



Darisabel summit groups have same mindset, but action is a work in progress

By REBECCA LeFEVER
Daily Record/Sunday News

Posted: 12/25/2010 11:47:04 PM EST



I'zyek, 4, and Steven Valenti in their Springettsbury Township home. I'zyek was adopted after three and a half years in foster care with seven different families. Steven used therapy services and the crisis nursery at the Lehman Center to help I'zyek adapt to their new life together. (DAILY RECORD/SUNDAY NEWS - PAUL KUEHNEL)

York, PA - At 2 months old, I'zyek Valenti was rushed to Hershey Medical Center with a fractured skull. His parents' explanation of how he was hurt didn't match his injury, and officials determined the boy had been abused. I'zyek was put into York County foster care.

Some children, like I'zyek, are saved from

additional abuse through federal and state programs.

For I'zyek, the program meant to save him was not perfect, and the insecurity of bouncing between foster parents would lead to other issues.

Since a community summit about six months ago, sparked by the beating death of 2-year-old



I'zyek and Steven Valenti color a house together in their Springettsbury Township home. (DAILY RECORD/SUNDAY NEWS - PAUL KUEHNEL)

Darisabel Baez, York County child advocacy groups discussed ideas and set goals to combat abuse and heal the scars it produces.

Even with organizations to help abused children, situations leading to abuse and child deaths, such as Darisabel, still occur. These organizations are trying to see if the work they do on their own can be implemented on a larger

Advertisement

Send flowers for any occasion

Bouquets \$19.99
from **19.99** ^{+s/h}

ProFlowers

Order ONLY at
proflowers.com/happy
or call 1-877-888-0688

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™



scale to help children like I'zyek.

While the groups function on their own, collaborating has led to some problems they didn't expect. Finding a leader that can initiate change has been difficult, and some have wondered if a new program is necessary, or if York County just has to better use what's already in place.

Help came to I'zyek three years after he was put into foster care. At that time, Steven Valenti was visiting with his second cousin, I'zyek's father, who was in York County Prison. Valenti was told I'zyek was living with his mother or relatives of his mother.

He later discovered the boy had been in foster care for 31/2 years.

"I wanted him to develop a family, and I decided to try to adopt him," Valenti said.

He adopted I'zyek as a single parent with no other children, and the boy, now 4 years old, was reconnected with members of his family.

But behavioral issues stemming from I'zyek's lack of a secure home -- he had seven foster families -- led Valenti to seek professional help.

After three months of living with I'zyek, Steven visited the Lehman Center in York and began using its free therapy services, where it was discovered that I'zyek had reactive attachment disorder -- a lack of trust in adults that kept him from connecting with Steven.

I'zyek learned it was OK to be angry, but instead of hitting people he chose other ways of releasing his anger, such as hitting a pillow, growling like a lion or stomping.

"It was like we had a mediator to bring us together," Valenti said.

Agencies like the Lehman Center -- a branch of the Children's Aid Society -- have been working with families in York County to prevent abuse and help caregivers of abused children. It is one of several organizations that participated in the June community summit held in Darisabel's honor.

A community gathers

Darisabel



I'zyek, 4, and Steven Valenti in the Springettsbury Township home. I'zyek lived in seven foster homes before he was adopted. (DAILY RECORD/SUNDAY NEWS - PAUL KUEHNEL)

Baez was beaten to death by her mother's

Advertisement

Send flowers for any occasion

Bouquets \$19.99
from **19.99** ^{+s/h}

ProFlowers®

Order ONLY at
proflowers.com/happy
or call 1-877-888-0688

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™



boyfriend, Harve Johnson, on April 6, 2008. Her body was covered in more than 72 bruises and lacerations, and Johnson was convicted of first-degree murder and sentenced to death.

Darisabel's mother, Neida Elizabeth Baez, pleaded guilty to third-degree murder for not intervening and was sentenced to five to 10 years in state prison.

Two years later, on June 10, about 250 police, medical personnel, lawmakers and child advocates gathered to remember Darisabel, but also to gather input on how to combat child abuse.

Since then, James DeBord and Dan Fink with YorkCounts, sponsor of the June summit, began researching programs across the nation that had significant success in preventing and treating abuse in their communities.

Groups met in late July, and they decided to adopt a program for the county, rather than just telling people to prevent child abuse. After completing their research, they selected programs from San Diego, North Carolina, Allegheny County and Florida as finalists for implementation here.

Fink, who conducted most of the research, said a recurring theme in the four programs was an emphasis on keeping kids with their families, rather than moving them into foster care. The programs also used family-building resources that would help parents communicate with and discipline their kids.

DeBord said YorkCounts asked the nonprofit Child Abuse/Prevention Outreach Committee to choose from among the four finalists.

The committee works toward ongoing awareness and guidance when it comes to child abuse prevention, and has organized walks and other events to educate people on how to report abuse and prevent it from occurring.

While the committee has examined the programs presented by YorkCounts, Caroline Tyrrell, spokeswoman for CAPOC, said it is at a standstill.

"I'm thrilled we were selected as a leader in this, but we're not really recognized in the community and we need the help of the commissioners to tell us what we can and cannot do," Tyrrell said.

CAPOC hopes to create a board of people from the community who would help guide them in selecting and starting a program for York County. Until they get that guidance, Tyrrell said, she's not sure what the next step will be.

Working in other ways

Even though a countywide program isn't in place, organizations in York County continue to combat child abuse.

Dr. David Turkewitz, director for the pediatric emergency center and chairman of the department of pediatrics at York Hospital, has been working with a child death review board to examine why children die and sort out patterns

Advertisement

Get a **FREE** ADT-Monitored Home Security System.*

(With \$99 customer installation and purchase of ADT alarm monitoring services. See important terms and conditions below.)

*\$99.00 Customer Installation Charge. 36-Month Monitoring Agreement required at \$35.99 per month (\$1,295.64). Form of payment must be by credit card or electronic charge to your checking or savings account. Offer applies to homeowners only. Local permit fees may be required. Satisfactory credit history required. Certain restrictions apply. Offer valid for new Security Choice - An ADT Authorized Dealer customers only and not on purchases from ADT Security Services, Inc. Other rate plans available. Cannot be combined with any other offer. **\$300 VISA® Gift Card Offer: \$100 VISA Gift Card is provided by Security Choice and is not sponsored by ADT Security Services. Requires mail-in redemption. Call 1-888-407-2338 for complete restrictions and redemption requirements.

Call Now! 1-877-835-8373



Print Powered By FormatDynamics™



that lead to childhood deaths. The review board consists of about 25 to 30 people who meet every two months to develop alternative strategies besides corporal punishment for abusers, and teach people that it's not OK to hit kids.

"This is the responsibility of every citizen, and we've got to get neighborhoods to act as safety nets," Turkewitz said.

Working at York Hospital has given him the opportunity to help educate parents on how to handle their children before they take them home. Parents can attend a shaken-baby impact prevention program and they receive crying cards to help them develop strategies for reacting to their child's crying.

The Nurse-Family Partnership uses evidence based on at-risk mothers and teaches the women how to understand their child's development behaviors. Turkewitz is looking into expanding this program to provide services for at-risk children.

"You want to do more, but how do you package it in there?" Turkewitz said.

As president of the Pennsylvania Academy of Pediatrics, Turkewitz also has been working with York City Church Pastor Aaron Anderson to start a statewide chapter of Prevent Child Abuse America. A small board of people is working through the chartering process, which would make Pennsylvania the 47th chapter of PCAA in the country.

Anderson said the organization wants to educate parents, teachers and anyone else involved with children on how to report abuse.

"A lot of it is trying to change our culture for how we treat children," he said.

When people see child abuse as a public health issue, Anderson said, the cultural aspects will change. A similar case, he noted, was an increase in seatbelt use over the years once the public realized the risks associated with not wearing one. Once people realize the risk that child abuse is to society, they'll see a need for radical change, he said.

One good thing that comes out of cases such as Darisabel's death is it gets people talking, Turkewitz said.

"We know that the longer we go from the summit that we'll lose awareness and momentum," he said. "There's so much we want to accomplish, and it's important we keep working toward that."

Using what we already have

As members of the community work on new prevention programs, some people have found organizations already in place to be beneficial.

Steven Valenti has used one of the many resources York County already has in place for victims of abuse. I'zeyk has completed his therapy at the Lehman Center, and Steven regularly uses the crisis nursery when he has appointments.

Advertisement

Get a **FREE** ADT-Monitored Home Security System.*

(With \$99 customer installation and purchase of ADT alarm monitoring services. See important terms and conditions below.)

*\$99.00 Customer Installation Charge. 36-Month Monitoring Agreement required at \$35.99 per month (\$1,295.64). Form of payment must be by credit card or electronic charge to your checking or savings account. Offer applies to homeowners only. Local permit fees may be required. Satisfactory credit history required. Certain restrictions apply. Offer valid for new Security Choice - An ADT Authorized Dealer customers only and not on purchases from ADT Security Services, Inc. Other rate plans available. Cannot be combined with any other offer. **\$500 VISA® Gift Card Offer. \$100 VISA Gift Card is provided by Security Choice and is not sponsored by ADT Security Services. Requires mail-in redemption. Call 1-888-407-2338 for complete restrictions and redemption requirements.

Call Now! 1-877-835-8373



Print Powered By FormatDynamics™



"It's tough to find someone to help when you're a single parent," Valenti said.

The crisis nursery has helped a lot of parents avoid situations that could lead to their children being placed in foster care, director Martha Martin said.

The nursery can keep up to 12 children during the day and eight children overnight, she said. It's one of four crisis nurseries in the state, and one of 66 in the nation, that takes children 6 years old and younger for up to three days, free of charge, and provides them with everything from food to clothes and diapers.

"Our goal is to be a support to families and prevent situations in which abuse happens," Martin said.

The Pennsylvania Family Support Alliance trains some of the staff who work directly with parents at the Lehman Center. The alliance also works with people who are trained to report abuse -- such as teachers and day care workers.

There are also organizations that help kids after abuse occurs.

Each case handled by the York County Children's Advocacy Center is reported through the PA Childline and then processed through the district attorney's office. These cases include sexual abuse and extreme physical abuse.

About 1,000 abuse cases are reported through the Childline each year, according to Deb

Harrison, executive director for the advocacy center. Last year they interviewed 268 of those children. The cases they don't review usually involve negligence calls, where children face malnutrition or aren't attending school.

During those interviews, a child speaks with a forensic interviewer in a private setting. Either watching in another room through two-way glass, or on a television, are an investigating police officer, a member of York County Children and Youth and someone from the DA's office.

Before the advocacy center was formed, these three agencies would conduct their own interviews, putting the child through the ordeal of telling of their abuse each time. By working collectively, Harrison said, the investigative experience is less traumatic.

But even with multiple resources available to the community, child abuse continues.

While considering another program to adopt in York County, Tyrrell has been wondering if the county needs something bigger or should better use organizations already in place.

"We don't want to duplicate efforts," she said.

The county movement for the past few years has been to work toward family finding and family preserving, Tyrrell said, and CAPOC has been questioning how community organizations can work in a greater force.

"Everyone working since the community summit

Advertisement



DIRECTV has more of what you want to watch!

Switch today! 1-888-778-0985



Offer ends 2/9/11. Credit card required (except in MA & PA). New approved customers only (lease required). \$19.95 Handling & Delivery fee may apply. Applicable use tax adjustment may apply on the retail value of the installation. Call for details.

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™



has the right mindset," she said. "What we can do with that has yet to be seen."

rlefever@ydr.com; 771-2088

Watch the Carrying Darisabel documentary

What action has been taken

YorkCounts

YorkCounts has helped organize meetings between groups that attended the community summit -- one held in late July and another earlier this fall.

Dan Fink, media contact for YorkCounts, did research on national programs that showed progress in preventing child abuse.

The information was presented to the groups, and they asked someone to take the lead on selecting a program to be adopted in York County.

Child Abuse/Prevention Outreach Committee

CAPOC was selected as a leader in choosing a program presented by YorkCounts.

The group organizes several outreaches each year. Some upcoming events are:

--- Painting for Prevention: 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. April 9 at Central Market in York. Community members can add their own touches to a mural with a little direction from some professional

artists.

--- Cares Day: 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. April 30, location to be determined. Local organizations set up information tables, hold raffles and have games for children -- all to bring awareness to child abuse and how to prevent it. All proceeds to toward CAPOC for the printing of literature and awareness materials.

Pennsylvania Family Support Alliance

The support alliance has been working with CAPOC in organizing the Painting for Prevention event, but they also have a new program in the works to be revealed in January. Beth Bitler, program director, said the program will concentrate on educating people on how to intervene when they witness abuse, and learn that there are more ways to help than just reporting it.

Dr. David Turkewitz

Dr. David Turkewitz is the director for the pediatric emergency center and chairman of the department of pediatrics at York Hospital. He also serves on the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency Child Abuse Advisory Board and the Pennsylvania Attorney General's Advisory Board on Child Abuse. He is also president of the Pennsylvania Academy of Pediatrics. Since the summit, Turkewitz has been working closely on a child death review project, which examines patterns that lead to childhood death. The review board consists of about 25 to 30 people who meet every two months to

Advertisement



DIRECTV has more of what you want to watch!

Switch today! 1-888-778-0985



Offer ends 2/9/11. Credit card required (except in MA & PA). New approved customers only (lease required). \$19.95 Handling & Delivery fee may apply. Applicable use tax adjustment may apply on the retail value of the installation. Call for details.

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™



develop alternative strategies besides corporal punishment for abuse, and teach people that it's not OK to hit kids.

Aaron Anderson

The pastor of York City Church, Aaron Anderson has been involved in starting a statewide chapter of Prevent Child Abuse America. He is in the process of making Pennsylvania the 47th chapter in the country and organizing a small board to lead the group. The organization focuses on public awareness of child abuse, public participation in prevention of child abuse, public policy and advocacy to promote prevention and utilization of evidence-based prevention programs for children, caregivers and parents.

Lehman Center

The Lehman Center continues to work within the county to provide childcare, therapy services and parenting classes. They offer a crisis nursery, one of four in the state, for caregivers who need to drop off a child when they have appointments, job interviews or simply need a break. They can care for 12 children during the day and eight overnight, providing everything from food to clothes and diapers. Parents also can take advantage of the center's play therapy, home therapy and a family advocate to talk them through tough situations.

Considering programs

YorkCounts researched national programs with the most successful rates for preventing and

treating child abuse. Dan Fink, media contact for YorkCounts, led the research and selected three programs for the organizations from the Darisabel Baez community summit to review.

San Diego's First 5 Commission

The commission began in 1998 after a tax increase on tobacco products funded early childhood development programs. As of July 2009, more than \$262 million went to programs and services to support early childhood health and development.

Some of the commission's key objectives are to:

--- Decrease the percentage of children entering kindergarten with undetected and/or untreated developmental, social emotional or behavioral delays or problems.

--- Increase the use of positive parenting practices to promote the healthy social emotional development of children from birth to age 5.

--- Increase parents' and caregivers' access to needed services for their children.

--- Increase the public's commitment to investing in services that support the healthy development of children from birth to age 5.

--- Increase the community's capacity to identify, treat and support the needs of young children and pregnant women.

Advertisement



DIRECTV has more of what you want to watch!

Switch today! 1-888-778-0985



Offer ends 2/9/11. Credit card required (except in MA & PA). New approved customers only (lease required). \$19.95 Handling & Delivery fee may apply. Applicable use tax adjustment may apply on the retail value of the installation. Call for details.

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™



Allegheny County's Effective Child Welfare System

Since 1992, the National Family Preservation Network has promoted services that reunite families and support father involvement, as well as Intensive Family Preservation Services, all within the child welfare system. The program focuses on keeping children safely in the home whenever possible. Some of their strategies are:

--- Prevention: The county contracts with 170 human services agencies to provide support for families. These services include a "manhood training" program run by an area church, an afterschool mother-daughter mentorship, and funds that go toward art, music or sports lessons.

--- Placement: If a child needs to be taken from the home, a pre-placement conference is held so that caseworkers, supervisors and administrators can discuss the situation. In most cases, the child is placed with a family member, and family must be ruled out before a child can be placed with non-relatives. Relatives are also assisted in meeting safety standards, with items such as smoke alarms and safety covers for electrical outlets.

--- Permanency Planning: When a child is removed, meetings are held with caseworkers, supervisors, parents, children older than 14 and others involved in the case. Goals are set and resources are provided. If the parents have not made progress within a year, alternatives are considered.

--- Child death investigations: Allegheny County had no child deaths caused by abuse or neglect from July 2003 to July 2006. Staff must respond within two hours to the death of a child younger than 6, and directors believe immediate response to complaints is key to preventing child deaths.

Florida's IV-E Waiver Demonstration Project

Each of Florida's 67 counties have implemented community-based care contracts with 20 leading agencies. The waiver ensures foster funds are used in a wide variety of child welfare services rather than being restricted to out-of-home care.

--- The number of children served has dropped by 29 percent since the waiver started. And the number of children placed in out-of-home care after receiving home services has decreased.

--- More than 64 percent of children were reunited with their original caregiver within a year. There also was a significant increase in the re-education of children who needed to return to out-of-home care.

--- In-home services have been expanded to include housekeeping, parenting skills, child development education and budgeting. Services also have been expanded to use relative caregivers and family connections for permanency in a child welfare case.

--- Spending for out-of-home care dropped 16 percent since the waiver began, and dependency

Advertisement



DIRECTV has more of what you want to watch!

Switch today! 1-888-778-0985



Offer ends 2/9/11. Credit card required (except in MA & PA). New approved customers only (lease required). \$19.95 Handling & Delivery fee may apply. Applicable use tax adjustment may apply on the retail value of the installation. Call for details.

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™



case management spending dropped 18 percent. The number of children in foster care has dropped, as well as the spending needed to support it, both decreasing by 25 percent. For other services, such as adoption and independent living, costs have risen.

North Carolina's Task Force on Child Abuse Prevention

In North Carolina, a child is mistreated every 15 minutes by a parent or caretaker. The Task Force on Child Abuse Prevention studied this issue and developed a strategic plan to address child abuse prevention.

--- Establish indicators to help identify progress toward the goal of reducing child maltreatment, along with an evaluation timetable to measure progress.

--- Identify a state agency that has preventing child maltreatment as one of its principal responsibilities, along with a set of recommendations on the resources used.

--- Focus government and nongovernment organizations on programs and systems of care that will reduce child maltreatment.

--- Identify ways to maximize existing funding or rework existing programs to better meet child maltreatment.

--- Work to better identify incidents of child maltreatment and prevention efforts.

Recent cases of alleged child abuse

--- Darisabel Baez, 2, of York was beaten to death by her mother's boyfriend, Harve Lamar Johnson, in 2008. Johnson was convicted of first-degree murder and sentenced to death. Neida Elizabeth Baez, the girl's mother, pleaded guilty to third-degree murder for not intervening and was sentenced to five to 10 years in state prison. [Click here for the Carrying Darisabel documentary.](#)

--- Nathaniel Craver, a 7-year-old York County boy adopted from Russia, died in August 2009 at Hershey Medical Center. An autopsy revealed more than 80 external injuries to his body, about 20 of which were to his head, according to court documents. His adoptive parents, Nanette and Michael Craver of Carroll Township, were charged with homicide. Their cases are pending in county court.

--- Johnathan Matthew Nodine, 11 months, of West Manheim Township died May 19, five days after his mother's former fiance called 911 because the boy was having trouble breathing, according to police. An autopsy showed Johnathan died of traumatic brain injury, and multiple bruises were found on the back of the boy's head, police said. Michael Tarmon, 22, has been charged with criminal homicide.

--- Sinhue Johnson and Louann Emma Bowers were arrested for allegedly hiding their five children, ranging in age from 2 to 13, in York. Police suspected the man and woman had hidden their children inside a run-down row home

Advertisement



SAVE up to **64%**
Plus, get
3 FREE Gifts



Special Code: 45069ZWN

To Order: www.OmahaSteaks.com/print71 or call 1-877-605-0496

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™



without plumbing, heat or running water. The children had not been enrolled in school, been immunized, or issued birth certificates. Bowers recently gave birth to the couple's sixth child while awaiting trial in York County Prison. Johnson and Bowers are both charged with endangering the welfare of children.

Getting help

Pennsylvania has an anonymous 24-hour ChildLine to report abuse at 800-932-0313. Local Children and Youth Services will respond to tips, but calling the state hotline allows officials to track cases that span more than one county.

Families who need an extra hand in caring for their child can call The Lehman Center at 845-5771. The center offers a 24-hour crisis nursery and a family advocate to work with caregivers. The nursery takes children 6 years old and younger for up to three days, free of charge, and provides them with everything from food to clothes and diapers. Many parents and caregivers use the nursery when they need to go to appointments or need a break.

Watch the child abuse summit

Advertisement



DIRECTV has more of what you want to watch!

Switch today! 1-888-778-0985



Offer ends 2/9/11. Credit card required (except in MA & PA). New approved customers only (lease required). \$19.95 Handling & Delivery fee may apply. Applicable use tax adjustment may apply on the retail value of the installation. Call for details.

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™