



### **What We Do**

Circle of Parents® is a national network of statewide non-profit organizations and parent leaders that are dedicated to using the mutual self-help support group model as a means of preventing child abuse and neglect and strengthening families. Circle of Parents offers anyone in a parenting role the opportunity to participate in weekly group meetings with other parents to exchange ideas, share information, develop and practice new parenting skills, learn about community resources, and give and receive support. Groups are parent-led with the support of a trained group facilitator, are conducted in a confidential and non-judgmental manner, are free of charge and provide developmentally-appropriate children's programs or child care concurrent with the parent group meetings. Developing leadership on the individual, family, community and societal levels, as desired by parent participants, is a central theme of the Circle of Parents model.

Focus groups of Circle of Parents' participants convened by national researchers in the fall of 2004 indicate that parents feel supported and connected to other parents, learn how to parent children as they grow, learn about non-violent ways to discipline children and learn more about themselves and how this awareness helps them to become better parents. Parents also report gaining knowledge about meeting family needs from resources and materials that are provided during the support group meetings. Similar findings have been revealed during outcome evaluations conducted by statewide network members of Circle of Parents. In Minnesota, it was found that parents become empowered to influence other parents and their community.<sup>1</sup> In Florida, results of a statewide outcomes evaluation suggested that parents improved their self-management skills by learning new, non-violent ways to cope with stress.<sup>2</sup> Circle of Parents programs are uniquely able to provide emotional support, while at the same time challenging parental perceptions and behaviors through peer pressure, role modeling and compliance with group norms.<sup>3</sup>

Other indications of the effectiveness, reach and efficiencies of Circle of Parents are as follows:

- Circle of Parents is a cost-effective and innovative service approach to the provision of community supports for children and families.
- Circle of Parents creates opportunities for parents and caretakers to build closer ties with their children, relatives, other families and neighbors.
- Families participate in a helping network that includes parents as natural helpers to each other in a mutually supportive manner.
- Since Circle of Parents support groups rely on partnerships with other agencies, schools, family support institutions, faith-based communities and civic groups, families gain important connections to community resources for formal and informal support. Many of these resources are close to home.

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<sup>1</sup> Treichel C.J., Bjournson C., Dando, K, Hagel H, Siegel E, Skillingstad C, Thompson D. Family Support Network Parent Outcomes Study. Prevent Child Abuse Minnesota. August 2002

<sup>2</sup> Falconer MK, Brunger R. Circle of Parents Support Group Evaluation Report. The Ounce of Prevention Fund of Florida. January 2005

<sup>3</sup> Gay K. The Circle of Parents Program: Increasing Social Support for Parents and Caregiver. North Carolina Medical Journal. September/October 2005

- By empowering parents as leaders, participants in Circle of Parents groups are prepared to take on leadership roles in their families and on the community, state and national levels, enabling family support programs and policy to benefit from the expertise and experience of parents.

### **How We Operate**

To sustain and enhance these achievements for families, the organizations and parent leaders affiliated with the national network pool resources, whether cash, goods, services, or expertise or to develop, enhance and expand Circle of Parents support groups. The members represent a diversity of experiences and backgrounds and include parents, administrators, community organizers, management and program services staff and a cross-section of human services professionals. Honoring principles of mutual respect, equal contribution and shared leadership, each member:

- Actively participates in the work of Circle of Parents and shares responsibility for its success;
- Shares resources, both human and material, with other members;
- Substantially contributes to strategic planning, problem solving, implementation and evaluation of Circle of Parents' activities and projects through participation on committees; and
- Substantially contributes to the growth and development of Circle of Parents through involvement in special projects, sharing data and information about program outcomes, participating in collaborative ventures with other national family support organizations, and engaging in advocacy and development efforts to promote the work of Circle of Parents.

During the past eight years, the number of organizations providing Circle of Parents in communities has increased substantially and we have created several national products to support their work. These include:

- National standards and principles for self-help support groups
- Grant-making system to support local program development and innovative initiatives
- Quality assurance processes for state network development
- National group facilitator and children's program manuals
- Training curricula for trainers of support group facilitators and parent leadership development
- Parent handbooks, tip sheets and outreach brochures (in Spanish and English)
- Training and technical assistance systems, including a website, listserv, technical assistance conference calls and site visits and an electronic resource library
- Parent leadership development materials, including a video conceptualized by and featuring parent leaders

### **What's Our History**

Circle of Parents was originally created as a project funded by the Office on Child Abuse and Neglect (OCAN). The project brought together a wide variety of expertise and years of successful program delivery among parent leaders, 17 child abuse prevention and family support organizations, known as the National Family Support Roundtable, and Prevent Child Abuse America (PCA America). After growing to a network of 29 statewide and regional organizations and 12 parent leaders, Circle of Parents® incorporated in April 2004 and was launched as a non-profit organization in October 2004. Circle of Parents continues to partner with Prevent Child Abuse America and other national family support organizations to fulfill its mission.

Circle of Parents was also supported for over five years by the Office of Juvenile Delinquency and Prevention (OJJDP) to develop and expand programs for underserved communities and populations, including those determined to be at higher risk of victimization such as families of children birth to three years old and Alaska Native, American Indian and African American children.

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Currently, Circle of Parents serves as a resource partner for the FRIENDS National Resource Center, a program of the Children's Bureau. In this role, Circle of Parents is responsible for developing curricula and implementing training and technical assistance activities that teach community based child abuse prevention (CBCAP) organizations in every state the values, benefits and approaches to engaging parents in family support program and policy development. Most of the CBCAP organizations are either the state child welfare agency or the children's trust fund. Using the Parent Leadership Ambassador Training (PLAT) program, on site TA visits and TA teleconference calls, we have successfully trained groups of professionals and parent leaders in over 35 states. We expect to reach all remaining states, as well as Washington, D.C. and Puerto Rico by the end of 2009. We also facilitate the FRIENDS Parent Advisory Team.

More recently, Circle of Parents received a grant from the Office of Family Assistance to implement a comprehensive training, technical assistance and community access project to aid local home visiting programs in the provision of support and education to new and expectant fathers. The mission of *Partners for Kids: United Hands Make the Best Families* emphasizes the importance of healthy father-child relationships, parental balance among mothers and fathers, and family support services that are both mother and father-friendly. The project is being implemented in partnership with the National Fatherhood Initiative, the Conscious Fathering Program™ of Parent Trust for Washington Children, Prevent Child Abuse America and Dr. Leo Mesa, a domestic violence expert. Initially targeting Healthy Families America and Parents as Teachers programs, *Partners for Kids* will expand to other home visiting programs in the final 3 years of the project.

### **Where We're Heading**

Moving forward, Circle of Parents seeks to advance its capacity building and training and technical assistance work by focusing on the following priority areas:

- Advocating for parent involvement in program and policy development by offering parent leadership training to parents, practitioners and a variety of family support organizations.
- Providing ongoing training and technical assistance and networking among Circle of Parents programs to promote continuous quality improvement.
- Growing the number of children's programs, viewed as a vital component of the Circle of Parents' support groups.
- Advancing efforts to build evidence for the effectiveness of the Circle of Parents program model.
- Collaborating with other family support organizations and initiatives that align with our model of family support, consensus decision-making and sharing leadership among parents and professionals.

Circle of Parents is currently managed by a national staff of three and is governed by a voluntary board of directors. Its operations are heavily dependent upon the contributions of its member organizations and national Parents as Leaders Team.