

# Masons Care About Children

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*This Short talk bulletin has been adapted from a presentation made to the conference of Grand Secretaries in North America at their Annual Meeting in Calgary in February 1987 by Brother Carl W. Stenberg Right Worshipful Grand Master of Masons in Pennsylvania who serves as a Director of the National Masonic Foundation for the Prevention of Drug and Alcohol abuse among Children*

At the 1986 conference of Grand Masters of North America in Arlington, Virginia, approval was given for the formation of "The National Masonic Foundation For The Prevention of Drug and Alcohol Abuse Among Children." This was probably the most positive statement expressed by the conference of Grand Masters in many years, a declaration that "MASONS CARE ABOUT CHILDREN."

According to the 1986 issue of Prevention Parentline, the top seven discipline problems in public schools in the 1940s were: talking, chewing gum, making noise, running in the halls, getting out of turn in line, wearing improper clothing, and not putting paper in wastebaskets. The top seventeen discipline problems in the 1980s are: drug abuse, pregnancy, rape, assault, arson, murder, vandalism, gang warfare, venereal disease, alcohol abuse, suicide, robbery, burglary, bombings, absenteeism, extortion, and abortion.

My Brethren, it takes little reflection on our part to recognize that we are living in a different world today, a world where challenges are different, a world-where values have been altered, a world where issues that at one time seemed important to us are no longer important issues to young people.

A documentary on public television stations recently dealt with a subject they termed 'A generation at risk.' This documentary, while dealing with the problem of drug and alcohol abuse, expanded its concern to problems of suicide, pregnancy, dropping out of school and other issues. When a total analysis is made, however, it is impossible to separate drug and alcohol abuse from practically every other major problem which young people must face today.

It is a characteristic of a complacent society to ignore that which we do not want to see or hear or which does not affect us directly. It is far too easy when we eat three meals a day, go home to a warm house at night, and sleep in a comfortable bed to ignore that which is adversely affecting what is rapidly becoming a majority of our population.

A short time ago a national publication revealed that in one of the California school systems sexual contact among children began at 11.1 years for females and 11.4 for males. This is from the same geographical area that has been fighting against sex education in the schools for decades on the grounds that it was a problem which did not exist there. We, as a society, can ill afford to take the same position with the current devastating threat of drug and alcohol abuse.

My Brethren, if we needed a selfish reason to support our national program, the potential loss to our fraternity in members alone would justify our action. The potential of what can happen if we, as citizens of the world, fail to control this "CANCER" that is destroying our youth will provide all the incentive we need.

In looking at the membership statistics of the Masonic Fraternity over the past several decades, we must realize that to a great extent we, as a fraternity, have lost an entire generation through a lack of interest in the principles and philosophies for which we stand. What we are facing today could be far worse.

Perhaps the greatest problem which will confront the National Masonic Foundation for the Prevention of Drug and Alcohol Abuse Among Children is the correlation of effort among grand jurisdictions which have no nationally based organizational level.

Probably the greatest philanthropy that has ever existed is the Shriner's program for crippled children's hospitals. The Shrine, however, is made up of a fraction of the Masons of the United States and Canada. Think how much more we should be able to accomplish with so many more members to draw from. The Shrine, however, has a national level and has the organizational effort to correlate the activity of their philanthropy.

Every jurisdiction, although having the same major problem of the threat of drug and alcohol abuse, is going to have unique problems unto themselves due to operational procedures which function within that state or province. I will attempt to emphasize some of the procedures which we have found to be successful in Pennsylvania which hopefully may serve as a guide to other jurisdictions in establishing their criteria and goals.

From our experience in entering into the program through the Pennsylvania Foundation For the Prevention of Drug and Alcohol Abuse Among Children, we became aware in a short time that the most effective way we could deal with this problem was through professional agencies already in existence. We also learned that it was necessary, prior to dealing with any of the agencies, to check out their references and qualifications through the Department of Health and Education. There are many organizations ready and willing to accept whatever help we can

provide but are not qualified or equipped to handle problems of this magnitude. We had to determine where we could be most effective.

Our basic concern, as is the basic concern of the National Foundation, is not rehabilitation but rather prevention through education. With the recognition of this approach, those Agencies available with which we can work are narrowed down considerably. At the present time, the Pennsylvania Foundation has established a working relationship with 15 different organizations within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

Some of the organizations we work with do involve rehabilitation, but we have made it a strict practice to deal only with the educational end of that organization's function. For example, one agency with which we work is the Gateway Rehabilitation Center. Although their primary function is that of rehabilitation, our relationship with them has provided for the production of an educational film and a provision to hire a psychiatrist to work with children who are growing up in the homes of alcoholics and drug addicts to prepare them to deal with the reintroduction of that family member back into their home.

Our relationship with the Department of Health and Education involves the training of selected public school educators in how to handle drug and alcohol abuse in the school system. This has proven not only to be a highly beneficial portion of our program but has exposed Freemasonry widely not only to the public but to the state government.

In this program, we provide use of our "Masonic Conference Center" as the location for three and five-day training seminars. The Masonic Conference Center is adjacent to our Masonic Home complex which exposes to many for the first time one of our other Masonic charities.

To give you an idea of the magnitude of this portion of our program, 1199 participants took advantage of the opportunity for this training involving a total of 84 days in 1986. The Foundation provided the room and board while the Department of Health and Education provided the training personnel.

At two locations, the St. Francis Medical Center and Thomas Jefferson University Hospital, we are involved with pre-natal and postnatal education of mothers of addicted infants.

At Mercyhurst Preparatory School, we support and underwrite the expenses for a group of young people who, through theatrical exemplification, express to their peers the effects of becoming involved with drugs and alcohol.

The Foundation has also awarded a \$6,000 scholarship to a registered nurse to complete work in the field of chemical dependency in pregnant women and their newborns.

Another type of program we are involved with is through "Gaudenzia, Inc. - Vantage House" in the support of an educational curriculum for children totally geared to prevention and education. Through them, we are also supporting the publication of an education pamphlet with statewide

distribution aimed at parents and educators as well as an orientation manual for mothers of these children.

What I have expressed are some of the varieties of programs with which our Foundation is currently involved in our jurisdiction. Costs for these programs have ranged from a low of \$500 for the production of a training film to \$11,500 for a more extensive educational program. The extent of involvement would be up to each jurisdiction .

In recognition that our program is still in its infancy, we would certainly anticipate a continued investigation into the most effective means through which we can contribute to control this insidious disease.

There is in all probability no exact duplication of our programs available in other jurisdictions. Variations in your efforts will be necessary to fit those programs which will be available to you in your jurisdiction. One of the functions of the National Foundation is to provide for each jurisdiction advice and guidance to organize your own foundation and/or efforts. At some time in the near future, we anticipate that the National Foundation will provide for you brochures describing the Foundation and its organization.

We must never lose sight of the final objective of our efforts "TO HELP CHILDREN." The public exposure, however, which Pennsylvania Freemasonry has experienced since the formation of the foundation has been an unanticipated side benefit outside the initial purpose of its origin. It is not predictable as to what lasting effect the success of the National Foundation may have on the history of Freemasonry.

We can, however, say with little reservation in regard to another great foundation that as much as the Shrine helped create the Crippled Children's Hospitals the crippled children's hospital has helped the Shrine. Perhaps one of the great needs of the Masonic fraternity has been a national cause to unite our efforts. Some day we hope it may be said that not only did Freemasonry inspire the National Foundation but that the National Foundation has given inspiration to Freemasonry.

*STB - May 1987*