

Overview of Prevent Child Abuse Iowa

Founded in 1975, Prevent Child Abuse Iowa (PCA Iowa) has the mission of ending child abuse in the entire state of Iowa. For its first seven years, the organization educated and trained professionals and the public about child abuse – the reality of which was not then widely recognized or addressed. In 1982, the Iowa Department of Human Services (DHS) awarded PCA Iowa a contract to initiate a statewide program of community-based projects for preventing child abuse. PCA Iowa has continued to operate the original prevention program, while developing a second statewide prevention program focused on young families.

PCA Iowa's goal is for Iowa to become a place where children are free from abuse and neglect, living in families that are nurturing and safe. PCA Iowa believes that almost all parents love their children, wish to be good parents, and do not want to abuse their children. Despite this, some parents are socially isolated, have few resources to help them through difficult times, face stresses with which they cannot cope, or lack important parenting skills. Parents in these circumstances are at risk of abusing their children.

PCA Iowa's goal is to ensure that parents receive the social support, respite child care, and education they need to be good parents and not to abuse their children. PCA Iowa works to make this prevention-focused support, education, and care available to families throughout the state by: (1) organizing and directing child abuse prevention programs, (2) partnering with state and local officials to protect children from abuse, (3) advocating for expanded child abuse prevention services, and (4) informing the public about child abuse and ways to prevent it. Following is a brief summary of PCA Iowa's work in each of these four areas.

(1) Organizing and directing child abuse prevention programs. PCA Iowa's primary activity has been organizing and managing statewide, community-based family support and child service programs. This experience began in 1982, when the Iowa DHS chose PCA Iowa to organize a new, statewide community-based prevention initiative called the Iowa Child Abuse Prevention Program (ICAPP). PCA Iowa has directed ICAPP for the succeeding 27 years.

ICAPP uses a network of community-based nonprofits to provide support, care, and education for families and children in more than 90 counties. In state fiscal year 2008, child abuse prevention councils provided 71,325 hours of crisis nursery and respite child care to 1,286 families with 2,166 children. More than 3,500 parents attended parent education classes, and 1,491 participated in young parent support groups. A total of 44,861 children and 5,588 adults attended sexual abuse prevention classes. Prevention services overall helped 56,419 children. Providing services required 54,874 hours of volunteer time from 3,381 volunteers.

Under PCA Iowa's direction, ICAPP offers these services in 91 of Iowa's 99 counties:

- 64 Sexual Abuse Prevention projects teaching students and adults how to recognize and respond to the risks of child sexual abuse and how to safe from sexual abuse
- 55 Parent Education projects providing instruction and support for parents
- 24 Young Parents projects providing group support for young families
- 19 Respite Child Care projects offering child care for parents' time out
- 6 Crisis Nursery projects offering 24-hour emergency child care and other child abuse prevention services

In September 2007, Iowa officials chose PCA Iowa to administer a second new child abuse prevention program, which will offer crisis and respite care services and parenting instruction throughout the state. After this expansion, almost every Iowa county will have some child abuse prevention activity supported by PCA Iowa.

(2) Partnering with state and local officials to protect children from abuse. For almost a decade, PCA Iowa has been a key partner with the Iowa Department of Human Services in a statewide initiative called the Community Partnerships for Protecting Children (CPPC). This initiative improves how communities support families and protect children from child abuse – helping to produce more effective family interventions. With this reform, community members and agencies reach out earlier to families facing stress; intervene more rapidly, comprehensively, and effectively when abuse or neglect occurs; and join with public officials to make child protection policies and practices more effective.

PCA Iowa has helped the CPPC in important ways. For almost five years, a PCA Iowa staff person has served as an associate coordinator for the CPPC, working closely with the DHS staff person responsible for overall coordination of the Partnership. PCA Iowa's associate coordinator participates extensively in state-level administration of the CPPC, coordinates state-level support activities, consults on changes in policies and practices, and assists in the orientation of new CPPC local coordinators and representatives.

Much of PCA Iowa's CPPC work has involved helping local sites build a base of community support. In 2007, PCA Iowa's successful application to the Iowa Commission on Volunteer Service made it possible for PCA Iowa to place ten AmeriCorps members to help CPPC efforts in 23 Iowa counties. Members assist in a range of local Partnership efforts in order to increase awareness of the CPPC, strengthen community involvement in the Partnership, and build neighborhood networks for supporting families. PCA Iowa successfully applied to become an AmeriCorps site and, starting in the fall of 2007, enrolled ten members to serve in 23 Iowa counties. The success of PCA Iowa's AmeriCorps efforts was recognized with increased funding that allowed PCA Iowa to expand this project in its second year (2008-09) to fourteen members serving 31 counties. PCA Iowa has requested funding to support fifteen AmeriCorps members in 2009-10.

(3) Advocating for expanded child abuse prevention services. Prevent Child Abuse Iowa is the state's leading advocacy organization for child abuse prevention services. PCA Iowa's executive director is actively involved each legislative session to advocate for a range of prevention efforts. Most recently, PCA Iowa developed and led a network of state and local people to advocate for new and improved strategies for preventing child sexual abuse. PCA Iowa's efforts led to \$200,000 in added child sexual abuse prevention funding in 2007, enactment of a state income tax checkoff for child abuse prevention in 2008, and passage of legislation to develop a shaken baby syndrome prevention program in 2009.

(4) Public awareness about child abuse and how to prevent it. PCA Iowa directs a broad range of efforts to enhance community awareness of and support for child abuse prevention. The premise of PCA Iowa's efforts is that preventing child abuse is the responsibility of everyone – and not just child welfare or law enforcement officials. Individuals can support stressed parents in many ways, such as lending a listening ear, sharing a word of encouragement, and offering to care for a child to give a parent a break. They can also ensure that officials learn of family situations where children need protection. Here is a summary of the major public awareness efforts:

A. *Communicating the message of child abuse prevention.* PCA Iowa is a widely-respected and reliable information resource for executive and legislative officials, professionals, the media, and the public. Staff respond to frequent local, state, and national media inquiries about child abuse and its prevention. PCA Iowa further communicates its prevention message proactively by writing letters to the editor, contacting media representatives with newsworthy information, and distributing its research findings and policy recommendations to public officials, professionals, and the general public. PCA Iowa has a highly visible presence on the internet through its web site, www.pcaiowa.org. PCA Iowa also publishes Iowa's only statewide newsletter focused on child abuse prevention, *Together for Prevention*.

B. *Organizing statewide child abuse prevention awareness activities.* PCA Iowa organizes and supports statewide efforts to increase public awareness of child abuse and involvement in its prevention. Much of the focus of this work is on organizing public awareness activities during Child Abuse Prevention Month (April). In April 2009, PCA Iowa distributed nearly 200 community resource packets to all of local resource people. PCA Iowa also instituted an inaugural signature prevention awareness effort, called "Pinwheels for Prevention," involving more than thirty Iowa counties.

C. *Conducting and publishing research on child abuse.* PCA Iowa conducts extensive, independent research on child abuse issues. Recent research has examined these topics: (1) Iowa's high rate of child abuse, (2) drug-related child abuse in Iowa, (3) homicides of young children in Iowa, and (4) strategies for preventing child neglect. These research reports are widely recognized, respected, and often cited by state officials, fellow professionals, and the media.

D. *Hosting an annual conference on child abuse prevention.* PCA Iowa annually hosts Iowa's only statewide child abuse prevention conference. For 28 years, this two-day conference has drawn together prevention council members, nurses, educators, family support workers, social workers, and others to hear state and national experts speak on a range of child abuse prevention topics. More than 430 people attended the 2009 event.