

Insuring the Future for Children - 1991

Our tradition tells us that the “keepers of the city” are those who teach and care for the children.

Issue

Although the resources to improve, protect, and assure the well-being of children are available, nevertheless a substantial proportion of the world’s children face lives of desperation. Their experience includes hunger, poverty, illness, impaired development and death. The inadequate nutritional, health care and educational resources addressed to children’s needs perpetuate this quiet catastrophe. Among children of the United States many are not exempt.

Background

In large parts of the world, the harsh facts include the daily tragedy of 40,000 children dying of malnutrition and preventable diseases, 150 million children with ill health and poor growth, and 100 million children between 6 and 11 years of age who are not in school.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which became international law in September 1990, among other issues, obligates nations to combat malnutrition and disease and provide basic education for all children.

These commitments were reaffirmed and adopted as goals on September 30, 1990, by the first World Summit for Children, in which the United States President participated. In the United States, The World Summit for Children Implementation Act has both international and national components. By shifting U.S. foreign aid allocations towards the needs of children it directs funding increases for primary health measures.

The National Commission on Children and other experts have pointed to the declining quality of life of many American children. In the United States:

1. Children are the poorest group. One in five lives in a family with an income under the federal poverty level. Children make up the most rapidly growing segment of the homeless population.
2. The infant mortality rate is one of the highest in the developed world, higher than the rate in 21 other nations.
3. Students test lower on standardized tests than students from other nations. About 30% of ninth grade students do not graduate from high school.

Since 1981 the proportion of children receiving psychological services has increased almost 80%. From the 1960s to 1986 the adolescent suicide rate increased from 3.6 to 10.2 deaths per 100,000. Senator John D. Rockefeller, Chairman of the National Commission on Children, wrote in the Commission report, which was published in 1991, “Too many of today’s children and adolescents will reach adulthood unhealthy, illiterate, unemployable, lacking moral direction and a vision of a secure future.”

To reverse the decline in the quality of life of children in the United States the public and private sectors will need to work together to foster their healthy development. This would include implementing comprehensive programs to insure income security and encourage economic independence, provide universal access to improved health care services, expand preschool programs to insure that all children will be ready for school, and strengthen the

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schools to improve their effectiveness.

Transmitting a value system based on respect for human life and dignity that enables young people to evaluate their daily behavior and plan fulfilling and socially aware lives is the joint responsibility of family, school and community. Within the Reform Movement, synagogues, religious schools, Sisterhoods and youth groups help families give their children the Jewish values that will enable them to become confident, socially committed, responsible, Jewishly knowledgeable and spiritually centered adults.

Resolution

Since its inception, The National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods has adopted resolutions responding to the plight of children. NFTS reaffirms its commitments and calls upon its United States affiliates to:

1. Urge the United States Government to pass The World Summit for Children Implementation Act, as it refers to children worldwide as well as the United States, to assure children's health and basic education.
2. Demand immediate response at all levels of government so as to provide funding to alleviate the hunger and homelessness of children and their families.
3. Work at all appropriate governmental levels for passage of legislation and of policies that would provide family support systems such as income security, early education programs, quality day care and family leave.
4. Encourage federal, state and community efforts to provide all children with a quality education that enables them to continue their studies, to be qualified for entrance into the job market or to handle independently the activities of daily living.
5. Make schools responsive to the needs of children by adopting fundamental reforms, such as:
 1. developmentally appropriate, achievement-based, rigorous and challenging curricula
 2. recruitment and retention of skillful, imaginative teachers
 3. improved school environments
 4. financing that is equitable across school districts
 5. multidisciplinary approaches to help youngsters with multiple serious needs achieve their potential as well as reinstated and, wherever possible, increased pre-1983 levels of funding for compensatory education.
6. Advocate and establish, with corporate employers and community agencies, cooperative efforts to expand available school resources, such as the adopt-a-scholar and adopt-a-school financial and tutorial programs, summer and school year internships and mentoring programs.
7. Work with community coalitions to implement local programs for children, such as child care and mobile toy/library vans.

We further encourage our Sisterhood affiliates in Canada and worldwide to act upon the issues as they arise in their nations.