

One of the ways I like to use this monthly column is to shine a spotlight on terrific people and programs who support the efforts of families. This month, I am proud to welcome a guest contribution by Paul D'Agostino, Executive Director, and Brian McEwen, Associate Director of the Child Abuse Council. I invited them to write about the extensive support programs they administer for Bay Area children and families. Enjoy their article, discover the positive resources and services they make available to you and join their extended family.

Meet the Child Abuse Council

The Child Abuse Council is experiencing rapid growth and change...all of which is being fueled by the growing and changing needs of children, parents and families. When the Council was established in 1977, our primary focus was on treatment; working with families who were struggling with issues of abuse and trying to end generational cycles of abuse. Now, 30 years later, while continuing to work towards our mission to prevent abuse before it occurs, stop abuse that is occurring and rebuild the child and family after abuse, there has been a significant shift in our focus. Today the Council's primary goal is to offer preventative services and support to all families to help meet the growing demands and stresses of being a parent in today's world. While these programs all have different names, they share the same purpose of helping families move from good to better to great. The following preventative and educational programs are available to assist any parent with the demands of raising healthy and happy children:

Baby Bungalow is an early childhood resource center for parents and caregivers of children from birth to age 5. Baby Bungalow offers parent support groups, infant massage classes, developmental playgroups, CPR classes and a variety of other services. This popular program is offered through a collaborative effort of the Child Abuse Council, Healthy Start Coalition of Hillsborough County, and Children's Board of Hillsborough County, Tampa Bay Lightning and Lightning Foundation.

FRANC, or the Fathers Resource and Networking Center, **is a multi-functional service center that serves as a hub for community-wide fatherhood initiatives.** Boot Camp for New Dads, Nurturing Dads Course, Nurturing Parenting Course and Dads Dinners are available to all fathers and father figures. Support comes from Florida's Commission on Marriage and Family Support Initiatives, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Hillsborough Kids, Inc., and Children's Board of Hillsborough County.

Kids on the Block is an **educational puppet program that teaches third-graders how to be safe and how to say "NO" to abuse**, and that teaches fourth-graders how to handle bullying situations. Performed to nearly 30,000 students in Hillsborough County each year, Kids on the Block offers a friendly environment for students to ask questions from highly trained puppeteers. The program is funded by the Conn Memorial Foundation and United Way of Tampa Bay.

Parents as Teachers, or PAT, is a nationally recognized, early childhood parent education and family support program that uses certified parent educators to teach expectant and new parents about their child's development, intellectual growth, social/emotional, and motor skills through home visitations and group activities. PAT is funded by the United Way of Tampa Bay and Children's Board of Hillsborough County.

Parent Services Project, or PSP, is based on a nationally recognized family support program. PSP's family involvement and support activities are offered through childcare centers to bridge the child's home and school learning environments. PSP is funded by the Children's Board of Hillsborough County.

Healthy Start is a home visitation program provided by social service coordinators, nurses, and mental health counselors to pregnant women and their children (from birth through one year) and families. Healthy Start helps identify and assist women and infants at risk for poor birth outcomes. Healthy Start is offered through a partnership with the Healthy Start Coalition of Hillsborough County, Children's Board of Hillsborough County and USF's Lawton and Rhea Chiles Center for Healthy Mothers and Babies.

In order to assist families locally, world-wide and around the clock, the Child Abuse Council is creating a new website called the *Family Resource Corner*. When completed this spring, this new service will be a comprehensive website for all families to refer to for immediate, research-based information to answer all of the questions surrounding parenting and child development. Topics will include: preparing for the birth of a baby; stages of child development; parenting tips; and children's health and safety issues. Another feature will allow visitors to ask questions and receive answers by experts in the child development and maternal health fields. Parents can visit either www.familyresourcecorner.com or www.childabusecouncil.com to access this extraordinary parenting resource.

For more information about Child Abuse Council and our services, please call (813) 673-4646 or visit our website at www.childabusecouncil.com.