

From: K. P. Barnes
To: Sue Bell Cobb
Re: A Case for Prevention

Prevention is a long term sustainable, comprehensive approach to keeping children and families healthy and avoiding costly intervention at a later date. There are complex causes of abuse and neglect for Alabama's children which results in a \$520,000,000 invoice to the Alabama taxpayer annually in direct and indirect costs. The majority of funding is expended on intervention and investigation on the state level, most state agencies are limited in their ability to identify children at risk for abuse and neglect and provide services to prevent them from entering into the state system(s). Many children entering the system will eventually be served by multiple state, private, public, agencies that could have been averted by the provision of prevention services on the front end.

The Prevention system's strength is at the community level where these at-risk children and families are easily identified and services put into place to keep them out of the system and move them to strength based models of programming. For every dollar spent on Prevention the state conservatively saves \$5.68. Prevention must be a long term, (think of seat belt safety) the messaging must be consistent and service delivery must be stable with long-range planning being the key to success.

Child abuse and neglect not only damages families but undermines communities and economic growth. The Alabama Realtors Association recognized the importance of Prevention and its link to stable healthy communities. The Realtors Association has a long history of supporting the efforts of Prevention through the Alabama Department of Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention, "Children's Trust Fund".

Programs at the community level operate as a feeder support system to larger state agencies helping to support their mission. Parenting Education Programs keep children out of DHR's Child Protective Services and the Foster Care system; Mentoring Programs keep children out of DYS and the Juvenile Court System; Afterschool Programs support reducing the drop out, truancy, and delinquency rates; Fatherhood Programs add stability to the family unit and keep adults out of the DOC system; Public Awareness Programs and training keep Mandatory Reporters informed of their responsibilities and support child self-disclosure of abuse and neglect. All community programs support the mission of reducing the number of children entering the Mental Health System and operate at a more efficient and effective manner than large state systems while reflecting and responding to the needs of their community.

Funding cuts have resulted in community programs being reduced from 227 in 2005 to 101 in 2012. Alabama's model of Prevention service delivery to children and families is complex but the community is what engages individuals; it is the community that is responsible for introducing Alabama's children and families into services that prevent entry into the state system(s).