

poor, and *not* in inner cities. The economic consequences are staggering. One out of two children in a female-headed household is poor. Three out of four children from households headed by a mother under 25 are poor. Even when teen pregnancy results in marriage, these young two-parent families are almost three times as likely to be poor as

those with parents over 25. The links between teen pregnancy and poverty are not solely related to age and single parenthood, but also to the poor skills and limited employment experience that these young parents bring to the workforce and to the relatively lower wages America pays to young workers (Children's Defense Fund 1987).

### The Houston "Lighthouse" for Unattended Children

Sarah Smith

No principal ever wants to hear that a child is sleeping all night on the school grounds, but if that child has no home to go to and if the principal hears this on a day when freezing temperatures are forecast for the coming night, somebody has to do something. In Houston, Superintendent Joan Raymond responded quickly to this and similar reports of students living on the streets: she immediately set up Schoolhouse Shelters at Gregory-Lincoln Elementary and Middle School and at Jefferson Davis High School. With the assistance of the American Red Cross, school officials sought volunteers, set up cots in unused rooms, and spread the word that shelter was available, at least for a few days.

On the first night, eight people showed up at the shelters; not all of them were students, and only two stayed all night. But Joyce Moss, just-named coordinator for the effort, was not discouraged. She said, "As long as there is a need and we can let the young people know we're here, that's fine. We'll wait for them."

In the meantime, Superintendent Raymond presented a proposal to the board, detailing options—shelters, after-school care, and community involvement—a network of support from community agencies, and a modest budget. The proposal began:

Every analysis of homelessness in Houston indicates that children constitute a large portion of the homeless population. . . . The concern of the school district goes beyond the unaccompanied homeless student to the unattended student. Children who are unattended and uncared for after school hours have long been a concern of school personnel. The concern has escalated as teachers and principals report more incidences of students who are unattended and on the streets until bedtime.

All of us—schools, agencies, community—must cooperatively take whatever steps are necessary to assist these children. . . . We are proposing a Lighthouse on the campus of Gregory-Lincoln School which will extend the security, safety, and care traditionally provided during the school day beyond 3 o'clock.

Subsequent approval of the proposal committed board support through the end of June 1989, when the program will be reviewed. In the meantime, the pilot phase of the After-School Enrichment Program at Gregory-Lincoln has attracted about 25 students, who participate in recreational and educational activities from 4:00 to 6:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. With a site coordinator funded by the district now at work, school officials can accommodate up to 60 children; and we have already had requests to continue the program through the summer.

Extending district responsibilities in this manner has generated differing opinions, of course. But for now Raymond is firm in her commitment to explore the added duties, saying "Success is not a measure of numbers, but a measure of the willingness of the district to be sure children are cared for." All those teachers who have given their students books and clothes over the years, all those principals who have arranged for baths, haircuts, laundry, clothing vouchers, and shoe tickets may be pleased that a superintendent and board are reflecting the same kind of hands-on and heartfelt approach to children in need.

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## Each year 1 million American teens get pregnant, and two-thirds of these teens are *not* black, *not* poor, and *not* in inner cities.

*Our children and young families need economic safety.* Families whose heads are over 30 are doing well; their median income rose between 1973 and 1986. Families with heads under 30, however, are sliding backwards; their median income declined by 13.4 percent. The median income of families of all races headed by 20- to 24-year-olds fell 27 percent (50 percent for black males) during this period. The former is equivalent to the per capita income loss during the worst years of the Depression (Children's Defense Fund and Center for Labor Market Studies 1988). Dramatically declining wages have been a principal cause of declining marriage rates and the rising rates of out-of-wedlock births among teen and adult women in all income and racial groups, but especially in the black community (Wilson 1986).

*Our children need spiritual safety.* There is a hollowness at the core of our society. We share no mutual goals or joint vision—nothing to believe in except self-aggrandizement. The poor black youths who shoot up drugs on street corners and the rich white youths who sniff cocaine in wealthy suburbs share a common disconnectedness from any larger hope or purpose. The rising rates of suicide, drug and alcohol abuse, and out-of-wedlock births among youths of all races and income groups reflect a moral drift that cries out for correction.

The overarching task of leadership today in every segment of American society is to show our children that they can engage in enterprises that lend meaning to life, that they can make a

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