



BJA Bureau of Justice Assistance Bulletin

Nancy E. Gist, Director

Kid's Korner Program: City of Reno, Nevada, Police Department

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Kid's Korner joins law enforcement, public health, and social service agencies with a myriad of other public and private organizations to assist low-income children and families in the Reno, Nevada, area. Through this special partnership, Kid's Korner works to ensure that all children, regardless of economic circumstances, have the opportunity to lead healthy and productive lives. The Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) supports this innovative program through a grant awarded under the BJA fiscal year 1998 Open Solicitation Grant Program.

Washoe County, Nevada, which includes the cities of Reno and Sparks, is a thriving and growing community with an estimated resident population of 300,000 people. The area is known for its tourist attractions, including casino gambling. Approximately 850 people move to Washoe County each month, many seeking employment in the region's casinos and hotels, which offer many low-paying jobs with few employee benefits.

Housing costs in Washoe County are 25 percent above the national average, with scarce affordable housing in the region. Many low-income workers cannot rent apartments in the area due to the large deposits and credit checks that are required. These workers end up living in older motels that often are poorly maintained and in violation of building, safety, and health codes. Weekly motel rates average between \$120 and



Young patients come for a checkup at the Saint Mary's Take Care-A-Van.

\$200, and are often much more than a comparable apartment would cost.

In June 1996, two Reno police officers investigated several incidents involving small children and their parents living in the motels on Reno's Fourth Street Corridor. The police officers found children who were unsupervised, hungry, and living in extreme filth and poverty. Parents were frequently intoxicated, and there were indications of severe and chronic substance abuse. These families needed considerable help, but they were unaware of community resources that could provide assistance. The Reno Police Department created the Kid's Korner program to help meet the needs of these vulnerable children by linking families to community resources and services.

Kid's Korner Program

Kid's Korner is a "Knock-and-Talk" program in which police officers visit and check on the welfare of children living in local motels and provide families access to resources in the community. A public health nurse accompanies a police officer to offer on-the-spot health and social assessments of the families, "well-baby" checkups, and immediate medical referrals. The nurse also provides education on hygiene, nutrition, child development, parenting skills, and the effects of drugs and alcohol. Funding from the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) has allowed the Reno Police Department to add a full-time police officer and a full-time public health nurse to Kid's Korner, enabling the program to significantly increase the number of children and families it serves.

The Kid's Korner program has grown considerably since its founding in 1996 and is now an integral part of the Reno Police Department. Within the program's first year of operation, the Washoe County Sheriff's Office and the City of Sparks Police Department each assigned one officer to Kid's Korner, allowing the program to serve communities outside the Reno city borders. The Saint Mary's

Community Outreach "Take Care-A-Van" was added to the program shortly thereafter, enabling Kid's Korner to provide medical services to families at their doorsteps. Kid's Korner is now a collaboration of six agencies in the Reno area: the Reno Police Department; the Sparks Police Department; the Washoe County Sheriff's Office; the Washoe County District Health Department; Saint Mary's Community Outreach; and, most recently, the Washoe County Department of Social Services, which added social work staff to the program in September 1999.

"Kid's Korner fulfills the core public health functions of assurance through its outreach to homeless and near-homeless families. Its provision of, and referrals to, health-care services constitutes some of the most important work we do."

Barbara Hunt, R.N., M.P.A.,
Division Director, Clinical and
Community Health Services,
Washoe County District Health
Department, Nevada

Mission and Goals

The mission of the Kid's Korner program underscores the program's commitment not only to provide immediate care to children and families but also to connect them with long-term resources that will nurture their overall health:

The Kid's Korner program is committed to assisting the community's vulnerable children by linking families with resources and services to increase their opportunity for a healthy future.

To fulfill this mission, Kid's Korner has developed the following program

goals. These goals are clearly connected to the program's design and mission.

- Improve the physical and emotional safety of children by
 - a. Addressing immediate safety concerns.
 - b. Reducing the incidence of child abuse and neglect.
 - c. Improving parenting skills.
- Improve the physical health of children by
 - a. Addressing immediate health-care needs.
 - b. Providing preventive health care, such as immunizations, and educating parents about health care.
 - c. Providing and improving access to health and dental care.
 - d. Making referrals to other agencies as needed.
- Educate parents about
 - a. Child health and safety.
 - b. Prenatal and infant care.
 - c. Family planning.
 - d. Prevention of sexually transmitted diseases.
- Improve the quality of life for families by
 - a. Helping families set priorities to meet their basic needs.
 - b. Referring families to community services.
 - c. Assisting families in enrolling and equipping their children for school.

To accomplish these goals, the Kid's Korner program has developed two separate, but interrelated, components to provide services to low-income children and families in the Reno area. These two components—Knock-and-Talk and Take Care-A-Van—are described in detail below.

Knock-and-Talk

Kid's Korner focuses on one of Reno's hidden crises: the significant

needs of homeless children and families who have found temporary housing in the area's motels. The program's target population is children ranging from newborn to age 6 who are at risk because of inadequate health care, adult supervision, housing, and nutrition. Children in this age group are among the most underserved population because they are often invisible to the network of services that can be accessed once a child attends school. To locate these children, Kid's Korner staff visit about two dozen area motels, asking the occupants if they have children.

The targeted motels are selected from a combination of such sources as police records of service calls related to child abuse and neglect, Washoe County Child Protective Services reports, and informal discussions with other professionals who are in contact with homeless and near-homeless families.

During the Knock-and-Talk motel visits, the police officer and public health nurse assess the family's situation and determine the types of services and interventions appropriate for the family. The public health nurse brings a baby scale and other medical supplies to check the health of the infants and children she sees on her visits. She also educates families about parenting skills, nutrition, hygiene, and other health-related issues. While the nurse is attending to the family's medical needs, the police officer spends time with the children, encouraging them to do well in school and to stay away from drugs, crime, and other negative influences. The Kid's Korner police officers have become positive role models for the children, something missing in many of their lives. Officers recognize that by working with children at a young age they can help them avoid future criminal involvement. Kid's Korner, with its emphasis on building positive relationships between law enforcement officers and the residents they serve, is an example of community policing at its finest.



Police officers and a public health nurse pay a Knock-and-Talk visit to residents at a local motel.

The direct and active participation of law enforcement officers during the Knock-and-Talk visits sets Kid's Korner apart from other similarly focused initiatives and has greatly contributed to the program's early success. Before the program began,

would attempt to remove the children. They would not open their doors to her and frequently hid. Now, with the addition of a police officer and a team approach, doors are opened, children are seen, and services and referrals are provided.

Kid's Korner has found that families new to the program are more willing to see program staff when a uniformed police officer initiates contact than when the nurse is by herself. The police officer lends a reassuring presence to families unfamiliar with the program. Exhibit 1 illustrates the Knock-and-Talk outreach protocol.

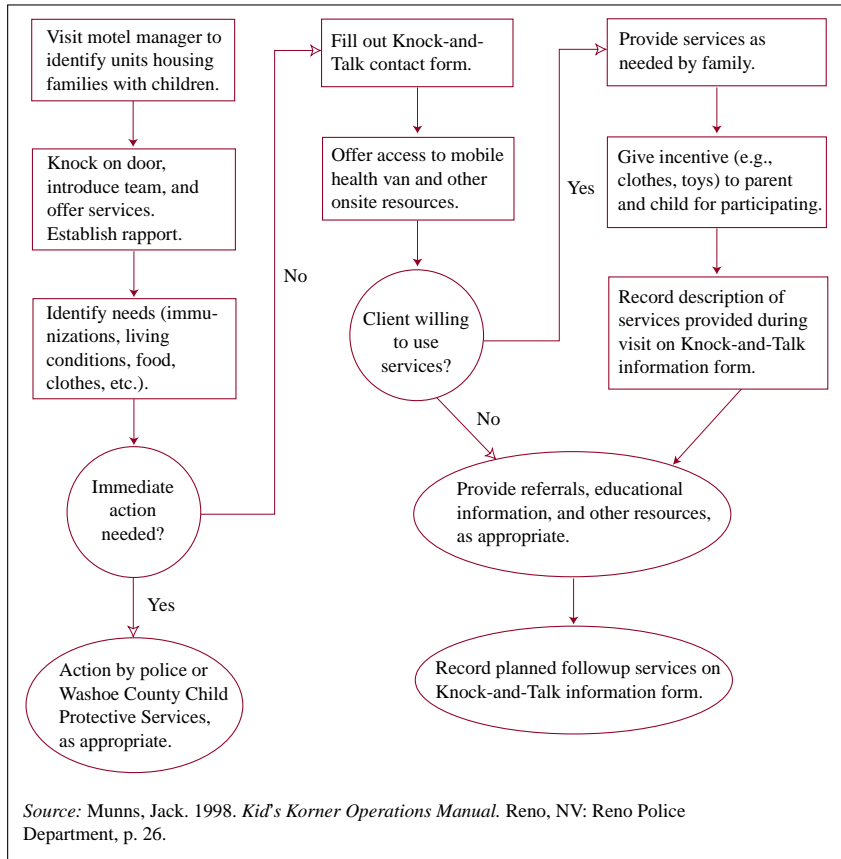
The overall philosophy of the Knock-and-Talk component is to address family problems quickly and on the spot whenever possible. In preparation for the motel visits, the team assembles resources: educational materials (social service resources, Kid's Korner brochures, health and child development information), toys, school supplies, children's clothes, diapers, transportation vouchers, and resource guides. This approach blends outreach visits and immediate followup services. For example, a family found with school-age children at home who are not yet

"The Kid's Korner program is truly an example of community-oriented government. I believe this is one of the most important and effective services we have provided to members of the community who are traditionally forgotten."

Jerry Hoover, Chief of Police, Reno Police Department, Reno, Nevada

many families were reluctant to see the public health nurse when she visited. Having prior experience with child welfare agencies, families feared the nurse was a social worker who

Exhibit 1. Knock-and-Talk Outreach Protocol



Occasionally, Kid's Korner staff encounter situations requiring immediate and direct intervention from law enforcement and child welfare agencies. These cases include children who have gone without food for days, children with inadequate clothing, acutely ill children, and children living in unsanitary conditions. Other examples are children who have been abandoned and young children who are left to care for their younger siblings while their parents are away. When these situations arise, the Kid's Korner team contacts Washoe County Child Protective Services to place the children in protective custody. The arrest of offending parents and the removal of children to an emergency child-care facility are sometimes necessary, but the goal of Kid's Korner's proactive approach is to avoid separating children from families whenever possible.

Take Care-A-Van

The Knock-and-Talk visits form the foundation of the Kid's Korner program. All other program activities originate from the contacts made during these visits. One such activity is the Saint Mary's Take Care-A-Van. The Take Care-A-Van is a fully equipped, 40-foot mobile medical clinic donated by Saint Mary's Community Outreach, a non-profit, health-care and philanthropic organization. This component of Kid's Korner responds to a critical need discovered early in the program.

Many children seen during the Knock-and-Talk visits are not current with their immunization schedules, a major barrier to school enrollment. When the Kid's Korner program began, the public health nurse administered immunization shots to children in the families' motel rooms. Often, the rooms were dirty and inappropriate for medical procedures. Compounding this problem, the nurse could only see a few children during her visits because the children were scattered in different motels throughout the area.

Medical services have been greatly enhanced by the Saint Mary's Take

enrolled in the local school may receive immediate transportation to the school, assistance in completing the enrollment process, and a cab voucher back to the motel. This action-oriented, problem-solving approach is one of the core strengths of the program. The ability to offer immediate services is a critical resource when working with families who often do not know where they will be living from one week to the next.

Kid's Korner staff regularly revisit families. These families may have received help from the team in the past or may have simply welcomed the offer of assistance. With families who are initially resistant, the Kid's Korner team continues to offer support and understanding. All services are voluntary, and medical treatment is not given without parental consent.

An important objective of the Knock-and-Talk visits is to treat medical

problems early, before they deteriorate and become more difficult, and often more expensive, to cure. For example, many children and families seen by the Kid's Korner team do not have medical insurance or a health-care provider. With few options available, families often take their children to the hospital emergency room for medical assistance, at great expense to the county and area health-care agencies. Kid's Korner works with families to avoid these costly trips to the emergency room. In conjunction with the Saint Mary's Take Care-A-Van, social service workers from the Washoe County Department of Social Services follow up the Knock-and-Talk visits to help families obtain immunizations, physical examinations, and referrals to area health clinics. By receiving regular medical care, children and families can remain healthy and avoid having to use the hospital emergency room as their primary treatment provider.



Getting vaccinated by a Take Care-A-Van nurse.

Care-A-Van. The van is staffed by an immunization nurse, a clerk, a nurse practitioner from the Washoe County District Health Department, and two human service workers from the Washoe County Department of Social Services. Twice each week, the Take Care-A-Van drives to a different part of the Reno area to provide free health services, particularly immunizations, to families. Parents, often contacted the day before during the Knock-and-Talk rounds, bring their children to obtain free preventive medical care. A wide range of health-care services is available at the van:

- Immunizations.
- Education about illness signs and symptoms, home safety, feeding, and parenting skills.
- Well-baby examinations.
- Lice and scabies checks and treatment.
- Medications, such as fluoride, acetaminophen, and diaper rash ointment.
- Referrals to other community resources, such as counseling, clinics, dentists, and public assistance programs.

The Saint Mary's Take Care-A-Van is now the second largest childhood

immunization clinic in Washoe County. Immunizations and other services are offered on a continuing basis but are not intended as a substitute for regular primary care. Instead, the health nurses work to avoid costly emergency treatment of clients, to ensure that immunizations are current, and to offer immediate short-term help. Following these services, many families are referred to area clinics and other health-care providers to obtain additional assistance. The van functions as a "hub" where social service workers, public health nurses, and police officers can assess the welfare of their clients and encourage a long-term relationship with the program.

Community Linkages

An important aspect of the program is its emphasis on community referrals and linkages. Through the Knock-and-Talk and Take Care-A-Van components, Kid's Korner seeks to eliminate service gaps that hinder families and children from obtaining needed assistance.

Several programs in the Reno area are available for low-income residents. These programs range from federal programs, such as Medicaid and WIC (a nutrition program for women, infants, and children), to local services,

such as community health clinics, food banks, and thrift stores. Unfortunately, many families do not use these services. Families seen by Kid's Korner staff are often new to the area or move so frequently that they do not know about the services available in their neighborhood. Such barriers as illiteracy, lack of funds, cultural differences, lack of transportation, mental health issues, domestic violence, child abuse and neglect, and drug and alcohol addiction also hinder families from accessing and receiving community services.

To overcome these obstacles, Kid's Korner staff work hard to educate families about and, more important, link them to these resources. Regular tasks include helping families to obtain stable housing, birth and immunization records for school enrollment, and information on emergency food pantries and places that serve meals. Program staff also refer clients to appropriate agencies and monitor their progress to ensure that they receive the services they need. Two full-time human service support specialists from the Washoe County Department of Social Services are responsible for overseeing this effort. The goal of these activities is to help families become self-sufficient and increase their chances for a healthy and productive future.

Collaborative Partnerships

Partnerships are essential to the success of the Kid's Korner program. Not only does the program depend on the contribution of resources and staff from several agencies, it also requires a diversity of perspectives and expertise on how best to serve disadvantaged children and families in the community. Kid's Korner staff have the freedom to step outside traditional boundaries when providing services. For example, during the Knock-and-Talk visits, the public health nurse may be accompanied by a Reno, Sparks, or Washoe County law enforcement



A public health nurse discusses available resources and provides information to a parent.

officer, regardless of the jurisdiction that the team may be in that day. If jurisdictional lines were held fast, program operations would suffer as program staff tried to juggle the needs of the clients, the staff schedules, and the city of residence. Instead, the officers conduct outreach and followup services across jurisdictional lines while ensuring that required official police actions are handled by the appropriate department. The Kid's Korner staff work as a team, irrespective of jurisdictional boundaries.

Many other organizations contribute to the success of the Kid's Korner program. Kid's Korner works with religious groups, nonprofit organizations, taxi companies, grocery stores, and others that contribute funds and supplies. Service groups such as the Junior League of Reno, Lions Club, Girl Scouts, and Soroptimists have donated money, supplies, and volunteer time to the program. Many local community human service agencies such as Family Counseling Services, Project Restart, Gang Alternative Partnership, Crisis Call Center, Health Access Washoe County, Family Court Judges, Head Start, Washoe County School District, and Catholic Community Services offer assistance and donate services.

Corporate partners such as Ralston Foods and Silver Legacy Hotel/Casino have also contributed to Kid's Korner.

In April 1999, several partners joined together to hold a Just for Fun spring day camp at the Silver Legacy's City Center Pavilion. More than 70 children enjoyed a day of games, arts and crafts, and storytelling. Appearances by the Washoe County Sheriff's Office K-9 units and Darin the D.A.R.E. Lion were also popular with the children. For children who normally spend

most of their days inside a motel room, this event was an opportunity for them to be "regular" kids for the day. Kid's Korner plans to hold similar events in the future.

Kid's Korner has received a variety of financial and nonfinancial resources to support the day-to-day operations of the program. The program's operating budget of more than \$330,000 is a combination of cash donations and federal, state, and private foundation grants. The Reno Police Department administers these funds on behalf of the program. In addition to the Bureau of Justice Assistance, the E.L. Cord Foundation, the Bretzlaff Foundation, the Nevada Division of Child and Family Services, and others have awarded grants to support Kid's Korner.

The nonfinancial resources obtained by Kid's Korner are also critical to the program's success. The six major partners contribute more than \$200,000 per year in combined salaries and services. Donated clothing, food, baby supplies, taxi vouchers, emergency housing vouchers, school supplies, and other materials were worth an additional \$10,000 in 1999. These numbers do not, of course, include the invaluable dedication and commitment of Kid's Korner staff and volunteers,



Members of the Knock-and-Talk team.

without which this program could not continue.

Kid's Korner is a true public-private collaboration and its existence and success are directly attributable to the many partners who have joined together to help children and families in need in their community. Their combined talents and resources have allowed the program to expand and become an established source of support for low-income residents in the Reno area. Perhaps the program's greatest assets are the spirit of collaboration and sacrifice evident among the various program stakeholders and their willingness to set aside traditional boundaries to achieve a com-

mon goal. Created by a group of individuals and agencies committed to addressing child abuse and neglect in Northern Nevada, Kid's Korner can serve as a model for other jurisdictions facing similar problems.

The Kid's Korner program was honored with the National Council on Crime and Delinquency's New American Community Award on March 23, 2000, at a ceremony in Chicago, Illinois. The award recognizes individuals, citizen groups, and organizations across the country that are working to reduce crime in their communities, particularly programs that strive to keep children from getting involved in crime.

Acknowledgments

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