

Who 'owns' the children? We all do

By YOLETTE IBOKETTE
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

"Who owns the children?" asks Sherri Killins, Commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care.

Looking at the participants of "The 2011 Summit on Early Childhood: Investment in our Future," the resounding answer is pediatricians and other health professionals, early educators, elected officials and children's advocates. On Nov. 16, these individuals gathered to learn about the "current state of early childhood developmental and behavioral health as well as the current state of current early childhood services." Sponsors included the Massachusetts Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, Early Education for All, Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children and the Boston Children's Museum. The summit featured renown speakers, facilitators and attendees - including pediatrician and Harvard University professor Dr. T. Berry Brazelton, whose achievements in neonatal research have won worldwide acclaim and is now a standard practice for evaluating newborns.



Voices of Boston

Dr. Charles Nelson, research director for the Division of Developmental Medicine at Children's Hospital offered a powerful presentation highlighting new insights on brain development during early childhood. Dr. Nelson focused on the principles of development along with the effects of positive and negative experiences.

Amy O'Leary, campaign director of Early Education for All, Strategies for Children, reminded participants that it is vital for children to grow up

in language-rich homes and have access to high quality infant, toddler, pre-school and full-day kindergarten. She also cited some improved social outcomes when we invest in early education and care: reduction of high-risk behaviors, reduction in crime and improved health outcomes.

The executive director of the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, Marylou Sudders, detailed services that her organization offers to low-income families, which includes emotional and behavioral assessment and child care. She stressed the fact that children have to be given an opportunity not just to survive, but to thrive.

Commissioner Killins eloquently reminded educators and child care providers who care for children with more than two risk factors to know them by name in order to better support those children. Robert Dugger, co-founder of Partnership for America's Economic Success and managing partner of Hanover Investment Group presented the business case for Early Childhood investment. He shared insights about the economic and human capital value of investing in early education.

Participants had the opportunity to choose one of four breakout sessions to explore factors necessary for quality early education and care, how to fill gaps in services for children and their families, and other related topics. The discussions from the sessions concluded that families have a number of needs: support for low-income children, parent support groups, culturally and linguistically appropriate childhood education and many others. In short, many families are struggling, especially those in at-risk environments. According to the organizers, the hope for the Summit was to "build a sustainable coalition that will have a lasting impact on policymakers, legislators and all stakeholders in early childhood services."

The day ended with Greg Hagan, president of the Massachusetts Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, asking participants to advocate for quality early education by calling, emailing and writing their legislators and newspaper editors. After all, we all own the children.

Yolette is a veteran educator and longtime contributor to the Reporter.

World AIDS Day '11 - Getting to Zero

By SHARON T. CALLENDER

On Dec. 1, millions of people around the world recognized World AIDS Day as a time to stop and reflect how HIV/AIDS has directly and indirectly impacted the lives of millions of individuals. According to the United Nations Program for AIDS (UNAIDS), 34 million people from every continent in the world were living with HIV at the end of 2010.

This year there are themes from various

health organizations. The themes may be different but the message is universal - the prevention of HIV/AIDS is crucial to the future welfare of mankind.

The UNAIDS strategy aims to advance global progress in achieving country-set targets for universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care, and support and to halt and reverse the spread of HIV and contribute to the achievement of the Millennium

Development goals by 2015.

Adopted by the Program Coordinating Board in December 2010, the strategy works to position the HIV response in the new global environment. The AIDS response is a long-term investment and the intent of the strategy is to revolutionize HIV prevention, catalyze the next phase of treatment, care and support, and advance human rights and gender equality. UN-

AIDS targeted strategy goals by 2015 are:

- Sexual transmission of HIV reduced by half, including among young people, men who have sex with men, and transmission in the context of sex work.
- Vertical transmission of HIV eliminated, and AIDS-related maternal mortality reduced by half.
- All new HIV infections prevented among people who use drugs.



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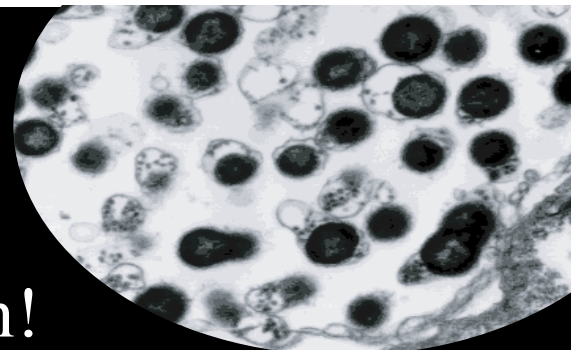
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