

The Children's Charter of Metropolitan St. Louis

Preamble:

As concerned citizens of the Greater St. Louis community, we believe that the problems of our children and their families can no longer be ignored. We have examined the plight of all of our children and especially those most at risk. We are alarmed at the growing evidence that their ability to fully participate in this community and to become productive, healthy citizens is greatly jeopardized by the existence of forces such as racism, poverty and the inequitable distribution of our community's resources. We are resolved to work together to address these problems, for we believe that, without a united and concerted effort, we cannot hope to achieve for them the benefits of growing up in this democracy. To make this commitment even more specific, we affirm the following:

We Believe that All Children Have a Right to:

A safe environment...for without safe homes, safe streets, and safe schools, children and their families must be preoccupied with issues of security and freedom from violence;

Economic security...for without gainful employment and adequate incomes, their parents are unable to provide the resources needed for healthy growth and development;

An environment free of racism...for without racial justice, young persons of color will grow up with fewer resources and opportunities, and will be less prepared to become productive, contributing members of society;

Equal opportunity to education...for without educational programs which from their earliest years meet their cognitive, social and personal needs and are sensitive to their family needs as well, children will not develop to their full potential;

Parenting support...for without parenting education and child care, counseling and other needed services, their parents are less able to provide adequate care or advocate for their needs;

Preventive health care...for without access to health care services, beginning with prenatal care and continuing through adolescence, children are unable to achieve a level of wellness which supports their development and chances of success;

Strong, viable neighborhoods...for without communities which reinforce the values of care and concern for one another, our children will grow up without an understanding of the rights and responsibilities of urban life;

A desegregated society...for without respect for the experience of a diverse society, our children will be unprepared to meet the challenges of the 21st century;

Hope and opportunity...for without a sense that the future holds for them an array of possibilities, children lose their ambition and fail to develop the motivation to achieve and shape their own lives and the future of their community.

Furthermore,

To accomplish these, we believe this community must employ the following strategies:

- Invest in children as its highest priority;
- Empower families so that they are able to access needed services;
- Provide comprehensive services in a coordinated manner;

- Involve parents in the decisions which affect the lives of their children;
- Deliver necessary services at the neighborhood level;
- Promote school and agency partnerships so that schools can function as community resource centers;
- Use partnerships between and among agencies and groups serving children and families;
- Use a regional approach in the planning and coordination of services to children and families; and
- Evaluate and monitor the effectiveness of services designed to meet the needs of children and families.

Based on this Vision,

We therefore commit ourselves to strive to accomplish the following:

- To establish family support centers which help prevent child abuse and neglect through local efforts for assisting families with respite care and other services;
- To increase the availability of safe, affordable housing for at-risk families, and the funding of services which prevent abuse of children;
- To ensure that child development classes are an integral part of the curriculum in elementary and high school;
- To increase the availability of good jobs through support for small and medium-sized businesses, rebuilding infrastructures, and using enterprise zones;
- To increase the number of job training programs and better coordinate training with the needs of employers;
- To increase the availability of licensed day care and subsidies to child care, and thus improving access to work;
- To work with parents so that children are ready to learn when they enter school, especially by supporting such initiatives as Head Start and Success by Six;
- To reduce teen pregnancy in this community through school-based sex education and comprehensive adolescent health services;
- To promote neighborhood-based community centers for primary care in all areas with high at-risk populations;
- To promote the use of schools or other community organizations as community service centers where services such as health care can be readily obtained;
- To promote a system which enhances the use of information in planning the delivery of health services at at-risk children;
- To promote programs for parents which enable them to understand and to help their child's cognitive and educational development;
- To establish a regional framework for locally appropriate mobility strategies connecting families to social, economic, cultural and other opportunities; and
- To work toward a community-wide action plan which advocates for children's issues on the local, state and federal levels.

We, the Undersigned,

Are dedicated to accomplishing the above through our own efforts and through those organizations and agencies with which we work.