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**Home Alone:
Is It a Risk Factor for Middle School Youth
and Drug Use?**

Peter F. Mulhall, Donald Stone, and Brian Stone

**HOME ALONE: IS IT A RISK FACTOR FOR
MIDDLE SCHOOL YOUTH AND DRUG USE?***

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between middle school/junior high student latchkey status and early experimentation and use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs. Students were queried about the frequency (number of times per week) and quantity (number of hours per day) of unsupervised after school days in an average week. Questions were also asked regarding their experiences with "gateway" drugs, inhalants, and steroids. Chi square analysis was used to test the strength of association. The results of this study indicated that latchkey youth (LKY) who were home alone two or more days per week were four times more likely to have gotten drunk in the past month than those youth who had parental supervision five or more times a week. Also, significant differences were observed for LKY with respect to cigarette smoking, inhalants, and marijuana use. Other findings and demographic variables were discussed as they pertain to LKY as well as suggested strategies for healthy self-care alternatives.

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The importance of understanding risk factors and the socio-cultural environment that fosters substance abuse and other problem behavior is essential for prevention and health education planning. In recent years there has been growing concern among parents, health professionals, and the media about the possible deleterious consequences of children caring for themselves after school hours [1].

The increase in the number of dual-career and single-parent families accompanied by the decrease in traditional, extended family arrangements for child care have resulted in increasing numbers of children caring for themselves (latchkey youth [LKY]) during out-of-school hours. It is estimated that approximately two to six million youth under thirteen years of age regularly care for themselves [2]. However, this estimate is considered to be relatively low due to the reluctance of some parents and students to disclose that their children are left unsupervised after school. Furthermore, this estimate may be biased in that it is relatively unclear as to what criteria define self-care in terms of the amount of time youth spend alone, whether that time is spent at home or away from home or whether older or younger siblings are present.

Unsupervised time after school of LKY has become a concern of health researchers and others since there is some evidence of a direct relationship between the number of hours spent in after-school-self-care and the risk of using alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs (ATOD) [3]. Richardson et al. found in their study of 4,932 eighth graders that LKY who took care of themselves for eleven or more hours per week were at twice the risk of ATOD use compared to non-LKY [2].

Unfortunately, there is a paucity of research concerning the effects of self-care on substance use or on other potentially dangerous behaviors by LKY; also some limited studies on LKY have reached different conclusions in regards to the specific risks involved. For instance, Long and Long found that LKY were more fearful and depressed [4]. Another study found no difference in academic achievement between LKY and those children cared for by adults [5]. Finally, a third study found no difference on measures of self-esteem, locus of control, or social competence between LKY and those at home under adult supervision [6].

During early adolescence, youth face a critical period of trial and error during which many first experiment with alcohol and drugs. Johnston, O'Malley, and Bachman reported that 45.1 percent of youth said that their first use of cigarettes occurred in the middle grades with 69.3 percent also reporting experimentation with alcohol and 28.6 percent reported using other illicit drugs (marijuana, inhalants) during these formative years [7]. Also, more and more youth are becoming sexually active, risking sexually transmitted diseases or pregnancy and the birth of unhealthy, low-birthweight babies. Furthermore, substantial numbers of American youth are becoming vulnerable to multiple high-risk behaviors and school failures [8].

Other researchers have suggested that increased adolescent drug use is associated with poorer communication within the family and that the youth who

identify less with their parents and have less affectionate relationships with their parents are more likely to initiate substance use [9-11]. Clearly, it would appear that the more self-care, the less is the opportunity for interaction and communication with parents. However, prior studies have not thoroughly examined the relationship between self-care and use of ATOD.

METHODS

Sample

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between middle school student latchkey status (LKS) and early experimentation and reported use of ATOD. A sample of over 600 middle grades youth were surveyed in 1993 as part of a larger study. The participants in the study were enrolled in three different middle school districts located in both urban and rural areas in a midwestern state. Subjects were classified as LKY if they reported that they spent two or more days alone after school without adult supervision. Approximately 60 percent of the students were enrolled in grade six with the fifth and seventh grade comprising approximately equal percentages (20%). Fifty-two percent of the subjects were male and 76.8 percent were white while 14.6 percent were of African American heritage.

Approximately 62 percent of the males and 57 percent of the females indicated that they spent two or more school days alone after school in a week without adult supervision. Also, over twice as many LKY lived with either a single parent or a parent and a step-parent (see Table 1).

Approximately 43.9 percent of non-LKY lived with both parents, 31 percent with a single parent, and 40 percent with a parent and step-parent. Significant differences were obtained when analyzed by number and days spent home alone after school and by family living arrangements for LKS.

Survey Instrument

The survey instrument utilized in this study was part of a Project Drug Free questionnaire that was employed in a larger study. Part one of the instrument recorded personal information on the subjects, such as their age, sex, ethnicity, school grade, academic grades, family living arrangement, and parents' education. Also, the students were asked about the frequency (number of times per week) and quantity (number of hours per day) of unsupervised after-school days in an average week. Part two employed a drug use instrument which was modified from a validated questionnaire developed by the Institute for Health Promotion, University of Southern California and was approved by the U.S. Department of Education for this project [12]. Questions were asked regarding the subjects' experiences with "gateway" drugs (alcohol, cigarettes, and marijuana), inhalants,

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Middle School Students (*N* = 636)

Variable	Percent (<i>N</i> = 636)	LKY Status (<i>N</i> = 383)	Non-LKY (<i>N</i> = 253)
Sex			
Male	51.7	62.2	37.8
Female	48.3	57.4	42.6
Ethnic Group			
White	76.8	56.1	43.9
African American	14.6	78.0	22.0
Other	8.6	61.1	38.9
Living Arrangement			
With both parents	58.2	56.1	43.9
With single parent	23.4	69.0	31.0
With parent and step-parent	18.4	60.5	39.5
Grade			
Fifth	18.6	52.1	47.9
Sixth	61.0	55.9	44.1
Seventh	20.4	78.0	22.0

and steroids. The survey instrument used in the larger study contained questions relating to student attitudes and knowledge of drugs as well as self-esteem, peer pressure, and perceptions of their school environment.

Study Design and Procedures

The study team made contact with the school administrators by mail and by telephone three months prior to carrying out the actual survey, explaining the objectives of the study, the purpose and utilization of the data. A copy of the questionnaire was also submitted for the school's inspection and informed consent letters were sent to the parents. All parents agreed to have their children participate in the study.

Upon approval of the school administration, the investigators went to the various school sites and met with all of the teachers involved. Strict anonymity of data utilization was assured to encourage honesty of the students' replies. All grade five-through-seven students attending school on the date of the survey participated in the study, totalling 636 subjects. All questions were read aloud and

explained by the investigators to the subjects in an attempt to overcome any reading problems which might affect the survey results. For the purpose of this article, only the demographic information as well as the data concerning the students' drug use patterns were used in the analysis.

Statistical Analysis

Results are based on youths' responses to questions concerning their demographic characteristics, latchkey status, perceived academic performance, living arrangements, and reported drug usage. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages were calculated to summarize the responses of all the students for each survey item. Chi-square was employed to investigate any possible association between self-care arrangement and youth drug use patterns, as well as their interrelationship with different demographic variables.

RESULTS

Drug Usage

The drug of choice reported by all users regardless of LKS was alcohol (21.6%) followed by inhalants (17.3%), cigarettes (13.2%), smokeless tobacco (8.0%), marijuana (5.8%), and steroids (4.6%). Of particular interest was that 13.8 percent reported they had been intoxicated during their lifetime and 7.2 percent said they drank to intoxication in the last month.

Table 2 displays the data reported by the subjects concerning their reported drug usage by LKY status.

Alcohol Use by LKS

Combining the data into two categories by latchkey status, significant differences were obtained between the groups by alcohol use ever and within the past month ($p < .001$, $< .01$). Further analysis revealed that this relationship also was significant for both males and females. Also, when examining lifetime alcohol consumption by no usage, one to ten drinks and eleven or more times a significant difference was observed ($p < .01$). It is interesting to note that children who reported no adult supervision for five days displayed the heaviest alcohol consumption.

When examining the variable of drinking to intoxication by the categories of ever ($p < .001$), past month ($p < .001$), and by days spent home alone ($p < .001$), highly significant differences were observed. Once again, children who reported being left home alone for five days showed the highest percentage of drinking to intoxication.

Table 2. Reported Drug Use of Middle School Students by LKY Status ($N = 636$)

Variable	LKY	Non-LKY	Significance
Alcohol use ever	25.7	13.1	xxx
Alcohol last month	10.1	03.6	xx
Drunk ever	18.9	05.9	xxx
Drunk past month	09.1	02.4	xxx
Marijuana use ever	07.5	01.6	xx
Marijuana use past month	04.5	00.8	xx
Inhalants ever	18.4	12.8	x
Considered using steroids	10.7	09.2	ns
Steroid use ever	04.3	02.6	ns
Cigarette use ever	15.7	09.1	x
Cigarette smoking past month	14.1	06.3	xx
Smokeless tobacco ever	07.4	07.1	ns

xxx = $p < .001$ xx = $p < .01$ x = $p < .05$

ns = nonsignificant

Inhalant and Marijuana Use by LKS

When examining if youth ever used inhalants during their lifetime, a significant difference was observed ($p < .05$) between LKY and non-LKY. Also, significant differences were found for these same youth groups for ever smoking marijuana ($p < .01$) and using marijuana in the past month ($p < .01$).

Steroid Use by LKS

No significant differences were observed with respect to steroid use between LKY and non-LKY children. However, it should be noted that a relatively small percentage of both groups reported that they had used or were considering using steroids.

Cigarette Smoking by LKS

Significant differences were observed when comparing LKY and non-LKY children on cigarette use ($p < .05$). Also, a significant difference was obtained by comparing LKY and non-LKY children by cigarettes smoked in the past month ($p < .01$).

Smokeless Tobacco by LKS

No significant differences were observed between LKY and non-LKY children and smokeless tobacco use. Smokeless tobacco use was relatively infrequent in both groups.

Ethnic Groups and Living Arrangements by LKS

Table 3 presents the data obtained with respect to ethnic groups and days spent alone after school without adult supervision. Approximately 8 percent of the respondents were classified as "other" and were of Asian or Hispanic origin. Seventy-seven percent classified themselves as white and 15 percent as African Americans. A significant difference was obtained ($p < .001$) by LKS and ethnic group with a higher percent of African Americans reporting going without adult supervision for five days after school.

Reported School Grades by LKS

Subjects were asked to indicate their overall grade point average for the current school year. Students who responded that they were either "B" or "C" students were combined into a single category for purposes of analysis; since only a few students classified themselves as "C" students. A significant difference ($p < .01$) was obtained. Approximately 53 percent of LKY who spent five days alone after school reported that they were "D" students as compared to 23 percent of "A" students. Correspondingly, 44 percent of the non-LKY reported that they were "A" students and 34.5 percent indicated they were "D" students.

Table 3. Number of Days Alone after School by Ethnic Group and Latchkey Status ($N = 636$)

Days Alone	White (%)	African American (%)	Other (%)
Zero (non-latchkey status)	43.9	22.0	38.9
2 days	18.9	16.5	16.7
3 days	7.3	5.5	13.0
4 days	4.0	6.6	1.9
5 days	26.0	49.5	29.6

 $\chi^2 = 28.36$
 $p < .001$

Table 4. Number of Days Alone after School by Self-Reported Grades
(N = 636)

Self-Reported School Grades	Zero (%) Non-LKS	2 Days (%)	3 Days (%) LKY	4 Days (%)	5 Days (%)
A	44.0	21.0	8.0	4.0	23.0
B & C	39.9	18.0	8.2	4.6	29.2
D	34.5	5.5	3.6	3.6	52.7

$$\chi^2 = 21.47$$

$$p = < .01$$

DISCUSSION

In summary, significant differences were found for LKY by:

1. alcohol use in the past month, amount of alcohol consumed, and drinking to intoxication. Also, LKY were four times more likely to have gotten drunk in the past month than non-LKY
2. inhalant use, smoking marijuana ever and in the past month
3. cigarette smoking and use in the past month
4. ethnic group and self-reported school grades

Based on these findings, it would appear that LKY are at greater risk for ATOD usage and other drugs as well as exhibiting academic performance. The trend of increasing LKY is disturbing as it appears to create a climate by which children are placed at greater risk for ATOD usage at an earlier age. It is well documented that children who abuse drugs early in life are more prone to suffer serious consequences later. Several reported studies have suggested that at least some types of problem behavior of young adolescents can be associated in part to the time that youth spend without adult supervision after school [13, 14]. In this regard, Richardson et al. suggests that the following variables may mediate latchkey status and increased risk of alcohol and other drug use:

- Lack of parental supervision during crucial after-school hours
- Self-care may result in more unnoticed solitary trials and peer related trials of ATOD
- Self-care may lead youth to perceive themselves as risk takers leading to ATOD abuse
- Many LKY live in economically depressed areas where drugs are readily obtainable
- Alcohol and other drug use by parents and friends, attendance at parties, and being offered cigarettes may have a greater influence on LKY

- Lack of homework completion and other problems in school performance. Such situations may have a negative impact such as lowering of one's self-esteem, increased absenteeism, and other negative behaviors
- Youth who are angry, fearful, and feel that their parents are absent too much may be more likely to use ATOD than non-LKY [2].

Weaknesses in using self-reported data and the inability to more fully assess the quality of parent-child relationships in a broader social context dictate caution in drawing conclusions regarding LKY and ATOD use. Demographic trends continue to show escalating numbers of single-head household, highly mobile families who live away from grandparents and other relatives, and increasing numbers of working parents [15]. Thus, prudence would suggest that we need to develop strategies for healthy self-care alternatives for our adolescents.

Such strategies could include extended after care programs at school or other community sites such as libraries, youth centers, churches, or other locations. In addition, programs developed for LKY could focus on academic enrichment, sports, fine arts, or community service projects. Such statistics can provide the opportunity for schools and communities to address these problems through a variety of school and community-based after-school or youth development programs. Supervised time after school can also provide opportunities for early adolescents to connect with positive role models and contribute to community service. A recent publication by the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development *A Matter of Time* delineated the importance of youth development in non-school hours [16].

Finally, larger scale studies are needed to more fully assess the risk of LKY and ATOD as well as to evaluate the effectiveness of proposed or ongoing latchkey programs in the community. Furthermore, it should be noted that latchkey status represents only one variable in the matrix of factors related to middle school substance usage behavior. As such, more studies need to be conducted to fully understand the influence of parent-child relationships and their influence on ATOD usage as well as other high risk behaviors such as juvenile delinquency and criminal behavior [17].

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MEMORANDUM

TO: TOM FREEDMAN, MARY SMITH
FROM: JULIE MIKUTA
RE: LATCHKEY CHILDREN
DATE: JULY 24, 1997

*Miss
Story*

*Crime
Violence
Lynchings
drugs
alcohol.*

SUMMARY

This memo gives information about the number of latchkey children in America, and studies that have been done comparing the use of alcohol and drugs by latchkey kids and children who are supervised after school.

I. THE NUMBER OF LATCHKEY CHILDREN

There is not a consensus on the number of latchkey children in America. According to the US Census Bureau, 1.6 million children are latchkey kids (1994). Nearly 500,000 are under the age of 12. The National Child Care Survey (1995) estimated that there are 2.5 million latchkey kids. Other estimates put the number of latchkey children between 5 and 7 million. [M Seligson, Exec Director of School-Age Child Care Project at Wellesley]

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II. LATCHKEY CHILDREN AND DRUG AND ALCOHOL USE

- A 1995 study of 636 children in grades 5 through 7 in Chicago and rural Illinois areas found that latchkey kids are: 3 times more likely to say they have been drunk at one time or another; 4 times more likely to say they have tried marijuana; and twice as likely to smoke cigarettes than children who are supervised after school. [University of Illinois, Jan. 1995]
- The University of Illinois research team has since concluded that it is not the number of days that children are left unsupervised which determines if they will use drugs or alcohol, but the number of hours per week that they are left alone. Eleven hours seems to be the threshold.
- A 1989 study found that latchkey kids are twice as likely to smoke cigarettes, drink alcohol or try marijuana; more time that the teenager remains unsupervised, greater the risk of problem behavior. [*Pediatrics*, Vol 84, p 556-566]
- J. Richardson, USC study of 4932 eight graders found that children at highest risk of substance abuse were the 28.6% who spent the most time unsupervised at home. [*Science News*, Vol 136, No. 12: 9/16/89]
- A Louis Harris poll cited 'children left on their own after school' as the number one cause of school failure.

LEVEL 1 - 4 OF 13 STORIES

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BYLINE: MINDY CAMERON; TIMES EDITORIAL PAGE EDITOR

BODY:

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MANY years ago, my boys were **latchkey kids**. Of the many foolish things I did - or did not do - during those years as a young, working mother, allowing my kids to be home alone after school was the dumbest.

Remarkably, my sons have grown into quite capable young men. I try not to think much about that risky period, but it all came back recently as I sat in a room with child-care experts, advocates and policy-makers.

The meeting was two weeks ago at Wingspread Conference Center near Racine, Wis. Delegations from three cities - Seattle, Chicago and Boston - were gathered to strategize ways to make out-of-school time safe and enriching for children who might otherwise be unsupervised or in poor-quality care.

Although more options exist today than 20 years ago when my boys were young, the problem persists. Millions of working mothers are haunted by the uncertainties of what their 10-year-old is up to after the school bell rings.

The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that 24 million children between 5 and 14 have working parents. Child-care experts say 5 million of those children regularly spend time without adult supervision during a typical week.

No-wonder then, that the seeds - literally - of teenage pregnancies often are sown in the anything-goes hours after school. Juvenile crimes are most likely to be committed between 3 and 6 p.m.

Most unsupervised or poorly supervised youngsters, however, aren't having sex or committing crimes while Mom's at work. They are watching television. Children spend only a fifth of their waking hours in school. According to Wellesley College child-care researchers, children spend more of their non-school time watching television than in any other single activity.

TV may be a convenient baby-sitter, but increasingly, studies show that more time in front of the television equals lower reading skills and greater



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likelihood of behavior problems.

Say "child care" and the image that comes to mind is of infants and toddlers, the wee ones that simply cannot be left to fend for themselves.

We know childhood doesn't end at 6, but how long does it last?

That question framed the session at Wingspread and drives the work of those gathered there. They represent the people in public, nonprofit and private sectors, including parents, who work the shadowy side of child-care, what they call school-age care or, increasingly, out-of-school time.

Because their work doesn't have a governmental policy focus, it remains out of the spotlight. A goal of the conference was to find ways to sustain out-of-school care initiatives now under way in Seattle, Chicago and Boston.

There is some urgency.

First, federal welfare reform does not exempt mothers with children over age 6 from the work requirement if child care is not available.

Second, seed money to create quality services for low-income children is about to run out. In 1994, the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund committed \$ 6.4 million over four years to improving the supply and quality of programs for low-income school-age children during out-of-school time. The initiative is called MOST (Making the Most of Out-of-School Time) and went to Seattle, Chicago and Boston.

Grant money disappears next year. If the MOST initiative is to continue in the three cities, and spawn better programs elsewhere, new revenue sources must be found.

That won't happen without a broader base of support, a base that must have as its core parents, and include business and education-reform advocates.

There's plenty to work with. A growing body of research links in-class achievement to quality of experiences out of school. Many businesses are savvy about the issue because of employees who struggle to balance work and home responsibilities.

Cities are recognizing that local government has a role to play in creating positive choices for kids and parents. Seattle has been a leader with its Family and Education levy, some of which pays for out-of-school programs.

Although fallout of welfare reform may help to magnify the issue for low-income parents, this is not a class issue. Middle-class parents stretch to pay for out-of-school care, but concerns about availability, quality and transportation are common to all parents.

A participant from Georgia had good advice for getting parents involved: Don't scare them.

Parents already have private fears about their children's safety. None of us likes to admit our child was - or is - a latchkey kid.



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The Seattle Times, May 18, 1997

Quality out-of-school programs that expand on common sense and traditions developed in old-fashioned scouting and Boys and Girls clubs - meaningful experiences with caring adults - hold great promise for enriching children's lives.

Let the crusade begin.

Mindy Cameron's column appears Sunday on editorial pages of The Times. Her e-mail address is mcam-new@seattimes.com.

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LEVEL 1 - 5 OF 13 STORIES

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Correction Appended

SECTION: a; Pg. 18

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HEADLINE: Houston delegates to focus on latchkey kids

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As the President's Summit gets under way in Philadelphia, Houston's 10 delegates are bringing their own preferences on how best to use citizen volunteers.

Some hope to get ideas or help on child hunger or health problems, but for Tony Campbell at St. James Episcopal Church, the problem is the afternoon. More exactly, between 3 p.m., when school lets out, and 6 p.m., when schoolchildren's parents get home from work.

Those are the hours when, statistics show, children roam about unsupervised and commit crimes. Those are the hours when some of them get to know the neighborhood drug dealer and teen-age girls are most apt to get pregnant.

"If you want to solve a multiple series of problems, you handle those hours," Campbell explained. "That's when you lose a lot of kids."

What he wants are volunteers and others to find constructive ways to keep youths occupied after school, much like his own church already is trying to do.

Such are the sentiments that Houston's contingent took to the Presidents' Summit for America's Future, headed by retired Gen. Colin Powell. As many as 2,000 delegates from 100 U.S. cities, through the Points of Light Foundation, will be comparing notes on which ideas on volunteerism work and which don't.

Local representatives at the summit are Campbell and activists Jana Gunter, Maria Cristina Garza, Martin Quach Huynh Ha, Tyrone Morgan, Maconda Brown O'Connor, Deborah Ortiz, Jerry Workman, City Councilwoman Gracie Saenz and the group's leader, Martin Cominski (SEE CORRECTION).

They will convene their own summit in Houston in the fall.



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Cominski, head of the Serve Houston Youth Corps, said representatives' preferences likely will to get the youths, as well, to become volunteers.

They join a star-studded cast in Pennsylvania.

Points of Light Foundation president Robert K. Goodwin, a former Prairie View A&M University vice president, said President Clinton and former Presidents Bush, Carter and Ford, along with Nancy Reagan and Lady Bird Johnson will participate.

Texas Gov. George W. Bush sent his wife, Laura, as well as Geanie Morrison of Victoria, the Rev. Coby Shorter III of Austin, Maria Garza Webster of LaJoya, Linda Cunningham of Longview and Nancy Weiss of Lubbock.

Also attending will be the representative of the cable station Nickelodeon, Bunker Hill Elementary School fifth-grader Jason Files, who wanted to go "because I saw all those kids pledging hours to help in their cities on Nickelodeon's Big Help Program. 'Files has assembled 145 "kid volunteers" from his Memorial neighborhood to do community service work.

Jose Rojas, director of youth volunteerism for the Center for Family Wholeness, 2109 Webster, the local affiliate of Adventist Community Services, wants the nation to know it can make "a life or death difference" for children by providing mentors and coaches, safe places during nonschool hours and a chance at better health.

The Points of Light Foundation, which takes its name from Bush's call for "a thousand points of light," was the inspiration of the late Michigan Gov. George Romney. His idea was to use myriad volunteers to work on the range of contemporary problems besetting America.

CORRECTION-DATE: April 29, 1997

CORRECTION:

Martin Cominsky's name was misspelled in this story. Correction published 4/29/97.

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE: April 30, 1997



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LEVEL 1 - 15 OF 15 STORIES

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January 28, 1996 Sunday, NORTHWEST FINAL EDITION

SECTION: TEMPO NORTHWEST; Pg. 1; ZONE: NW

LENGTH: 1550 words

HEADLINE: WHERE THE BOYS . . . AND GIRLS . . . ARE;
TEEN CENTERS PROVIDE AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE STREETS

BYLINE: By Michele Mohr. Special to the Tribune.

BODY:

Pity the poor teenager. Almost grown up and hardly any place to go.

The shopping malls don't want them unless they are applying the lessons learned in Consumerism 101. Fast-food restaurants prefer they get their burgers and go. The local law shags them out of kiddie parks and suggests that the corner congregants move on. But where?

For many teenagers in the northwest suburbs, the destination of choice is a teen center.

"Teens need a place they can call their own," said Lisa Sheppard, youth coordinator at the Northrop Teen Center in Rolling Meadows. "A place where they can be safe and supervised--but not too supervised."

Rather than have teenagers aimlessly cruising the streets until curfew, the teen centers struggle to provide a safe haven while giving youths ages 12 through 19 a modicum of independence.

Some centers such as Northrop are run by local park districts. Others are operated by villages and townships such as the Arlington Heights-funded teen center or the Maine Township Drop-In Center.

Several other teen centers in the northwest suburbs were the brainchild of local residents. In Crystal Lake, a group of parents founded the non-profit Student Association Inc., and approached park district officials with their idea for a teen center.

"They did a wonderful job of getting the teen center off the ground," said Jack Sebesta, superintendent of recreation for the Crystal Lake Park District. The district donated space, and parents and students organized four nights of teen activities each week.

"But, as often happens in cases like this, the volunteers experienced burnout," Sebesta said. The park district took over the operation of the teen center last year and currently offers activities on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights.



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Chicago Tribune, January 28, 1996

Sebesta said residents and business owners supported the idea of a teen center because of a perceived lack of places for teens to participate in one of their favorite activities.

"They had no place to hang out," he said. "Route 14 is the main drag and the kids would go from one parking lot to the next, from one fast-food place to the next. And the business owners were not that excited about all those kids hanging out."

Pam Baldwin, who has a daughter in high school and twins in junior high, has acted as a chaperone for several band nights at the Crystal Lake Teen Center. "We've only lived in Crystal Lake two years and ever since we came here, my daughter and her friends complained that there was nothing to do, nowhere to hang out. They'd go to a restaurant, but the restaurant people didn't want them there for hours just drinking coffee," she said. "So the teen center has turned out to be a great idea for them."

"When I've been there as a chaperone, the kids all seem to have a good time, and they get a lot of kids. There are no problems and everyone seems well behaved," Baldwin added.

Serious concerns prompted the opening of teen centers in Des Plaines and Schaumburg. A 1992 gang-related slaying led to the creation of the Maine Township Drop-In Center, which operates out of Stevenson High School, while a fatal auto accident was a force for the Village of Schaumburg to open the Barn.

"In 1977, there was a car accident in which three girls died, and that became a rallying point for the opening of a teen center," said Barn youth coordinator Dave Shepard. "People basically wanted a safe, supervised place, and that concept hasn't changed much since we opened. Our job is to provide a safe, stable environment."

The Barn opened in 1979 and is one of the oldest teen centers in the northwest suburban area. It is housed in the basement of a barnlike structure owned by the village and is open 3 to 5:30 p.m. Monday, Wednesday and Friday; 7 to 10 p.m. Tuesday through Friday, and 1 to 5 p.m. Saturday.

"The first couple of years we were only open at night," Shepard said. "But we picked up the afternoon hours in 1987. In the afternoon we get a younger **population, some latchkey kids.**"

"At night it is a different crowd. The older kids come by who maybe work right after school. They meet their friends, check in. They're not sitting here from 7 to 10 p.m."

The Barn has three different areas for teens to hang out and offers a variety of activities to keep them busy. On a recent Friday afternoon, four girls giggled their way through a game of table tennis while two boys played video games and a third sprawled on a couch. In another room, two older youths played pool as the stereo blasted out Pearl Jam.

The walls are plastered with posters featuring rock groups such as Iron Maiden, Danzig and Judas Priest. In the hallway outside Shepard's office is a menagerie of small animals including hamsters, rabbits and a chinchilla.

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Chicago Tribune, January 28, 1996

"Some of these kids can be tough as nails upfront," he said. "Then you'll see them talk nicey to the rabbit."

According to Mike Keegan, 16, of Schaumburg, the teen center is more than a place to hang out. "You can come here when you've got a problem," he said. "They're always willing to help you out."

Eighteen-year-old Eric Herrmann of Schaumburg said he likes that the staff is not real strict or uptight. "You're supervised, but they are not in your face," he said.

"It's just a cool place to hang out," added Jim Sanders, 15, of Schaumburg.

Shepard said the facility provides stability for teens who spend much of their time alone, whether it is because they live with a divorced parent or both parents work outside the home. "The staff is always here. The kids know our rules. They know what will make us angry and what won't," he said.

The Barn has about 150 regulars, and the staff supervises about 40 teens each day, Shepard said. The average age is 14, with boys outnumbering girls by a 3-to-1 ratio, although Shepard said that is beginning to change.

"Our parents like it because they know where we are," said Kelly Conway, 12, of Schaumburg, who only recently began hanging out after school at the Barn.

Most of the area teen centers feature a variety of activities, from pool to table tennis. Popular amenities include Foosball, air hockey, video games, board games and darts, stereo systems, televisions and videocassette recorders, and computers.

"The kids use the computers to do their homework," said Mike Clingingsmith, director of the Arlington Heights Teen Center.

The teen centers also offer special activities. Clingingsmith said the teen center is developing a "Discover Arlington Heights" field trip series that will visit local businesses, and the facility is available for rental for birthday parties or other teen events.

The Crystal Lake Teen Center hosts monthly band nights that typically draw 200 to 300 youths, while the Northrop Center sponsors dances featuring local deejays. The Maine Township Drop-In Center offers arts and crafts classes and hosts a family night the last Thursday of each month, said program coordinator Tony Clesen.

The Barn has a large outdoor component to its programming, including a yearly white-water rafting trip, canoeing in the Ozarks, golf outings and skate-a-thons.

Gym facilities are available at some locations. Northrop teen center members can participate in open gym nights at the Arlington Heights Community Center, and teens using the Maine Township Drop-In Center are welcome to use the gym at the grade school that houses the facility. "It's basically a recreational setting," said Clesen.

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Chicago Tribune, January 28, 1996

Sports, however, is the main focus at Club RecPlex, a Friday night teen club sponsored by the Mt. Prospect Park District. Every Friday from 7:30 to 10:30 p.m., junior and senior high school students take over the RecPlex facility in Mt Prospect.

"The response has been very good," said Steve Durlacher, director of operations, about the program, which has been in operation for two years. "So many places offer structured activities, so we thought we'd offer something unstructured. The kids get free run of the facilities."

Durlacher said the sports focus tends to pull in younger teens.

Most of the teen centers reported serving more youngsters between the ages of 12 and 15. About 70 percent of the regulars at the Arlington Heights Teen Center are junior high school kids, with a smattering of freshmen and sophomores.

"The center is big enough so that each group can hang out in their own area and not bother each other," Clingingsmith said. "But it's nice to see that a few of the high school kids will work with the younger teens. And the junior high school kids don't seem to be intimidated by the older teens."

Sebesta said the younger teens will hang out at the Crystal Lake center for a couple of hours, while the older ones meet friends and "decide where to go from there." Friday nights there are usually more of a junior high night because the high school teens are attending basketball or other high school events, Sebesta said.

Most of the centers are busier in the afternoons. Northrop even dropped its later evening hours because of the lack of interest, Sheppard said. "We get the kids who may not be involved in sports or other extracurricular activities at school," she said. "We would like to draw more kids, but we are here to fill the needs of those who need us."

GRAPHIC: PHOTOS 5 PHOTO: Jeff Teuber (left), 16, of Schaumburg and Brian Bogt, 16, of Hoffman Estates square off in a pinball game at the Barn in Schaumburg. Most centers feature a variety of activities, from Foosball to video games. Tribune photo by Hung T. Vu.; PHOTO: Teen centers give the kids a place to hang out--and a place where the dress code is relaxed, needless to say. Photo by Tim Boyle.; PHOTO: Ian Anderson, 14, outside the Arlington Heights Teen Center, where about 70 percent of the regulars are junior high school kids. Tribune photo by Chuck Berman.; PHOTO (color): Jon Drake (from left), Justin Schmidt and Matt Buller, all of Crystal Lake, pass the time at the Crystal Lake Teen Center. Photo by Tim Boyle.; PHOTO (color): At the Barn in Schaumburg, Denny Peters gets into a game of table tennis. Tribune photo by Hung T. Vu.

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE: January 28, 1996



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LEVEL 1 - 24 OF 26 STORIES

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The Tampa Tribune

April 5, 1996, Friday, FINAL EDITION

SECTION: BAYLIFE, Pg. 3

LENGTH: 280 words

HEADLINE: IBM workers devise kit to help **latchkey kids**

BYLINE: LINDA LATHAM WELCH; of Cox News Service

BODY:

AUSTIN, Texas - Parents of McCoy Elementary School students in Georgetown gave high marks to a kit designed to help children who come home to an empty house.

The kit, designed by 27 IBM employees as part of a leadership class, was tested last semester on the fourth- and fifth-graders at McCoy.

Parents who responded to a recent questionnaire called the kit "thought-provoking and necessary even for children who don't come home alone on a regular basis." They said it could also help those kids who may find themselves alone while their parent is at the grocery store or held up in traffic.

The kit includes stiff, brightly colored cards for children to put on the refrigerator, by the telephone and in their backpacks. There are spaces for emergency telephone numbers, parents' and neighbors' numbers and additional numbers.

Also included are suggested role-playing situations for children and parents and a portable finger-printing kit so parents can have their child's prints on record at home.

Help for latchkey children is nothing new, but some school districts are discovering that vital information may be distributed in bits and pieces, rendering it ineffective to the thousands of children who need it.

"This kit helped tie together a lot of things we've talked about over the years," said McCoy Principal Jack Sharp.

Linda Albury, a programmer and spokeswoman for the IBM group, said she and her co-workers wanted to make the information more effective, "and, we found, when it's presented in a package, it's better."

The group is trying to find money to print the kits and distribute them to all children in area school districts, Albury said.



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LEVEL 1 - 22 OF 26 STORIES

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May 3, 1996 Friday, DU PAGE SPORTS FINAL EDITION

SECTION: METRO DU PAGE; Pg. 3; ZONE: D

LENGTH: 213 words

HEADLINE: AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM PAIRS KIDS WITH SENIORS

BYLINE: Joanne von Alroth.

DATELINE: Westmont

BODY:

As a sociologist who frequently works in schools, Kimberly Moss-Dobbins has seen many children who could use a little extra attention after the dismissal bell has rung.

"Kids from single-parent homes, **latchkey kids**--there are so many children who go home after school who do nothing but wander aimlessly," Moss-Dobbins said last week. "I thought there had to be something better to do."

Beginning May 14, local children and their parents will have that in a program for elementary school students at Westmont Convalescent Center, 6501 S. Cass Ave.

Available from 3 to 5 p.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays at the center, the free program will pair children with seniors for tutoring and homework assistance, crafts classes and computer training. The program will be offered through the summer, and might be expanded if demand is great enough, Moss-Dobbins said.

"We think it's a great intergenerational opportunity," Moss-Dobbins said, noting that while many seniors living at the center have much to offer the community.

"It allows these terrific seniors to share some of their skills with children, while giving kids who might otherwise be aimlessly roaming around the opportunity to do something constructive," she said.

For information, call 708-960-5425.

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE: May 3, 1996



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July 8, 1996 Monday, MCHENRY COUNTY EDITION

SECTION: MCHENRY COUNTY; Pg. 3; ZONE: MC

LENGTH: 249 words

HEADLINE: CLUB FOR **LATCHKEY KIDS** TO BE SET UP AT SCHOOLS

BYLINE: Rich Rostron.

DATELINE: Woodstock:

BODY:

It is called the Kids Club, and officials of Unit District 200 hope it will solve the problem of **latchkey kids**, who may remain home unsupervised after school lets out and before their parents get home from work.

Lynne Blumhorst, an aide at Clay Street Elementary School, proposed the pilot day-care program at the school. The program would allow children to remain under adult supervision for several hours after school lets out.

"This way the kids would be at school, where they'd be safe," Blumhorst said.

The pilot program at Clay Street, which was approved by the District 200 board at its June 26 meeting, will begin when school reopens this fall.

Blumhorst expects the program to be more than just a baby-sitting service.

"We're going to have . . . homework time, enrichment and visitors," said Blumhorst. The visitors will speak to the children about their fields. Blumhorst plans to invite people from the conservation district and high school sports, as well as other areas of interest.

Children also will work in arts and crafts.

"Maybe we'll find something that really interests them, and they'll want to do," Blumhorst said. "I'd like them to have something to do other than wander the streets and get into trouble."

The program will last from 2 to 5:30 p.m. on school days and will cost \$45 per student per week. Blumhorst predicted that the fees will more than pay for the program. Profits will be turned over to the school at the end of each semester.

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE: July 8, 1996



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LEVEL 1 - 1 OF 26 STORIES

Copyright 1996 Times Mirror Company
Los Angeles Times

December 15, 1996, Sunday, Home Edition

SECTION: Life & Style; Part E; Page 1; View Desk

LENGTH: 1450 words

HEADLINE: FOR **LATCHKEY KIDS**, A FRIEND IS JUST A PHONE CALL AWAY

BYLINE: PAMELA WARRICK, TIMES STAFF WRITER

BODY:

Alexander is 7 years old and there is a strange scratching noise at the door. What should he do?

Katie is 8 and can't finish her homework. Does anyone understand word problems?

Daniel is 6 and he was just wondering . . . could someone please read him a story?

They are all home alone.

Every day after school, they step gingerly into empty apartments and lifeless houses. The lucky ones might be greeted by a pet. Even luckier are those who can pick up the phone to check in with parents at work.

But for many, there is no call, no one to tell about the A on a spelling test, the winning soccer kick at recess or the bully on the long walk home.

As the winter days grow darker and colder, ~~more~~ and more children are reaching out to PhoneFriend--Southern California's only confidential "warmline" for **latchkey kids**. ✓

Housed in the tiny space between the chaplains' offices at Glendale Adventist Medical Center, PhoneFriend is a free call-in service for any child in any of 90 participating elementary schools in Glendale, La Can ada Flintridge, Burbank, Pasadena, Eagle Rock, Highland Park and Hollywood. Originally covering only areas in the 818 area code, the service added a new line this fall in the 213 area code, and the phones have not stopped ringing.

The callers may be frightened--"I think somebody followed me home!"--or anxious--"My best friend says she'll never speak to me again"--or just curious--"How would a person get gum out of his hair?"

Before this school year is out, the volunteer-run service expects to answer more than 15,000 calls--the highest volume since its founding in 1989. That volume may require a substantial increase in PhoneFriend's modest \$ 20,000



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Los Angeles Times, December 15, 1996

budget, which to date has been funded solely by the medical center and a handful of corporate and individual donors.

"There is no way of knowing if there are more kids home alone here than before," says PhoneFriend supervisor Bruce Nelson, "but we do know there are an awful lot of kids out there who desperately need someone to talk to."

Although there are no reliable statistics on the exact number of latchkey children in California and the United States, children's rights experts estimate that at least 4.5 million of the nation's 30 million schoolchildren are left home alone to care for themselves occasionally, if not regularly. ✓

A landmark survey by the Child Welfare League of America reported that in 1990, as many as 28% of the nation's kindergartners were being left alone and as many as 77% of third-graders were spending time home alone. The league is a Washington, D.C.-based advocacy federation that for 76 years has been an outspoken voice for children's rights. ✓

While those figures have not been officially updated, researchers say there is good reason to believe the number of kids in so-called self care has not diminished. "This is still a serious problem, and it is likely to get worse soon," predicts Wellesley College research scientist Beth M. Miller. "With welfare reform, we're going to see more and more low-income single mothers going to work. All of them will have a very, very difficult time providing care for their children when they do."

And the children left home alone can expect to face a very difficult time on their own. In the 1990 study of latchkey children, the authors found that elementary-school-age children were unable to safely handle even the most ordinary situations in their homes.

The researchers looked at how children reacted to such commonplace occurrences as answering the telephone and handling the delivery of a package and found that few children answered the phone properly. Many freely told the caller their names and that they were home alone. All the children failed the package delivery test with most of them opening the door to the stranger with the package. ✓

"This inability to deal with potentially harmful situations placed the children at great risk," the researchers concluded.

Those who operate PhoneFriend call their service a "warmline," not a hotline for kids in crisis. But on any weekday afternoon, there can be crises on the line.

There was the little girl left home alone all day because she was too sick to go to school. "She was very young, maybe 7 or 8," Nelson recalls. "And she told us she had been vomiting all day. Her mother wouldn't be home till 5:30, and she was clearly so distressed and so very sick, we offered to call her mother for her but she refused. She pleaded with us not to call for fear she would get in trouble. We offered to call medical help for her, but she resisted that as well."

Finally, after more than an hour on the phone, the sick and weepy girl announced with relief that "Mommy's here now." The absent mother--a nurse in a



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Los Angeles Times, December 15, 1996

Los Angeles-area hospital--took the receiver, thanked the PhoneFriend volunteer for keeping her child busy and hung up.

*

That child, like all of the kids who call PhoneFriend, got the service's number from her teacher when school started in September. The Glendale Adventist community services staff hands out 50,000 cards and stickers with the PhoneFriend numbers: 241-KIDS in the 818 area code and 254-KIDS in the 213 area. Calls are answered Monday through Friday from 3 to 5 p.m. during the school year as well as during the summer months. The service is closed during school holidays.

When a timid second-grader arrived home one rainy afternoon to find his house ransacked, the first number he called was the one on the PhoneFriend sticker in his kitchen. The boy was under strict orders not to bother his parents at work. And he was afraid to call 911 because he wasn't sure he could recite his entire address.

The PhoneFriend volunteer kept the boy on the line while she called his father at work and alerted police to the break-in. Although the police who arrived to investigate did not bring any charges against the parents, they could have.

"If a child is in danger because of neglect, then we will usually step in," says Det. Steve Carey, a bureau consultant to the Los Angeles Police Department's juvenile division. "The law says only that a parent or adult who willfully causes or permits the health or safety of a child to be placed in jeopardy is guilty of endangerment. But, we get calls weekly about kids 7, 8 or 9 being left home alone. And that, in and of itself, is not necessarily endangering."

When both parents work and there is no easy access to affordable child care, leaving kids home alone may seem like "the best answer" for many families, Carey says. "I was one of those kids myself from the age of 9 or 10. Sometimes that's just the way it has to be."

But when very young children are found alone--or worse, caring for even younger siblings--authorities do step in. Police blotters are full of cases where children as young as 7 are left by their parents to oversee babies or toddlers.

When children are in trouble--or real danger--the volunteers at PhoneFriend alert social services workers or police. But offering such a safety net, say critics of such latchkey programs, may give parents an unrealistic sense of their child's security.

"Our message at the Child Welfare League" says information coordinator Joyce Johnson, "is that kids shouldn't be left alone under any circumstances. We think that families need other options. Hotlines and other programs designed to help kids who are left alone don't address the central problem--and that is, there are far too many kids alone at home who are in real danger."



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But at PhoneFriend, the typical call is usually less urgent, though still heartbreaking.

"My father, he died in June and now, I really, really miss him. I'm so sad but I think I'm real mad at him too. That's not right, is it?"

The caller is 11 and she lives in Highland Park. She should be doing homework, but instead she's calling PhoneFriend because whenever she's home alone, she thinks about her dad. The woman who answers her call knows exactly what to say.

"I've been through this myself, honey, when my husband died," soothes Bertha Bortz, a gentle grandmother who works the phones every Thursday afternoon. "It's OK to be sad, but you know what? It's OK to be angry too. That's all a part of grieving, sweetheart."

The specially trained volunteers, mostly retired teachers and a few high school students getting class credit for their efforts, are careful not to intervene or solve their young callers' problems.

"Our job," says hospital chaplain Janet Richardson, "is to help the children be more self-sufficient and self-confident, to find the best ways to solve their own problems because they, after all, are the ones out there all alone."

GRAPHIC: GRAPHIC-DRAWING: ("For **Latchkey Kids**. . ."), TIM TEEBKEN / For The Times

LANGUAGE: English

LOAD-DATE: December 15, 1996



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LEVEL 1 - 11 OF 13 STORIES

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January 26, 1997 Sunday, CHICAGOLAND FINAL EDITION

SECTION: REAL ESTATE; Pg. 5C; ZONE: C

LENGTH: 839 words

HEADLINE: TAKING ON THE BLOCKS;
COMMUNITY LEADERS PUT THE 'NEIGHBOR' BACK IN NEIGHBORHOOD

BYLINE: By Pamela Schaeffer, American News Service.

DATELINE: KANSAS CITY, Mo.

BODY:

Like virtually every other city in the United States, this one has had its share of **latchkey kids**, truancy, graffiti, drugs and gangs.

But Kansas City has something else, something few, if any, other cities have. It has "block leaders" like Shirley Parks, a neighborhood "mom" who invited some girls to exercise with her in her front yard and sparked a mini-peace movement in a violence-prone neighborhood.

Block leaders serve as surrogate moms and dads for kids who might otherwise spend their afternoons and evenings roaming the streets. They provide everything from a safe place to get snacks to cooking classes and wake-up calls.

The 3-year-old program is creating a national model for urban youth development, according to its designers--and recreating the old neighborhoods where children knew someone was watching.

"We're about that village it takes to raise a child," said James Lee, referring to the African proverb used by Hillary Clinton in the title of her recent book.

Lee, like Parks and several dozen other block leaders in the city, are paid a modest hourly wage by a consortium of local social agencies and a federal program. They spend several hours each week recruiting young people off the streets into productive activities.

Beci Amy, one of the program's overseers, said the kids aren't just eating cookies after school.

"Some of the things they've done is paint over graffiti, plant community gardens, and buying groceries for senior citizens who can't get out," she said. Some have also held rallies against violence and drugs.

But block leaders don't work only with youth. They get to know entire families and connect them with needed services.



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"Block leaders are here for each other, and they're here for the whole community," said Lee, who organized a reading program involving older children who read to younger ones, building skills all around but also familiarizing the older readers "with stories they might have missed."

Both Parks and Lee work in the city's Blue Hills neighborhood, using a YMCA as an activity center, although, said Parks, "We're also encouraged to have the kids come to our homes."

Parks holds barbecues and tailgate parties for young people in her dance group and their friends. The dance group, called the 57th Street Sensations, evolved from her front yard exercises with neighborhood girls and eventually some boys who hung around to watch.

The Sensations have performed in neighborhood parades and other community events, and Parks tells them they are "dancing for peace," hoping to shift their focus from the violence that mars Kansas City and other urban areas.

Parks also hopes to involve young people in her neighborhood in creating a quilt similar to the AIDS quilt, with each square representing a young person killed in an American city. Her plan is to incorporate personal possessions of each young victim and compile newspaper clippings that tell their stories.

The block leader program, a first of its kind, according to organizers, is an offshoot of YouthNet, an umbrella organization of agencies serving young people.

The city now has 38 block leaders. Some are paid directly by the program, others are AmeriCorps volunteers. All get 30 hours of training focused on such skills as needs assessment, cultural sensitivity and conflict resolution, said a spokeswoman for YouthNet.

Earlier this fall block leaders got involved in Clean Sweep, a citywide cleanup effort. Such projects connect people in neighborhoods and "empower them to do something about the problems right where they are living," she said.

Owens wants her block leaders to be "people lovers" and challenges them to each recruit 45 young people into programs.

Her ideal candidate already has a full-time job. Block leader Lamar Vickers, for instance, is general manager for a lawn care service owned by his mother.

For their neighborhood work, AmeriCorps volunteers get a stipend through the federal program; locally funded block leaders are paid \$8 an hour for a maximum of 12 hours a week. Inevitably, Lee said, block leaders put in extra unpaid time.

Among Beci Amy's favorite program-related stories is one involving a block leader who was victimized in the housing project where she lives and turned it into a positive through the program.

The woman's car was stolen by a 13-year-old boy who was not in the program, Amy said. When she learned the thief's identity through the grapevine, she approached the boy.

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Chicago Tribune, January 26, 1997

The block leader reported the theft to the police but didn't stop there. She developed a relationship with this child," Amy said, "supporting him as he went through the process of being charged with the theft."

Later he became part of the program, "one of her kids," Amy said. "And he began telling other kids what happens when you steal cars."

Like many other block leaders, Parks feels her efforts to create a village in her neighborhood have improved her own life along with the lives of those she serves.

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE: January 26, 1997



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LEVEL 1 - 1 OF 15 STORIES

Copyright 1997 Star Tribune
Star Tribune (Minneapolis, MN)

June 14, 1997, Metro Edition

SECTION: Home; Pg. 4H

LENGTH: 1763 words

HEADLINE: Tenants with children now have more options

BYLINE: Neal Gendler; Staff Writer

BODY:

Fair-housing laws prevent most landlords from discriminating against tenants with children. These days, more apartment owners are turning necessity into opportunity by offering a range of family-friendly facilities and services such as playgrounds, after-school child care and summer activity programs.

When Eileen Parker and her two young children moved into a suburban apartment two years ago, it seemed ideal: fairly spacious, at ground level with a lawn for the children's play out front, a walking trail out back, an elementary school across the street, and a management that was welcoming.

"It's a wonderful layout," said Parker, a director of franchise operations for an international franchise company. "At the time I moved in, there were quite a few families and older people, working people. It was fine then."

But it's not now. Attitudes have changed, she said.

"The landlord doesn't like the children to play outside; it ruins the lawn," she said. "They're messy - they get dirt on the sidewalk or they might decide to have a leaf fight." She said she was criticized when her daughter drew a chalk picture on the sidewalk, "and they're too noisy outside. The single people in the building don't like it."

She'd rather switch than fight, so she's searching for a new place and wondering how she can identify buildings that are child-friendly.

She's looking at a good time, for the apartment industry has been turning necessity into opportunity: Fair-housing laws prevent landlords from refusing to rent to people with children - with certain exceptions, mostly in buildings reserved for oldsters - and increasing numbers of apartment owners have been developing playgrounds, after-school care and summer activities and advertising themselves as child-friendly communities.

"More and more of our members are providing services for children who live in the buildings," said Mary Rippe, president of the Minnesota Multi Housing



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Association. "It fills a need for the children. It also helps our members with retention," encouraging renters to remain. "It also builds some respect and good skills in the kids, and keeps them occupied where they might be doing something that might be less good for the community as a whole," such as making noise or mischief.

"There are some neat programs out there that could make it exciting and inviting for kids," said Becky Yonts, national sales trainer for Apartment Search Inc., an apartment-referral firm in the Twin Cities area. "There are buildings that do things that make them attractive."

Susan Schnarr, chairwoman of the multi-housing association, said, "There's been a significant increase" in family friendly policies. "I would say that in the last couple of years it's almost a 'given' to offer some sort of activities and amenities for children."

Patti Trongard, sales manager for Star Tribune Fonahome, an apartment-referral firm owned by the newspaper company, agreed that the number of such programs is much larger than ever because owners have recognized a need, realized that they can meet it and found it to be a selling point.

Apparently, no one has a real grip on how many renters have children living with them, but Trongard supplied data showing that about 36 percent of renters in the seven-county area are in households of three or more. Claudette Juziatiss, an asset manager for Steven Scott Management, which manages about 5,000 housing units in the Twin Cities area, estimated the number of renter households with children at about 40 percent. Schnarr estimated 30 to 40 percent.

More kids, more programs

Trongard called providing for children "a growing lifestyle need." Twenty years ago, property managers were promoting the singles lifestyle, but "I think that's really shifted. There are definitely more people with children renting." She attributed the growth to a combination of not being able to buy and not wanting to buy, plus "the support and security they find in certain apartment communities, especially when you're talking about single parents. A real bond forms between management and the renters; it's like family."

Parker didn't list on-site child care or activities among her criteria for a new location. Foremost in her wishes is a place where management and tenants don't mind the presence of normally boisterous youngsters.

"The law says you can rent wherever you want, but some places obviously are not made for kids," she said. (See accompanying reports.)

She's been looking for two months for an apartment suitable for herself, her daughter, 7, and her son, 3. When she looked two years ago, "I didn't have anyone reject me because of the children," she said. "When people meet me I'm a fairly decent person - I look like I haven't been to a party for years." But this time, she's found the search more difficult.

Her first criterion may be schools; when looking before, "I had to have an



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excellent district," she said. "There was no question that St. Louis Park was excellent."

In this search, she's been to places where "some of the neighbors looked unsavory and they were not close to a lot of parks." While no landlords or managers said her family wasn't wanted - which could run afoul of fair-housing law - "I could tell if they weren't welcoming children. You could tell by the ad: 'Perfect for professional couple.' "

Lifestyles differ

Parker said she thinks children and single people tend to be incompatible in apartment buildings because the singles "tend to come home after the bars close and they're loud with their friends. That's why I like having a building with families and older people: We're all in bed by 10 or 11. And I'm sure the single people aren't thrilled with us because we're all up at 6."

Her ideal place would be "a building where there are more families, so other people aren't disturbed by the noise of children playing outside, because they are noisy - not just my kids, kids in general."

Parker said her other requirements include:

- A playground - ideally, a fenced play area. "It doesn't even have to have equipment, just an area that's safe and visible for the parents and preferably within earshot, as well, because mine are old enough to play outside."

- "Not too close to a busy street - the same as someone looks for when they buy a house."

- "Other kids in the building so they have other children to play with."

- A building in which people are accustomed to children, so tolerance is high.

- "Older people, because I think it's good to have children around seniors."

That may seem like a tall order, but Trongard of Fonahome said it's not unusual. "There are properties that value and will cater to the family," she said.

Steven Scott Management and Schnarr's firm, Mid Continent Management Corp., appear to be among them. Steven Scott has buildings that offer kids the run of the lawn, playgrounds, use of party rooms for doing homework after school, free arts and crafts activities around holidays and Easter egg hunts. For a couple of summers, the firm even ran summer basketball programs.

Mid Continent manages 3,600 units - mostly in the Twin Cities area and St. Cloud - and about five years ago began offering children's activities in Brooklyn Park.



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Programs meet a need

"We were seeing greater **numbers** of children in that area that were what we'd call **latchkey kids** - often single-parent families, but also dual working families, where children would get off the school bus at 3 in the afternoon and be on their own," Schnarr said. "We saw a real need for creating programs for those kids."

The result is "an after-school tutor who meets them at the school bus and takes them to our activity," she said. There is no charge for the program.

The kids enrolled - 30 to 40 at each building - go to one of two apartments remodeled into activity centers where "they get a healthy afternoon snack and then they sit down and work on homework. It's an extended learning environment; it's not play time."

The children also may have craft activities related to approaching holidays or watch educational videos.

"They have to behave," she said. "It's a study environment, not a rowdy play environment, and it's open until 6 o'clock every night. Parents can feel good that their children get off the school bus and are in a healthy environment for the next three hours."

In the summer, the pool has a lifeguard from 1 to 4 p.m. and there is no requirement that children old enough to be home alone be accompanied by an adult.

"Some kids are home alone all summer long; they don't have an adult with them at the pool," Schnarr said. The lifeguard prevents the sad picture of a child stuck inside all day, looking out at an inviting pool that they're forbidden to visit because they're not supervised by an adult.

Schnarr said Mid Continent's children's programs began as a response to an obvious need, but she and others said they're also good business.

"It began as one thing and it's turned out as another," Schnarr said. "I saw children who needed more than they were getting at home and in the schools and it just became something I recognized as a need, plain and simple. So we began the program based on that. We have since seen evidence of resident retention - people are staying in the property longer. It is a means of renting, an advertising tool."

Yonts said that more property firms are offering amenities for children because "it's absolutely a selling point and it really broadens the renter profile for the building." In other words, it attracts more kinds of renters, "not just professionals and empty nesters, but the whole gamut, including families."

Unplanned benefits have accrued for Mid Continent, Schnarr said. Because children are occupied constructively, they get into less mischief. "It has reduced maintenance expenses - and it's just an all-around more pleasant environment."

Juzaitis said buildings run this way are places where children develop



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relationships with managers, whose offices often are filled with children's drawings and crafts.

"It becomes more like a family," she said. "The management feels like those kids are part of their family," and, she said, the children feel the same way, with positive results in behavior. "It becomes a home to them, not just a place they're temporarily staying."

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE: June 16, 1997



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LEVEL 1 - 2 OF 15 STORIES

Copyright 1997 The Washington Post
The Washington Post

May 06, 1997, Tuesday, Final Edition

SECTION: METRO; Pg. B01

LENGTH: 1140 words

HEADLINE: For Some, When School Lets Out, Unease Sets In

BYLINE: Jacqueline L. Salmon, Washington Post Staff Writer

BODY:

The weekday afternoon ritual -- a child gets off a school bus and walks into an empty house, waiting for parents to get home from work -- is routine in the Washington area. But the disappearance of two "latchkey" sisters from Virginia has caused some parents to rethink the issue.

While many parents are comfortable with letting older children take care of themselves, others are clearly uneasy.

Rose Ann Harris lives in Spotsylvania, where Kristin Lisk, 15, and sister Kati, 12, vanished without a trace after getting home from school Thursday. Harris, who attends the Lisk family's church, said she is so concerned that she has made special arrangements for her 13-year-old daughter, Kelli, to go to a friend's home after school so she will not be alone.

Usually, Harris arrives home about 30 minutes after the bus drops Kelli at home. Harris said she's thinking about making the arrangement permanent. "Even for 20 or 30 minutes, we're not allowing her at home alone," Harris said.

Kimberly Dickey, of Spotsylvania, has two boys the same ages as the Lisk girls, Matthew, 15, and Joseph, 12. She still lets her sons stay home alone while she works as a cashier.

"I really don't think a whole lot about it," Dickey said. "If it was younger kids, I would be more concerned."

Many children left to care for themselves are uncomfortable with the arrangement, at least some of the time. Dozens of local children call latchkey hot lines every afternoon, complaining of boredom or tearfully asking for help.

A Washington Post poll in 1989 found that 15 percent of children ages 8 to 13 in the Washington area are primarily responsible for caring for themselves after school while their parents work. It is likely that the percentage is even higher today as more women have entered the work force and more children live in single-parent households.

Avery Beeson, a volunteer with the PhoneFriend program, a hot line for children younger than 15 that receives 9,000 calls a year, said she hears from many panicky children, some as young as 5, awaiting the arrival of a tardy



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parent.

"They just want to make sure that it is okay that their mom is five minutes late," Beeson said. She reassures the children and often stays on the telephone with them until a parent or other adult arrives home.

The District and Virginia do not have laws specifying at what age children can be left unsupervised; in Maryland, state law requires that children younger than 8 be supervised by someone who is at least 13.)

Individual communities offer guidelines for parents; some recommend allowing teenagers to stay home alone but warn that elementary-school children are too young to be left alone on a consistent basis.

In Fairfax County, for example, the county's Department of Family Services suggests that children ages 12 through 18 be left alone only if the child has no emotional or medical problems and only if the child is comfortable with the situation. Children younger than 12 should not be left home alone on a regular basis, the county emphasizes.

For older children, staying home alone is "a reality of the workplace," said Anne Moss, a child protective services supervisor with Fairfax's Family Services Department. "People cannot find sitters or cannot afford sitters when their children are older."

Parents say they often have no choice: They must work, and after-school care programs are often full or cost too much. After-school care for an elementary-school child usually costs more than \$ 200 a month -- a big price tag for parents struggling financially. Few after-school programs for teenagers are available at any price.

Social workers and others say that children old enough to be left home alone should have a clear understanding of how to handle emergencies and unexpected callers or visitors. They should have the number of a neighbor and the phone numbers of local fire officials and police, and they should check in with their parents frequently. Many parents now are wearing beepers, which their children call when they arrive home.

Despite the vast number of latchkey children, many family therapists and psychologists express concern that the practice may hurt some children's emotional well-being.

Recent studies show that preteens and teenagers who come home to an unsupervised house are more likely to use alcohol and other drugs, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics. One study of 5,000 eighth-graders concluded that children who care for themselves 11 or more hours a week were twice as likely to consume alcohol, smoke cigarettes and use marijuana as children who were supervised.]

Thomas J. Long, a Bethesda psychologist and a professor of education at Catholic University, has conducted surveys of latchkey children through the area's parochial schools. Many children responding to his surveys expressed fear and anger at being left home alone, he said, but also expressed reluctance to complain to their parents because they believe they are making a contribution to the family.



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Long said he believes that any child younger than 16 left home alone on a regular basis is "an accident waiting to happen."

SAFETY TIPS

FOR LATCHKEY CHILDREN AND THEIR PARENTS

HOUSE KEYS: Should be carried out of sight, either around a child's neck or attached to clothing.

COMING HOME: Walk home from school along a busy route approved in advance by a parent. Enter the house quickly and lock the door immediately. If a stranger is following, children should go directly to a trusted neighbor's house or nearby store.

CHECK IN: Once home, children should telephone a parent or designated friend.

INFORMATION: Children should know phone numbers for their house and for their parents' workplaces. They should be told which neighbor they can turn to for help, and they should have that neighbor's number. They should know when a parent will be home.

ANSWERING THE PHONE: Children should tell callers "My mother (or father) is busy right now. May I take a message?" They should never say they're home alone.

ANSWERING THE DOOR: Use a peephole to see who it is. Open the door only when it's someone who a parent has said may visit. Parents should practice with children by playing roles in a variety of situations, including when someone delivers a package or asks to use the phone, etc.

IN AN EMERGENCY: Teach children to identify an emergency, such as fire, a severe injury or break-in. Practice dialing 911. Make sure children can give their name, address, telephone **number** and description of the emergency calmly.

WHERE **LATCHKEY KIDS** CAN CALL FOR HELP:

PhoneFriend, (202) 223-2244 (M-F 3-9 p.m., Sat. 1-5 p.m.)

Teleten, (703) 368-8069 (M-F 3-7 p.m.)

Northern Virginia Hotline, (703) 527-4077 (24 hours a day)

SOURCE: D.C. Hotline, which operates PhoneFriend

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE: May 06, 1997



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LEVEL 1 - 9 OF 15 STORIES

Copyright 1996 Sun-Sentinel Company
Sun-Sentinel (Fort Lauderdale)

August 7, 1996, Wednesday, BROWARD EDITION

SECTION: SOUTHEAST, Pg. 1

LENGTH: 868 words

HEADLINE: PARENTS READY THEIR CHILDREN TO STAY HOME ON THEIR OWN

BYLINE: TAYLOR JONES; Special to the Sun-Sentinel

BODY:

Like any mother, Shaun of Margate worries about her kids.

This summer, she worries a little more because her girls are home alone while she and her husband are at work.

She didn't plan it that way. Shaun expected to send her girls to summer camp this year. However, her oldest daughter, 13, is too old for camp.

So she decided her daughter could be a summer volunteer.

"I called hospitals, nursing homes and day-care centers for her to be a volunteer, but either she wasn't old enough to volunteer or they already had their volunteers," said Shaun, whose last name is withheld because she fears for the safety of her children home alone.

"She's too young to help out and too old to be in day care," Shaun said.

And so, the girls, ages 13 and 12, spend the long summer days alone in their house watching videos and doing chores while their parents work.

They are in good company. More than 1.6 million children are left alone every day in this country, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. >

"It's scary. I'm so afraid they will open the door and some lunatic will be standing there and I'll go home to a horrible scene," Shaun said. "I tell them don't even look out the window."

Children who attend public schools in south Broward County have been learning how to be safe when they're home alone through the program presented by an official of the National Safety Council and sponsored by Joe Dimaggio Children's Hospital at Memorial Regional Hospital in Hollywood.

"My biggest concern with my daughter is that she is so nice that someone will come to the door and sweet talk their way into the house," Cindy said.

Since they were very young, the kids learned to call their moms when



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frightened or dial 911 in an emergency. They keep telephone numbers of relatives and trusted neighbors by the phone.

Shaun and Cindy also worry that their kids could have a household accident, choke, drown, succumb to fire or get into trouble while they are away.

That's why they have set strict house rules. At Shaun's house, the girls are not allowed to use the stove to cook, they can't swim in their pool and they can't have friends over until Shaun returns from work.

When the phone rings, they must take a number and never tell the caller that they are alone.

Cindy solves the phone dilemma by telling her son and daughter not to pick up the phone so they can't be conned into anything.

"I tell them not to answer the phone at all and let the answering machine pick up," Cindy said.

And both women call home numerous times during the day to check on their kids.

Preparation can make all the difference, said Joy Riddell, public safety coordinator with the National Safety Council, South Florida chapter.

Riddell puts on the Home Alone-Safe Alone program at schools in south Broward County throughout the year. The program prepares kids to be safe when they are home by themselves. It is sponsored by Joe DiMaggio Children's Hospital at Memorial Regional Hospital in Hollywood.

Riddell speaks to third graders because by then many of the youngsters have already become **latchkey kids**.

"I would say 70 **percent** of the third graders I ask have spent some time alone, from 20 minutes to a couple of hours," Riddell said.

Is third grade too young to be left home alone? That depends on the child and how long the parents will be away.

"All children are different," Riddell said, "but no child under 8 should be left alone."

Riddell gives the kids sage advice during her Home Alone-Safe Alone lecture:
-- Don't answer the door. -- Let an answering machine screen telephone calls. If your child does answer the phone, instruct him or her not to tell a caller they are home alone. -- Don't leave the house. -- Don't mess with the kitchen stove. -- Call 911 in an emergency. -- Stay busy.

Stay busy?

Yes, Riddell said, because busy children can't concentrate on how lonely they are or get spooked with every noise they hear in the house.

Parents do have some options to leaving their children unsupervised at home.



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Unfortunately, those options cost money.

For those who can afford it, live-in child care, day care and baby sitters are the answer. Schools, the YMCA, city parks and recreation departments and commercial providers offer various summer camps.

During the school year, elementary and middle schools provide after-school care programs through the county school board or outside providers authorized by the board.

Some schools even offer before-school child care.

Many of the schools' programs are available at reduced rates for families who can't afford full price. Fees range from free at a few schools to up to \$ 31 per week.

Parents who want to place their children in such a program must register in August before school opens to ensure a spot.

During the past school year, 20,000 Broward students who went to before or after-school child care participated in activities like arts and crafts, computer work, music, sports and cooking.

But the reality is, sometimes parents leave their kids alone, if only for a few minutes.

"You've got to have faith in your kids and hope you've raised them right," Shaun said.

LOAD-DATE: August 9, 1996



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LEVEL 1 - 12 OF 15 STORIES

Copyright 1996 The Hartford Courant Company
THE HARTFORD COURANT

July 24, 1996 Wednesday, STATEWIDE

SECTION: CONNECTICUT; Pg. A3

LENGTH: 676 words

HEADLINE: DOORS TO CHILDREN'S LEARNING SHOULD OPEN SOONER, YALE EDUCATOR SAYS

BYLINE: ROBERT A. FRAHM; Courant Staff Writer

DATELINE: NEW HAVEN --

BODY:

Yale University Professor Edward F. Zigler has been battering at the schoolhouse door for more than a generation, trying to open it to America's youngest citizens.

The man who helped found the government's Head Start program for low-income preschoolers in the 1960s believes schools are making a big mistake by not seeing children until they reach kindergarten.

"Where is it written that school begins at [age] 5?" Zigler said this week to educators from across the country who are part of his School of the 21st Century network.

As director of Yale's Bush Center in Child Development and Social Policy, Zigler is trying to expand the traditional notion of schooling beyond reading, writing and arithmetic. His Schools of the 21st Century -- known in some places as Family Resource Centers -- also include family services such as day care for preschool children, before- and after-school care for school-age children and even programs to teach child-rearing skills to parents of infants and toddlers.

What started as a pilot program in Independence, Mo., and Leadville, Colo., eight years ago has expanded to more than 400 schools in 13 states. The 140 educators here this week for the National Academy, the School of the 21st Century's annual conference, represent schools from New York City to rural Kansas.

"We have child care for school- age youngsters from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. year-round," said Tom Renshaw, an elementary school principal and director of the School of the 21st Century program in Larned, Kan.

"Things have changed," Renshaw said. "In rural areas there may even be a higher preponderance of both parents working. . . . Many family farms are struggling. The **number of latchkey kids** has increased dramatically around the country."

Two dramatic changes in families -- sharp increases in the number of working mothers and the number of single-parent families -- "make it clear why there is



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THE HARTFORD COURANT, July 24, 1996

an absolutely desperate need for child care in the United States," Zigler said.

But the country's approach to child care is a hodgepodge of programs ranging from profit-making day-care centers to family care and baby-sitting, much of it unregulated and of poor quality, he said.

"What has our nation done to support the family as it exists in the year 1996? Precious little," he said.

Schools may be the best hope for improving child care, but Zigler gives low marks to the school reform movement despite more than a decade of studies and reports since the government issued "A Nation at Risk," a 1983 report calling for the overhaul of public education.

Zigler cited one estimate that as many as one-third of the nation's children enter kindergarten without the necessary skills to start school.

"I consider what we are doing to many children . . . in the first five years of life [is] handicapping their growth and development so these children arrive in your schools and you must swim upstream because of the damage that's already been done."

Zigler called for "universal preschool education for every child" -- not just an all-day kindergarten that ends at 2:30 p.m., but preschool classes for 3-, 4- and 5-year-olds "that are as long as the workday of mothers and fathers."

But if schools are to take on new responsibilities, some traditionalists may find it hard to swallow.

"They think it's social engineering. . . . They have a different mindset of schooling," Assistant U.S. Secretary of Education Gerald N. Tirozzi told conference participants Tuesday. "It's going to be a hard sell."

When former President Bush and U.S. governors adopted national education goals in 1990, the first goal said that by the year 2000, "all children in America will start school ready to learn." That is good reason to start early, said Tirozzi, who was Connecticut's education commissioner in the 1980s.

"They are ready to learn when they're born," he told an audience of teachers, principals and school superintendents. "I don't know how you're going to be accountable for that goal because you don't see them until age 5."

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE: July 26, 1996



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