National Coalition for Child Protection Reform / 53 Skyhill Road (Suite 202) / Alexandria, Virginia, 22314
(703) 212-2006 / www.nccpr.org / info@nccpr.org

NCCPR:
The Prius of Child Advocacy

August, 2009

The National Coalition for Child Protection Reform is to child advocacy as a fuel-efficient hybrid is to automobiles. The fuel of advocacy is money, and NCCPR gets outstanding RPD – reform per dollar.

Operating on a shoestring budget of about $100,000 per year, we've produced more real reform per dollar spent than any other national child advocacy organization in America.

The trade journal *Youth Today* says NCCPR "might be the most successful youth advocate[s] out there in terms of landing [their] words on editorial pages around the country." The last page of this document, *NCCPR by the Numbers*, documents just how successful.

But we don't see getting the word out or "raising awareness" as an end in itself. Rather, our goal is reducing the number of children *needlessly* torn from everyone loving and familiar. In addition to sparing children from the harm that comes from being consigned to America's chaotic system of foster care, keeping those children out of the system also gives child welfare agencies more time to find children in real danger.

Below is a summary of our "evidence base" – our clear, measurable results – and what others are saying.

Take a look at our "Top Five" accomplishments for children. Then see why our rigor and our intellectual honesty – attested to in July in this column from a Florida newspaper: http://bit.ly/9exQb and in the comments below - have made us so well-respected among journalists and reform-minded child welfare professionals:

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THE NCCPR TOP 5

As we celebrate our tenth anniversary of full time advocacy, we review below our Top Five accomplishments. There are plenty more, but these five accomplishments alone have kept thousands of children from being needlessly placed in foster homes or institutions. None of this was done by NCCPR alone. All of it required strong partnerships, and in most cases, people of vision and goodwill within child welfare agencies. (Unfortunately, we can't always name those people and partners publicly.) But we believe none of it would have happened ***without*** *NCCPR.*

5. **Turning around Florida.** Ten years ago, national advocates despaired of ever seeing change in Florida. The Secretary of the state Department of Children and Families was openly contemptuous of national reform efforts. She crusaded for a vast increase in removals of children from their homes – and she got it, including a 50 percent surge in a single year. NCCPR has released more reports on Florida than any other state. At first we stood alone. But gradually we won over journalists, and then other key players. In 2007, entries into foster care dropped significantly for the first time. They declined again in 2008, and child safety improved. By 2009, Florida's success was featured in *The New York Times*. DCF now has a power point presentation on curbing foster-care panic. And, as one DCF administrator put it: "Family preservation is back."

4. **Removing barriers to kinship care in Utah.** Officials at the Utah child welfare agency misread a new federal law. They thought states had to complete a lengthy new "background check" on prospective foster parents, including relatives, before placing children in their homes. They even got the legislature to write the error into state law. The result: Hundreds of children who could have gone immediately to relatives were trapped in shelters for days, sometimes weeks. NCCPR discovered the error. NCCPR alerted other advocates nationwide. We brought in some key players in Utah child welfare, and the Youth Law Center, which has crusaded against shelters. As a result of our pressure, in public and behind the scenes, the agency changed course. Not only was the law repealed, the new law strengthened the preference for kinship care in Utah.

3. **Stopping an "unstoppable" orphanage.** She was known as "the Mother Teresa of Minneapolis," overseer of a personal charity empire, guest at a presidential prayer breakfast, subject of adoring profiles in national media. So it's no wonder that Mary Jo Copeland always got what she wanted. And when Copeland declared she wanted to build an orphanage for 200 children, aged four to eleven, she was expected to get that, too. But NCCPR and the North American Council on Adoptable Children persuaded the state's largest newspaper, and other key figures in child welfare, to oppose the plan. Now Copeland admits it's not going to happen. News accounts say donors shied away when "opponents made the project controversial."

2. **Curbing needless foster care placement in Missouri.** When a child dies in foster care, the usual media reaction is to call for tougher "background checks" and licensing standards. But when Dominic James died in foster care in Springfield, Missouri, NCCPR persuaded the *Springfield News-Leader* to look deeper – at the high rate of removal in Missouri and in the Springfied area in particular. The paper did story after story, even sending a team to Alabama to examine the successful reforms there. Working closely with the Missouri Council for Children at Risk, NCCPR issued a comprehensive report on Missouri child welfare and testified at a key legislative hearing. The *News-Leader* coverage attracted the attention of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. All the stories in the two newspapers pressured legislators and the child welfare agency. Entries into foster care in Missouri have been cut sharply, with no compromise of child safety.

1. **Transformation in Maine.** As in Missouri, tragedy led to change. This time it was the death of foster child Logan Marr. Working closely with the Maine Alliance for DHS Accountability and Reform, a group organized by a foster parent who had gotten fed up with taking in children who could have remained in their own homes, NCCPR issued two reports on Maine child welfare, testified at key hearings and persuaded the state's key media to look at Maine's high rate of child removal. We even persuaded PBS' *Frontline* to do a documentary on the Logan Marr case. News coverage included a dozen editorials in the state's largest newspaper supporting NCCPR's view. The relentless advocacy strengthened the hand of a new governor as he brought in new, reform-minded leadership. Today, the number of children in foster care in Maine is down nearly 40 percent. Entries into care are down significantly, the number of children in group homes and institutions has been cut by two-thirds, while the proportion of children in kinship care has more than doubled. It's all been done with no compromise of safety, and Maine's child welfare reform is a finalist in Harvard's Innovations in American Government Awards.

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SOME COMMENTS ON THE WORK OF NCCPR

"A remarkable advocate for child welfare reform [with] an impact all over the country."
--Benjamin Wolf, Director, Children and Institutionalized Persons Project,
American Civil Liberties Union of Illinois
(counsel for plaintiffs, Illinois class-action child welfare suit)

"A voice of reason …[that] can find fault with an agency without sounding like [they're] denouncing the Third Reich."
***--Tom Lyons, Columnist,* Sarasota (Florida) Herald-Tribune**

NCCPR "might be the most successful youth advocate[s] out there in terms of landing [their] words on editorial pages around the country."
--Youth Today

"In times of crisis, the rational voice of a well-respected advocate is essential to preventing public panic and political overreaction. The NCCPR is and has been that proactive, rational voice … I daresay [NCCPR's] perspective has saved a number of communities from going down the path of 'foster care panic,' where family preservation efforts are forsaken in the name of political cowardice and expediency. … We need a strong, reliable, and vigilant national voice advocating for positive reform and serving to quell fears when local issues turn ugly. There is no other advocacy organization I know of that plays this critical role."
--Marc Cherna, Director, Allegheny County, Pa. Department of Human Services

"NCCPR has been a key support for the child welfare reforms in Maine. … The strong voice of NCCPR gives voice to ideas that challenge the *status quo*. The children of Maine need that voice. … The work that [NCCPR] has done with the media in Maine has helped them understand the complexity of the child welfare system and has helped them to understand that the reforms are in the best interest of children and the people of Maine."
--James Beougher, Director, Office of Child and Family Services,
Maine Department of Health and Human Services

"The idea for this work was first suggested by Richard Wexler of the National Coalition for Child Protection Reform. Since that time, he has been an important collaborator in this project, offering insights into child welfare practices across the country and helping us to distill our thinking on the right role and responsibility for government in the lives of children and families."
-- Kevin Ryan, former New Jersey Child Advocate, in the Office of Child Advocate's
Families Under Supervision *report*

"I began covering child welfare by accident as one of those reporters who knew nothing about it and believed reunification sounded like craziness. [NCCPR Executive Director] Richard Wexler very patiently pushed me to read the right books and talk to a variety of experts. … [NCCPR], really, was a source of grounding for me for years, as a reporter and a writer."

***--Barbara White Stack, former reporter*, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette**

"You are a tremendous force and asset to children across the country and I have nothing but the utmost respect for your work. I think you have made a tremendous difference in people's lives through your media advocacy work. … Now more than ever the services of NCCPR are needed to keep the heat on. You helped reporters like me stay focused, to not be swayed by the state bureaucratic and political machines and to remember what child welfare and child protection is really supposed to be about - helping children and preserving families - which, sadly often gets lost in the rhetoric of the day …"

***--Colin Poitras, former reporter,* Hartford Courant**

"Though I'm always looking for opportunities to change my mind, only rarely does someone show up who can rearrange my thinking as radically as you did on the child-protection front. It affected my writing in a great many ways, and I'm grateful for that."

***--Kate Stanley, former editorial writer*, Minneapolis Star-Tribune**

"I know of no other individual or organization that has served as a countervailing force for redress of this imbalance [in media coverage] with the passion, dogged persistence, or intelligence of Richard Wexler and NCCPR. … Another thing that is truly remarkable about Richard is his seeming omnipresence. Pick up a newspaper anywhere from Sacramento, to Duluth, to Providence, if it contains a story about child welfare, that story is likely to quote Richard. From a funder's perspective, he is the living definition of 'bang for the buck.' … Struggling parents already disadvantaged by poverty, racism, and undeserved stigma would be at a far greater disadvantage without Richard Wexler and NCCPR on our side."

--Mike Arsham, Executive Director, Child Welfare Organizing Project

"As a practicing professional Social Worker and Professor in the child welfare field for the past 34 years, I can say that NCCPR has made the best presentation for the critical need for family centered work of any organization. … This past year [2007] in recognition of NCCPR's important efforts on behalf of families, the Family Preservation Institute Board awarded NCCPR the Kaleidoscope Award. … [NCCPR's] work has greatly aided organizations doing best practice work within the child welfare system."

--Prof. Alvin Sallee, Director, Family Preservation Institute,
School of Social Work, New Mexico State University

Now, see a case in point:

NCCPR IN MAINE:
THE VIEW FROM THE GRASSROOTS

Mary Callahan is the author of a book on her experiences as a foster parent in Maine, and the organizer of MADAR, Maine Alliance for DHS Accountability and Reform. Here, she describes NCCPR's role in Maine:

"Until my first conversation with Richard Wexler of the National Coalition for Child Protection Reform, I had only a narrow view of the problem. I knew what had happened to the kids in my care and a few foster parent friends and it certainly looked like a trend. But I had no broad perspective, no numbers to back up my feelings, no knowledge of the history that got us to this point, and no idea what was being done in the rest of the country.

"NCCPR gave me all that. Over the next months and years, Richard made himself available to me for information and guidance. He sent me literature and emailed me current events from around the country with regard to child welfare. He answered my questions, sometimes communicating with me more than once a day. He came to Maine four times for news conferences and presentations.

"The more I learned the more I knew I had to speak out and keep speaking out. I wrote letters to the editor, op eds and statements to give to the state legislature. Eventually I wrote a book. And every step of the way, NCCPR was there. …

"And we got results. A new administration is committed to real reform. They've brought in some of the very national experts NCCPR urged them to consult. I've been named to the Council to Restructure DHS, a special commission to advise on changing the system. And Maine is taking fewer children needlessly from their parents. I organized a Walk for DHS Accountability to draw more attention to the problems and keep the pressure on.

"But without NCCPR, I would have been saying, over and over again, "Here's what happened to me." How many times can people listen to that? With NCCPR's help I was able to say, "Here's what happened to me. Here is the national trend. Here is how we got to this point. Here is what other states are doing to improve the situation."

"Thanks to NCCPR, I could go in front of the Council and give 15 minutes of testimony and answer another 45 minutes of questions, without losing my credibility by saying, "I don't know." …

"Maine used to have the 4th highest percentage of its children in foster care. A lot of people, myself included, have worked to change public opinion and change the system to do better than that. We are succeeding. We all have had NCCPR behind us."-

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NCCPR BY THE NUMBERS, THE FIRST TEN YEARS:

Except as otherwise noted, all data are for the period June 1, 1999 through May 31, 2009.

42,000	Number of "hits" received by the NCCPR website in a typical month.
4,000	Number of e-mails sent to journalists and other advocates in a typical year.
1,504	Number of news stories quoting or influenced by NCCPR.
1,254	Number of media kits and related information sent to journalists.
241	Number of published NCCPR op ed columns.
204	Number of editorials influenced by NCCPR.
153	Number of presentations made by NCCPR to reporters and editorial boards.
89	Number of newspapers among the top 100 in daily circulation that have either published an NCCPR op ed column or quoted NCCPR.
25	Number of NCCPR reports on state or local child welfare systems.
1	Number of fulltime paid staff.

Over the past ten years, NCCPR's point of view has appeared in the pages of a newspaper, magazine, or news organization website, or been seen or heard on television or radio, an average of once every 1.9 days.

Of course, even the most "fuel-efficient" child advocacy organization needs *some* financial support. If you think these kinds of results are worth supporting, please go to our homepage, www.nccpr.org where you can make a donation through Network for Good