

**Advocating for Children**  
A report from Christ Church Cathedral's  
Children at Risk Committee

***“Several years ago, I was helping a little boy, first grade perhaps, from Washington Park School and had enjoyed helping him with clothes, socks and underwear. The last part of the process was where he selected toothpaste and other simple personal care items. That year we had only red or blue toothbrushes but we always try to offer these children choices whenever possible. So I offered him a color choice and he chose blue. Then without any time for thought, he looked up at me and asked this question “Can I have one for my brother? He don't have one either.” Of course, I said yes, even though the items were counted because I could not let this child leave knowing that he would have a toothbrush but his brother would not.”***

***“Mattie was placed in a high-risk clinic at Children’s hospital at birth. Follow-up was supposed to include a brain scan and monthly visits. Her mother, addicted to crack, and father, addicted to alcohol did not complete follow-up treatment. After allegations of spousal abuse, Mattie was placed in foster care. Mattie’s initial caseworker received a report about an MRI scan of the baby’s head that indicated fluid in the brain. She filed a report but took no action. Luckily Mattie was assigned a Prokids CASA volunteer who discovered a swollen area on her head and brought this to the attention of the new caseworker. Thanks to the CASA volunteer’s intervention and to her connections at Children’s, Mattie was able to get an appointment with a neurosurgeon very quickly.”***

***“In September I worked with a mom and her 3 children who attend Hays Elementary. They had been experiencing homelessness for over six months, moving from family to friends’ places. Mom finally found affordable housing in Price Hill and the kids, especially the 13 year old, were anxious and mad at their mom, convinced they would have to change schools. Faces without Place and Project Connect provided Metro tokens for two weeks until a yellow bus could be rerouted to bring them to school each day. In addition, the family received Payless gift cards, backpacks with school supplies, and a referral to get furnishings for their new apartment. They will also be included in an after school enrichment and mentoring program sponsored by FWP/PC, the Zoo and UC, called Zoomates. Without this assistance, the students would have had to start all over in a new school, immediately putting them about 2 months behind academically.”***

These are just a few of many such stories detailing children in crisis presented to Christ Church Cathedral's Children at Risk Committee by representatives of The Assistance League of Greater Cincinnati, Prokids, and Faces without Places/Project Connect. These organizations were invited to submit grant proposals for 2009.

The Children at Risk Committee (CaR) was chartered by the CCC Mission and Outreach board to coordinate and to target cathedral outreach activities and grants related to the care and advocacy for children in Lower Price Hill, the West End and Over-the-Rhine. Members of Children at Risk aligned on these key areas of focus:

- Acquiring expertise in the needs in these areas;
- Assessing the landscape to determine where gaps in need were greatest; and
- Developing solutions in cooperation with other non-profits and organizations that have similar objectives.

The committee began by reviewing the map of the target areas under discussion as well as information about current cathedral initiatives. After passionate discussion on these issues based on personal and professional experiences, members fanned out to interview a variety of organizations in the targeted areas. At first, a two-prong approach to providing support was considered: one through the arts and the other through education. However, due to the state of the economy, and its dire impact on families, the committee decided to focus on helping organizations delivering immediate and life-sustaining support to families. The Assistance League, Prokids, and Faces without Places/Project Connect, were identified as organizations on the front lines of this struggle, making interventions in ways that delivered measurable results. The overall drop in funding for social services means that the work of these organizations is even more critical to stabilizing and sustaining the communities in which they serve, and about which we at the cathedral care deeply.

**The Assistance League: Operation School Bell**

The Assistance League of Greater Cincinnati is a chapter of National Assistance League, an all-volunteer, non-profit service organization supported primarily by individual and foundation support. It receives no funding at the local or federal level, and no funding from the United Way. **Operation School Bell** is a program that provides new blue and white uniforms, a personalized duffel bag and hygiene products to children in grades kindergarten through six, attending more than 20 area public schools. The overarching goal of this unique program is to ensure that children come to school by removing the stigmas associated with not having decent clothes or shoes, and by bolstering self-esteem and confidence in the process. Operation School Bell has provided clothing to 9,469 children since 1999. Because of the increasing rise in unemployment and poverty, the goal for

the 2009-10 school year is to provide clothing for 1,600 children and the League needs our help to meet this goal.

**Faces without Places/ Project Connect**

Faces without Places (FwP) was founded in 1998 to support Project Connect, an education program at Cincinnati Public Schools in Ohio. Five thousand dollars was raised to provide a bus to bring homeless children to a summer program. FwP, in conjunction with Project Connect, provides valuable funding and support to homeless children through enrichment activities, after school and summer programs, transportation, uniforms, supplies, enrollment assistance and field trips.

There are no government-mandated programs that support homeless children between the ages of 0 and 5 unless they have been diagnosed with delays and disabilities. Nationally, 40% of children living in shelters are in this age group, and this can have a significant impact on their education and future development. FwP proposes to implement a pilot program to begin screening homeless children from 0-5 years in Price Hill, West End and Over-the-Rhine. This will entail hiring a screening consultant. and using the validated Parents Evaluation of Developmental Status (PEDES), to identify developmental issues and to determine appropriate action. FwP is asking our help to jump start this important pilot program.

**Prokids**

Prokids is a non-profit agency that provides outstanding volunteer advocacy for children in Hamilton County who have been abused and neglected so severely that they have been removed from their families. In Hamilton County alone, 1,200 children are in the foster care system each year. At the heart of Prokids' success are the recruitment, training and support of community volunteers known as CASAs or Court Appointed Special Advocates, who serve as voices for these abused children. In addition to its CASA University Training program, Prokids provides leadership and education to the community through special programs like Building Blocks for children birth to 3-years-old, and Steps to Peace to address family violence.

Prokids needs to train 50 new volunteers in 2009 in order to meet its goal of serving 450 children, and it will need 60 in 2010 to serve 500 children. Prokids is in danger of not meeting these goals due to funding shortfalls that may continue well into next year, which is why they are requesting our help. The ultimate goal of Prokids is to provide a CASA for each child in the foster system, and to help each find a permanent and secure home.

***Carolle Perkins***  
***October, 2009***