



# AmeriCorps & Investing in Independence

## SPOTLIGHT ON THE CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION CENTER

*In today's tight fiscal environment where policy makers face difficult budget decisions, programs that leverage funds to reduce future dependence on government funding stand out as wise investments. One such program is the Child Abuse Prevention (CAP) Center in California.*

The CAP Center serves at-risk children and families in crisis to prevent and break the generational cycle of child abuse. The Center benefits from national service members who help power its work: the Center administers six AmeriCorps programs with nearly 400 AmeriCorps members serving children, youth, and families throughout California. Members are recruited from the communities they serve, are provided training and support, and can earn an education award to help them defray the costs of college. With the help of AmeriCorps members, strategies such as home visitation, nurturing parenting, family resource centers, academic enrichment and school readiness, and foster youth mentoring can be addressed.

Services like those supported by AmeriCorps members at the CAP Center are an efficient investment of federal dollars. According to Sheila Boxley of the California Family Resources Association and former CEO of the CAP Center, "Insuring the well-being of our children is a moral imperative. There are also solid economic arguments for it." The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimated that a child abuse case ends up costing the government about \$100,000 over the course of that child's life. We know we can provide good preventive services for \$1,200-\$1,500 per year per child. That's a huge economic argument."

Investments in initiatives like the CAP Center's Birth & Beyond program, which provides families with crisis intervention and supportive services, such as parenting workshops and school readiness programs, can prevent the need for additional government spending later, Boxley continues. "Only 2 percent of the families that have been served have ended up with a substantiated subsequent CPS case. This program costs \$700 per parent, while an open CPS case costs as much as \$200,000. So in addition to keeping families intact, this program saves money."

Robert Sanger served two terms as an AmeriCorps member with the Birth and Beyond program. As a home visitor, he provided parent education and support, helped families achieve their life goals, offered alternatives to corporal punishment, and made available resources and referrals to assist families on the path toward self-sufficiency. Robert says that the training and education he received through AmeriCorps not only impacted his service in the community, it also made him a better father and had a deep impact on his career trajectory.

The CAP Center's work in California, in partnership with AmeriCorps members, serves as a case study in the value of investing in services and supports that increase family well-being and reduce the likelihood that families will return to the child welfare system. It also has a deep impact on the AmeriCorps members who serve there



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- Sheila Boxley -