

Children's Defense Fund—Minnesota's 2011 Updates

Founded in 1973 by Marian Wright Edelman, Children's Defense Fund is a nonprofit child advocacy organization that has worked to ensure a level playing field for all children. It champions policies and programs that lift children out of poverty, protect them from abuse and neglect and ensure their access to health care, quality education and a moral and spiritual foundation. Supported by foundation and corporate grants and individual donations, CDF advocates at the federal, state and community levels on behalf to ensure children are always a priority.

BREAKING NEWS: We are extremely pleased to announce the recent appointment of Amy Crawford as CDF—Minnesota's new regional director. Ms. Crawford will step into the position long held by Jim Koppel, who left the organization in April to become the Deputy Commissioner at the Minnesota Department of Health.

An accomplished and versatile leader in Minnesota's philanthropic and nonprofit communities, Ms. Crawford comes to CDF-MN with more than 20 years of foundation and nonprofit experience. This includes a track record of successful community involvement, which focused on improving the lives of children, youth and families.

Ms. Crawford expressed honor in being selected for this leadership role. "I'm privileged to advance the work of this historic organization that recognizes the importance of investing in children above all else. Given the tough financial realities facing families and the state, I'm committed to continuing CDF's efforts to provide a strong voice and presence for all children and youth, especially those most vulnerable."

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

We work to improve the lives of Minnesota's children through our advocacy, research, outreach and youth development.

Advocacy

Legislative Session: During the 2011 legislative session, 12 policy changes and program cuts, totaling approximately \$25 million, originally included in the HHS budget were removed from the budget agreement. These cuts would have impacted programs that help many of Minnesota's most vulnerable children. CDF-MN worked diligently in collaboration with other advocates to preserve funding for these critical services. Because family income is a strong predictor of a child's outcomes, CDF-MN is launching a statewide initiative focused on achieving economic security for Minnesota children and their families. CDF-MN is also expanding its child welfare advocacy efforts, working to increase both legislators' and constituents' knowledge of issues affecting children who have been, or are at risk of being, neglected or abused.

More work to be done: While funding for many critical children's programs was saved last session, services for neglected and abused children and child care subsidies suffered substantial cuts. Because the budget was balanced with one-time solutions, our state will be facing deficits in the years to come. Legislators will need to face these serious budget issues while looking forward to the state's future. By investing in children—prevention, early intervention and more—the state will see long-term gains with healthier adults joining in the workforce.

Research

CDF produced three significant research publications in 2011.

- *Economic Security and Child Well-Being:* CDF-MN's KIDS COUNT data book. This annual publication provides state data based on a variety of indicators that show how Minnesota's children and families are doing, using a different overall theme each year.

- *Zero to Three Research to Policy Project: Maternal Depression and Early Childhood.* Research is showing the pathways through which healthy and unhealthy growth occurs and ways to send more children down the route that will ultimately benefit all Minnesotans. If addressed early and holistically, maternal depression and its negative effects can be mitigated and even prevented.
- *Zero to Three Research to Policy Project: Minnesota's Invisible Children: Children in Families Receiving MFIP.* Seventy percent of the people receiving Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) are children, more than half under age 5, yet they are nearly invisible in state and federal laws. The deep poverty in which MFIP families live makes these children at high risk for developmental delays. MFIP is a potentially cost-effective doorway through which to deliver early childhood services to improve children's readiness for school and outcomes in adulthood.

Translating early childhood research into public policy: CDF-MN increases attention to the public policy implications of brain research for young children and their families, and provides concrete policy solutions to reduce the incidence and impact of maternal depression in early childhood, and improve outcomes for young children in child welfare and MFIP.

Outreach

Bridge to Benefits (B2B): (www.bridgetobenefits.org): B2B is CDF-MN's multi-state project to improve the well-being of low-income families and individuals by linking them to public work support programs and tax credits via an online screening tool. The free and confidential tool helps families and individuals understand if they are eligible for an array of public work support programs and tax credits and find helpful information to guide them through the application process. B2B continues to grow, both in usage and site capabilities. During the first half of 2011, 12,687 screens were done (includes 33,831 family members) an 87% increase over the same period in 2010. More than 90% of families screened were eligible for at least one program.

Youth Development

The CDF Freedom Schools®: Freedom Schools provide summer and after-school enrichment that helps children fall in love with reading, increases their self-esteem, and generates more positive attitudes toward learning. There are six Twin Cities Freedom Schools serving more than 400 scholars, including one hosted in the Minneapolis Juvenile Detention Center, Stadium View. While visiting a Freedom School Harambee (come together) this summer, a young scholar got up in front of the entire school to give an appreciation to his peers. The project director said that last year, this boy had never spoken—now he was standing up in front of everyone to give a recognition.

Beat the Odds®: Each year CDF-MN recognizes high school seniors who, despite having faced tremendous obstacles, were successful at school, home and in their communities. Last March marked the 19th annual awards celebration. Held at The Depot, more than 600 people came to celebrate these students and see them receive more than \$25,000 scholarships. Kerri Miller emceed and Mayors Chris Coleman and R.T. Rybak presented the awards. Special guests included Minnesota Viking Jim Kleinsasser; former Minnesota Viking and NFL Hall of Famer John Randle; and former Minnesota Viking Chris Liewinski. The evening began with a silent auction and reception and included the dinner, awards presentations and a live auction.

SAVE THE DATE: Plan to attend the 20th Beat the Odds, Friday, March 16, 2012.

Youth Advocate Leadership Training (YALT®) Program: CDF's vision is to develop the next generation of leaders who are committed to social justice and improving the lives of all children in America. To help achieve this goal, one of the many programs that CDF offers is the Young Advocate Leadership Training (YALT®) program. More than fifty young people have gone to the YALT trainings from our region. Trainings are normally held at the CDF retreat center at Haley Farm in Clinton, Tennessee.