

May 8, 1992
ILR 92-G

Representative David S. Ostler
318 State Capitol
Salt Lake City, Utah 84114

Subject: **Children's Trust Fund**

Dear Representative Ostler,

As requested, our office has conducted a survey of the Children's Trust Fund (CTF). This fund is administered through the Division of Family Services in the Department of Human Services. The fund was established to help pay for child abuse education and prevention programs throughout the state, and is subsidized from a surcharge on birth certificate copies. In conducting this survey, our objectives were to determine: 1) how much money has been accumulated by the fund and how much is being expended, 2) the kinds of programs that are being funded and how the money is being used, and 3) the effectiveness of these programs. Based on our field work, our conclusion is that the CTF is a very worthwhile diversion of money from birth certificate fees, and we feel the education programs it is funding are effective. Although the prevention of child abuse is a likely outcome of education, it is difficult to identify the extent to which child abuse is actually being prevented.

Revenues and Expenses of the CTF

The CTF was established in 1984. Legislation which became effective July 1, 1986, authorized the collection of revenues from birth certificate fees to support the fund. The Department of Health collects \$12.00 for each birth certificate issued, \$3.00 of which is diverted into a restricted fund which is the CTF. Each month the bureau of vital statistics calculates the number of birth certificates issued by all state and local health department registrars, and sends a signed statement to the Division of Finance indicating the amount of money to be debited from their account and

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credited to the CTF account.

The CTF has been credited an average of \$20,650 per month since its inception, and has accumulated a total amount of almost \$1,322,000 through October 1991. The fund has expended a little more than \$900,000 in that same time on child abuse programs, or about \$14,000 a month. The CTF can aid any one program up to \$20,000 a year. In addition, the fund may not expend any more than the total amount approved by the Legislature in a single fiscal year. The limit for fiscal year 1991-92 is \$350,000.

Programs Funded by the CTF

As mentioned earlier, the CTF was established to help pay for child abuse education and prevention programs throughout the state. Programs for the treatment or rehabilitation of child-abusive parents or individuals are recognized as necessary, but are presently not subsidized by the CTF because they are so costly. There are currently about 52 separate education and prevention programs in the state which receive CTF money. These are operated by individuals or agencies, from either the public or private sector, who have a clear and well documented background and interest in the area of child abuse, such as psychologists and family support clinics. The main condition of receiving CTF money is that the requesting individual or agency match the amount being requested dollar for dollar from some other non-state source(s). In order to receive CTF money, the individual or agency must submit a detailed proposal to the Division of Family Services outlining program objectives, planned uses of the money, sources of matching funds, the targeted population to be served, expected outcomes, etc. Each proposal is reviewed by the state child abuse prevention specialist to see that it meets the minimum requirements. If so, it is then reviewed by a panel of 3-5 child abuse experts who ultimately decide if the project will receive funding.

There are several different types of education and prevention program categories that the CTF has designed and helps fund. Examples are prenatal programs that teach basic parenting skills and the importance of the parent-child bond; programs for teenage parents who are considered to be a higher risk population for abusing their children; parenting skills education programs designed to teach positive forms of communication, appropriate styles of discipline, how to reduce stress in the home, etc.; programs for parents of children with special needs such as handicapped children; and general public awareness programs. All of these are designed to educate certain groups of people about the dangers of child abuse and provide them with alternatives in

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dealing with stressful and difficult situations.

We met with the child abuse prevention specialist who administers the CTF and visited some of the programs to see specifically how the money is being used. We were impressed with the professional nature of each of the programs and the seriousness with which they were presented. We attended two plays on sexual abuse which were put on for elementary and junior high age children, one by the University of Utah theater department, and one by the Davis County mental health unit. Through acting out various scenes, the two groups demonstrated that there are both appropriate and inappropriate forms of touching, and attempted to show the negative and destructive effects of the latter. They tried to help the children understand that their bodies are private, and that they have the distinct right to not be touched by anyone in ways which make them feel uncomfortable, embarrassed, or confused. They also tried to emphasize the importance of recognizing and trusting their feelings so they can avoid situations if they become unpleasant or threatening. The plays were effective in capturing the children's attention, especially given their tendency to become uncomfortable and giddy during a discussion concerning sex.

We also went with the specialist to do an on-site review of a CTF-funded agency, Family Development Resources Inc., which presents workshops and seminars to teach parenting skills in being more nurturing towards children. Though we did not actually sit through a workshop, the program seems very well structured from the discussion we had with the director and from the literature we read about it. The program attempts to teach adults empathy for what it's like to be a child, and is based on changing the kinds of distorted and inaccurate beliefs people have that can often lead to child abuse.

We lastly visited the Weber/Morgan Child Abuse Prevention Council to look at their "Don't Shake the Baby" program. This program was designed to help parents understand the dangers of shaking their newborns, in either anger or play. We were told that infant shaking is commonly misunderstood and parents do not know how severely it can damage a baby's head and brain. Evidently six infants died last year in Utah as a direct result of being shaken. We reviewed the literature used by the program which is passed out to parents of newborns, and which provides parents with alternatives in dealing with crying, irritable babies. The main point of the literature is to emphasize that a baby should never be shaken because it can cause injury and even death. The program also has a public awareness campaign through television and magazine advertisements which portray the dangers of shaking infants.

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Effectiveness of CTF

It is difficult to measure the effectiveness of CTF programs, primarily because there is no system of reporting instances where child abuse was prevented which would have otherwise occurred without the programs. We were, however, able to gather some information on program results. For example, we reviewed some initial feedback on the "Don't Shake the Baby" program from those parents who had received the literature. The response from the majority of parents was that they found the reading helpful, they would recommend it to other parents, and that they were now less likely to shake their babies than before.

We also looked at some results of the play put on by the University of Utah Department of Theater. During the 1990-91 school year the department performed 81 plays for some 18,800 elementary age children throughout the state. Of those children in attendance, 84 disclosed instances of personal abuse after seeing the play, and their cases were subsequently referred to the Division of Family Services. The Davis County group told us they have also had disclosures from children concerning sexual abuse after watching their play.

In addition, the annual report of the CTF for fiscal year 1989-90 claims that nearly 160,000 people participated in and were served by CTF programs. Coupled with the public awareness advertisements of each of these programs, over one million people in total were somehow reached.

It is our opinion that those children and adults who are exposed to these programs are better educated about child abuse and certainly stand a better chance of either preventing it from happening to themselves, or not allowing themselves to commit such an act. We feel the CTF is a very beneficial diversion of money, and do not see that any further review of the fund is necessary at this time.

We hope this letter has provided the information you need on these issues. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact us.

Sincerely,

Wayne L. Welsh, CPA
Auditor General

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