenting as a much bigger notion than just mama and daddy doing whatever it is that mama and daddy do. In other words, I see parenting in the context of the village. And since that has broken down, the remaining people of the village who are responsible for parenting are now feeling the weight because others are not working with them. That's why schools are in disarray. That's why nuclear families—meaning mothers and fathers—and communities are in trouble. It used to be that they each supported the other. Now one particular leg has to carry the full weight of the load, and it's just not designed to do it. Therefore, it will break. Think about a four-legged table. You cut off two legs and we're standing on top of it. There's no chance of that thing standing up. It's going to fall. It



Kent Amos (center) and some of his extended family

wasn't designed to support that weight.

So now we have a situation where the weight is being transferred to mama and daddy, or mama. Mama was never meant to handle the weight of raising a child from conception to adult status by herself. There should be a lot of people involved in that. It's like trying to eat a whole elephant. You'll say, there's no way I can do it. So you become frustrated and don't do anything. But if all you see is little bits at a time, you feel more able to eat it.

THE NOTION THAT IT TAKES A VILLAGE TO RAISE A CHILD IS VERY REAL.

What do children need? They need time, commitment and nurturing. We really have to decide to devote more of our time to children, and give children our first priority. I don't mean "quality time." That's a phrase and a notion that I abhor. Quality time is when, as an adult, you set time aside that fits your convenience and your schedule for your child. My argument is that all children have to be first on the time scale.

When I was a child, there was always an adult available to me. That nurturing person, generally speaking, was a family member, because at that time there was only one person working—or it was a

grandmother, or somebody living in the house or around the corner. So there was always a nurturing adult the child knew, who they could go to 24 hours a day. Since that system has now broken down, and that weight is placed on a single family member, there is a problem. So we have to recreate an environment where somebody is always available to that child, without putting the weight on one person.

Short of that environment, you have to decide that your child is important. There's a phrase I use all the time: "Nobody tells my child I'm busy. Only I can tell my child I'm busy." No staff person, no business associate, nobody. And by the way, there's no meeting that I would ever attend that's more important than my child. I'm clear about that, and I have more children than anybody. So, therefore, I prioritize my life around my children. Period.

The easiest thing to do is to reach out to a child, because they reach back. Now you may be in a gang-infested community and you've got to go through all the evil stuff that goes with that. But if you make it clear to a child that you care for them and are available to them, they'll come to you. The most violent, drug-dependant child will give it all up in exchange for an environment that is nurturing, wholesome, reassuring and protective. Kids don't want what's going on out there. I haven't found one yet who won't change if you present yourself to them in a sincere way. If you come at them with a speech or a lecture, then you've got a different problem. But if you really commit to them, they'll commit back to you. **BE**