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May 3, 1999

The Honorable Bruce Reed
Assistant to the President for Domestic Policy
Domestic Policy Council
Old Executive Office Building, Room 213
Washington, DC 20500

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PUBLIC AGENDA

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Dear Mr. Reed:

Two years ago, with the support of Ronald McDonald House Charities (RMHC) and The Advertising Council, Public Agenda sought to better understand American attitudes toward kids and what might motivate citizens to become involved in helping the nation's children prosper. The research resulted in *Kids These Days: What Americans Really Think About the Next Generation*, a report that *Congressional Quarterly* chose as one of 1997's historic documents, and media outlets both here and abroad devoted extensive coverage to the findings.

The surveys of adults and teens were recently repeated by Public Agenda, again at the request of RMHC and the Ad Council. Confirming both the validity and significance of the first study and suggesting how deeply felt Americans' concerns about the next generation are, there is virtually no change in public opinion after two years.

The general public, parents and teens express continued pessimism about the next generation -- few say today's children will grow up to make America a better place. Terms such as "lazy," "spoiled" and "rude" are used by the majority of Americans to describe children. Teens are characterized as "irresponsible" and "wild." Tragically, the recent murders in Littleton, Colorado will do little to reverse these views.

For Americans, "irresponsible parents" are to blame rather than social and economic pressures on families. While they recognize it's more difficult to be a parent these days, only one in five says it is "very common" for parents to be good role models and teach their children right from wrong.

Few are willing to write off kids, and given enough attention and guidance almost all teens, in the public's view, can get back on track -- even those who are regularly in trouble. To help kids, Americans support solutions close to home: improving public schools; establishing more after-school activities; having employers give parents more flexible work schedules so they can spend more time with their children; and having more involvement by volunteer organizations dedicated to kids. They do not embrace additional broad, national government programs.

The findings reinforce the ongoing RMHC and Ad Council initiatives to help children and their families. It is the Ad Council's intention to maximize the "help parents help kids" communications strategy in campaign messages as a way to build character in kids that many see as lacking.

Sincerely,

Deborah Wadsworth
Executive Director

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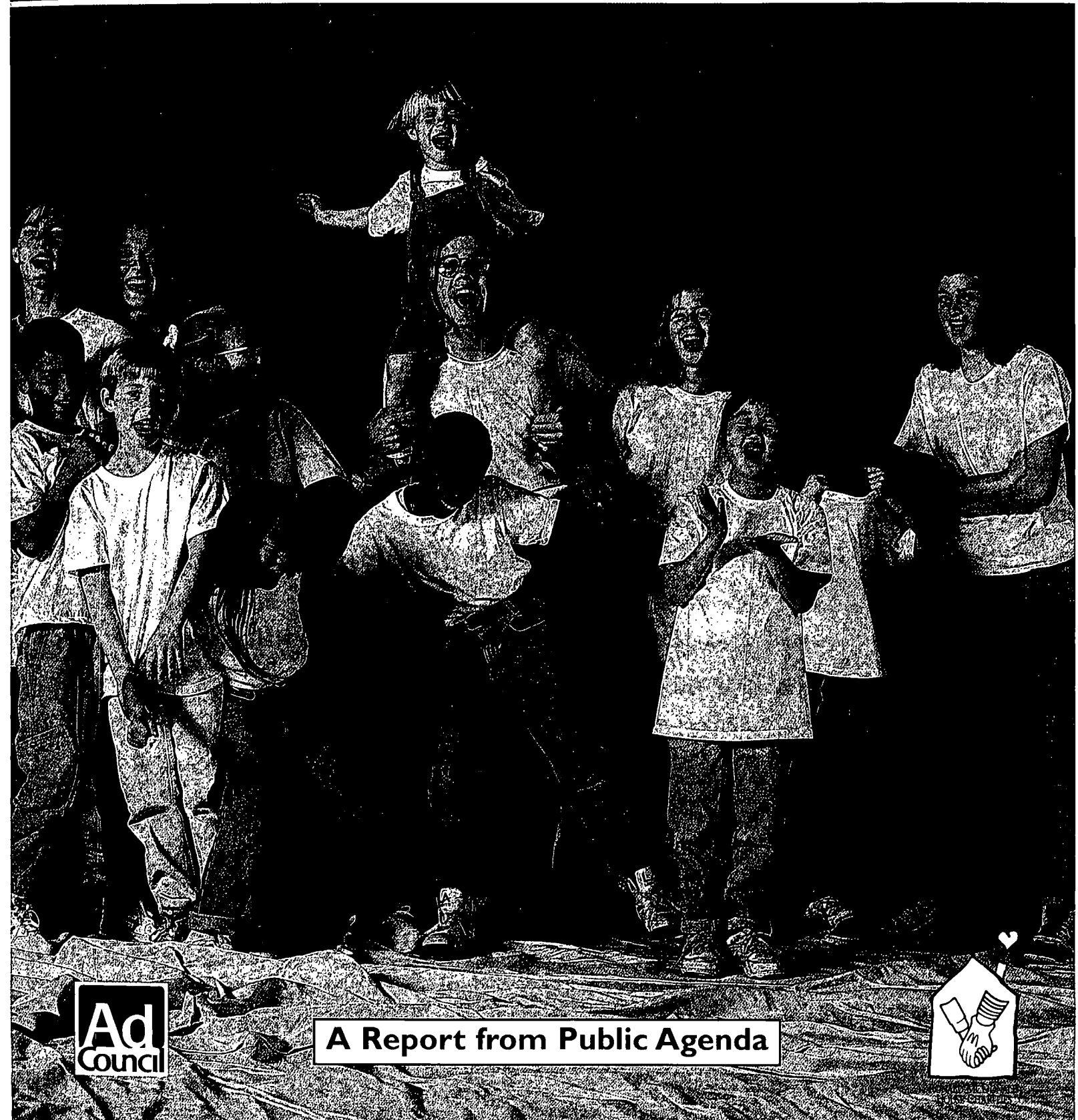
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KIDS THESE DAYS '99

WHAT AMERICANS REALLY THINK ABOUT
THE NEXT GENERATION



**Ad
Council**

A Report from Public Agenda

