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New Technology Paints Comprehensive Portrait of Children

Throw away your number two pencils and erasers because COMET is here. This revolutionary new web-based decision support system developed by Children's Institute and SophiTEC makes coloring in bubbles on scan forms things of the past.

"It's our unwavering belief that COMET will revolutionize education and the way parents, teachers, principals, and policy makers will use data and information to help children succeed," explained Dirk Hightower, Executive Director of Children's Institute. "Its framework can easily be adapted for use by health and human service providers as well."

A Note from Our Director



There's no doubt that times are tough. With less to spend and more to accomplish, we each have to do what we must to make ends meet without sacrificing our priorities, both at home and at work.

As with many organizations, Children's Institute certainly has not been immune to the economic downturn. With a 7% cut in state funding, as well as other funding streams reduced, we've taken our lumps. However that hasn't stopped us from moving ahead because we know that times like these are especially hard on children and families.

It's not uncommon that domestic troubles surface or develop when families are under enormous stress. A parent loses a job...bills pile up...tension builds at home...children get caught in the middle and act out in school...crime increases in their neighborhood. All are signs that point to the need for the work of Children's Institute, as well as our partner agencies throughout the community.

Now more than ever, Children's Institute strives to be especially efficient and innovative as we respond to the needs of children and families in an effort to sustain their social and emotional health. In this issue you'll read about exciting technology we've helped to develop that offers real-time data that will make a difference in how schools and organizations respond to the needs in our community. Other stories highlight best practices in professional development to better prepare those who work with young children, and our efforts to support families with loved ones in the military.

It has been said many times that the riches in life come from having one's health, as well as family and friends. While we may have to do more with less, I have no doubt that we have our priorities straight.

—A. Dirk Hightower, Ph.D.
Executive Director

Children's Institute Welcomes...

New Board of Directors Members

Michelle Batiste worked with the U.S. Military in a chartered civilian career as Family Readiness Director for 30 years. Given the responsibility of maximizing the quality of life for expatriate communities containing the families of deployed service members, she planned and organized programs, activities, processes, and procedures for up to 25,000 American military family members at one time. Her work spanned four countries and three continents, and in 2005, Mrs. Batiste was given the Department of the Army Decoration for Distinguished Civilian Service, the U.S. Army's highest award for civilian service. Along with her proficiency in communicating, motivating, and organizing, Mrs. Batiste brings to Children's Institute significant international experience and cultural sensitivity.



Donna DePeters has been associated with the field of education for over 30 years and brings a wealth of knowledge and experience in education and literacy to our Board. Mrs. DePeters taught elementary grades in the Greece Central School district for over 30 years and helped to establish Odyssey Academy, Greece's 6-12 grade school of choice and one that has received national recognition. She was a district trainer in writing workshop models and has presented at educational conferences across the state as well as at numerous colleges and public schools. Having retired from teaching, Mrs. DePeters is enjoying an opportunity to be involved in volunteer activities. She serves on the Policy Committee for Mayor Robert Duffy's Literacy Initiative and has volunteered time with Children's Institute and Rochester ChildFirst Network. She has also assisted with literacy projects at the Buffalo Bills training camp at St. John Fisher College and enjoys substitute teaching.



Esther Karp brings a wide range of skill and experience to the Board, having worked as a school psychologist and then administrator with the New York State Education Department. A former Fulbright Scholar and employee of Children's Institute, Dr. Karp has produced educational videos and secured grants to support her work in the fields of child abuse prevention and early literacy. She has been associated with the National Association of School Psychologists, the National Association for the Education of Young Children, the American Orthopsychiatric Association, and is a current member of the American Psychological Association.

Richard Schwartz offers a wealth of community activism and philanthropic expertise to the Board of Directors. An optical engineer at Xerox Corporation for 30 years, Mr. Schwartz has been a board member and chaired numerous committees for a host of service organizations in the Rochester community, including Rochester Area Community Foundation, the Grantmakers Forum of New York, the Greater Rochester After-School Alliance (GRASA), Horizons Student Enrichment Program, Friends of Progressive Neighborhood Federal Credit Union, Rural Opportunities, Inc., and Wilson Commencement Park. His volunteerism also extends to the First Unitarian Church of Rochester, where he is a member, and to his alma mater, the University of Rochester.



(continued on page 7)



Honoring and Strengthening Military Families and Children in Transition

Building on longstanding relationships with schools in the state of Hawaii, Children's Institute has responded to a request to support children who have a parent serving in the military. In response to this need, we sought advice regarding military experiences, perspectives, and interest. We brought expertise from our work in resilience, families in transition, young children, stress, and adjustment. There are approximately 1.5 million school-aged children and youth – 30% of them between the ages of six and eight – with a parent in the military. These children have young parents, are highly mobile, and experience a multitude of changes, including deployments.

We adapted the award winning Children of Divorce Intervention Program to the unique needs of children dealing with military separation. From that we

developed Same Sky Sharing, three developmentally appropriate curricula for use by trained mental health providers in multiple settings: schools, camps, private practice, and behavioral health agencies. We piloted them with school counselors and school psychologists and listened to their feedback. We kid tested and kid approved the many activities!

Through meetings and presentations, we continue to build relationships with others with this same interest. We advocate for a comprehensive multi-tiered framework that links individual needs with programs for healthy social and emotional development. We seek funding from multiple sources and have submitted proposals for research grants.

Children's Institute is committed to moving this initiative forward, working with schools and communities with a military presence. We plan to develop programs suitable for children from Reserve families. A child of a reservist called to active duty may be the only child in his or her classroom or school with a parent deployed.

Partners in Family Child Care

Improving early literacy development in Rochester's young children

It's a provocative question. What is the best investment of the next available philanthropic dollar? Philanthropist Jim Brush, CEO of Sentry Group, asked this question of a group of community stakeholders in January 2008.

"We knew it was imperative to the Brush Family to invest in an initiative that was based in research or evidence-based, able to leverage other funding, designed to prevent problems rather than remediate them, and that would address children's educational needs early in life," said Lori VanAuken, Deputy Executive Director. "With the help of The Children's Agenda, the Early Childhood Development Initiative, Rochester Area Community Foundation, and Rochester's Child, Children's Institute proposed a program based on current research that fit the specified criteria and met a pressing need."

Family child care providers – those who provide child care in their homes – have expressed a need for resources



and training to ensure that children have the language, literacy, and social-emotional skills to succeed in school and throughout life. Large numbers of children in Monroe County – up to 40% of infants and toddlers and 27% of three- and four-year-olds – are served by family child care providers.

The *Partners in Family Child Care Literacy project* was designed to help child care professionals increase the quality of care they provide to children and improve early literacy, which is a priority for the Rochester Education and Literacy Commission. The project

targets **group family child care**, in which two adults serve up to 12 children.

Over three years, the project will reach up to 90 child care homes serving about 750 children through the delivery of professional development, modeling, and curriculum during home visits. Home visitors also assist providers in screening children and ensuring that children with unmet social-emotional and other needs receive additional supports, including referrals to existing community services as needed.

Children's Institute manages the project and directs the evaluation. Services are delivered by the Family Child Care Satellites of Greater Rochester at Rochester ChildFirst Network and the Family Resource Centers of Rochester at Crestwood Children's Center. "The project builds on the work of *Caring for Quality*, a nationally recognized program implemented locally by Cornell University," commented Dr. Shira Peterson, the project's director. "Providers receive two visits per month by a trained home

visitor, who implements lessons from research-based curricula: *Parents as Teachers*, the *Early Literacy Project*, and *WestEd's Program for Infant/Toddler Care*."

The lead gift from the Brush Family Fund sparked support from the following funding partners: Rochester Area Community Foundation, Rochester's Child, First Niagara Bank, JP Morgan Chase, M&T Bank, Gerald and Caryl Wenzke, and some anonymous donors.

At an event in June to celebrate the completion of its first year, child care providers thanked Jim Brush and the many supporters of this project. "Providers told me 'I was able to use what I learned right way with the children'... 'I never had to leave my business to attend classes, since lessons were being taught while I worked with them – right in my home'... 'I wish this project was longer than one year'" said Brush.

Fundraising for next year is underway with Jim at the helm, and data and lessons learned from the year one will be available in fall 2009.

New Technology Paints Comprehensive Portrait of Children

CONTINUED FROM PAGE ONE

Every school district routinely collects large volumes of data about children and youth. The main challenge, according to Hightower, is gathering all of that data together and getting it into the hands of those who can make efficient and effective decisions that truly benefit children. By linking new and existing data sources from a variety of providers, COMET becomes a reliable, secure, and affordable information hub that facilitates solutions and validates funding decisions.

Whether it requires a rating scale or narrative, any screening or assessment instrument, questionnaire, survey, or form can be put on COMET. The parent or teacher only needs to enter a child's name, date of birth, and gender once. From there, a few clicks of a mouse produce easy-to-understand pre- and post-evaluations of the child. When children change grade levels and schools, COMET ensures that all of their data follow them, providing continuity of information. Eventually, COMET will suggest actions and interventions based on a child's data and will provide short- and long-term monitoring of their effectiveness. Also, administrators can access global reports by school, grade, program, intervention, or any grouping of interest.

Jolette (Joie) Charbonneau, a Universal Pre-K teacher at The Community Place of Greater Rochester, has been using COMET in her classrooms since October 2008. With up to 17 children in each class, she appreciates the system's ease and accessibility when she completes student assessments such as the Child Observation Record (COR).

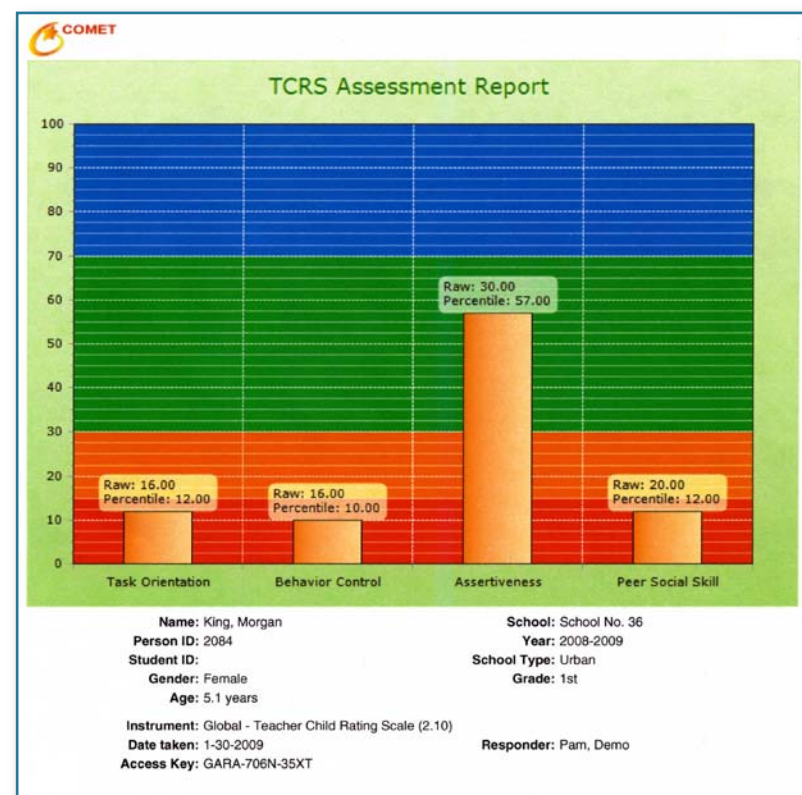
"I love that it's online and that I can input my experiences when it's convenient for me, whether that's at school or at home," Charbonneau said. "Once I complete and save the COR, others who work with my kids can access it and know what I'm seeing in the classroom."

For example, Charbonneau has a student with a lot of family issues, including an often-absent mom. In addition to her delayed interaction with peers and lack of self-confidence, the student couldn't identify letters or count, and her attempts to write produced only scribbles. With COMET, Charbonneau accessed the COR to establish a baseline for the student and continues to track her progress. "I can document even the smallest of milestones," Charbonneau added. "Although she's not a five on the COR yet, I know for a fact that she's gone from being a one in October to being a two or three in March."

Although Charbonneau has never completed a paper COR or waited two weeks for her report, she can't imagine completing it without COMET. "The immediate feedback allows me to adapt my learning plans right away," she said. "The built-in ticklers and progress reports also help to remind me what assessments I have to do and when."

The fact that environmentally friendly COMET works in real time for the same cost as using paper instruments has caught the attention of many of Children's Institute's partners. Currently there are 80 COMET pilot sites, including school districts in New York, Connecticut, and North Carolina, as well as not-for-profits in New York that range from tutoring programs to early care and education programs. By the end of this year, Hightower hopes to be working with 40 school districts, not-for-profits, and funding organizations nationwide. In five years, he hopes that number will be closer to 1000. Among the COMET newcomers are United Way of Greater Rochester and the YMCA.

To install COMET, all that's needed is internet access with a recent computer and a professional-grade communication line. "With some initial training and support from Children's Institute and SophiTEC," Hightower added, "the sky's the limit."



Rochester Early Childhood Assessment Partnership (RECAP) Utilizes COMET

RECAP moves towards web-based technology to deliver and submit screening and assessment tools, transitioning from paper scan forms to electronic forms. In Fall 2008, 33 Pre-K teachers, representing over 42 classrooms were trained at Children's Institute to use the COMET system. Teachers learned how to electronically complete and submit eCOR and eT-CRS child measures, a RECAP and Rochester City School District requirement. In its pilot year, teacher feedback has been very positive, noting the benefit of immediate, real-time feedback of scores and reports on their students. Information gained from child and class reports is used immediately in planning and individualizing instruction.

Guest Perspective



Accountability is a core value of United Way of Greater Rochester. Our contributors, sponsors, and those agencies that receive United Way funding rely on us to make the very best investment in preventing and addressing some of the most pressing issues facing our community. Issues like child abuse, maternal and child health, poverty, and homelessness are complex to understand, and difficult to solve. Yet we know that our donors, agencies, and partners are working hard to attack root causes that will eventually spare others future suffering.

How do we systematically document issues, capture progress, and share information on effective practices that help children and families – demonstrate accountability? COMET may just be the tool for which the community has been waiting, thanks to a collaborative project of Children’s Institute and SophiTEC.

United Way has always measured the effectiveness of every United Way funded program. With the addition of COMET to our toolbox, we will be able to go beyond measurement to systematic management of data that can be used to better inform our work and our investments. This web-based, user-friendly computer database created for not-for-profit organizations and schools, allows for the collection, centralized storage, analysis, and reporting of qualitative, quantitative, process, and outcome data. COMET allows agencies and other stakeholders to make informed decisions that will improve program quality and children’s outcomes – in real time.

Because information and reports can be generated almost instantaneously, agencies and their staff no longer need to wait several months for feedback or to make corrective changes. United Way is hoping to see swift adjustments to programs and opportunities based on real-time data to address issues collaboratively.

We hear encouraging feedback from current COMET users, like prekindergarten teachers, who have indicated that it saves them time and that the system is user friendly. Infrastructure costs are minimal requiring only a computer connected to the internet. We’re anxiously looking forward to incorporating this system in our work to better serve the community.

As we prepared for a new funding cycle, our Community Investment Cabinet worked with staff to develop a resource investment philosophy. We believe that COMET will be an important tool to carry out a philosophy that includes accountability; achieving measurable results by identifying priorities and strategies; transparency and accessibility; constructive relationships based on mutual respect, candor, and understanding; high standards; and respect for the perspectives, opinions, and experiences of the broadest-possible cross section of people.

We are delighted to be among the newest COMET users and look forward to our continued partnership with Children’s Institute.

–Dawn Borgeest
Chief of Corporate Affairs
United Way of Greater Rochester

Children’s Institute Welcomes...

Shelley M. Sanyshyn joins Children’s Institute as a Primary Project consultant and COMET trainer. She received her masters degree in Applied Psychology and Quantitative Methods from the University of Baltimore, Maryland. Prior to joining the National Services team, Shelley practiced as a Licensed Professional Counselor providing therapy to inner-city children and families within the Baltimore City Public School System, while serving the role of Associate Director within the University of Maryland’s School Mental Health Program in Baltimore.



New Roles...

Lauri Brugger has been promoted to Director of Community Partnerships and will oversee collaborative management of efforts that strengthen children’s social and emotional health, implementation of quality improvement in prekindergarten, child care and after-school programs, and other efforts that support agencies’ common goal of improving the lives of children. She has been serving Children’s Institute since 1999 in several capacities including coordinating RECAP, the continuous quality improvement system for early childhood in Monroe and Chemung Counties, and serving as Deputy Director of Community Partnerships. Lauri was recognized in the rising star category of the Non-Profit Awards given by the United Way and Rochester Business Journal. She holds an M.S. in Elementary Education and B.A. degrees in Political Science and Psychology.



Lori VanAuken has been promoted to Deputy Executive Director and will work closely with the Executive Director, senior leadership team and Board of Directors in developing and executing advancement efforts of the organization including development, communications and strategic planning. She joined Children’s Institute in 2005 as the Director of Community Partnerships, where she provided oversight and led the collaborative work of the agency in improving after-school and early education quality, birth outcomes for young children, improving early literacy, and helping families to access child care subsidies. She also continues to work with donors who support the work of Children’s Institute. Lori holds a masters degree in public administration and has 20 years experience in the not-for-profit sector. She serves on the Rochester Education and Literacy Policy Committee and is the co-chair of the Early Childhood Development Initiative. Lori continues to shape early childhood policy on the local and state level.



Media Violence Hurts Children

We know some of the causes for violence in the City of Rochester—poverty, joblessness, drug addiction, and ready availability of guns. There is another probable cause, though, that we tend to ignore. It is a cause that has permeated our culture and affected the way our children develop into adults: Violence in the media and the pervasiveness of excessive screen time.

Our children are growing up with unrelenting entertainment and fantasy violence in the media that gives them constant exposure to pretend danger and fighting that is depicted as heroic, exciting, and fun. Studies tell us that by the age of 18, the average American child will have viewed 200,000 acts of violence on television.

The American Academy of Pediatrics, through the research it has compiled, tells us that there is an undisputable link between media violence and aggressive behavior in children. Studies demonstrate that violent media affects children

by increasing anti-social behavior, making them less sensitive to violence and the victims of violence, and increasing their appetite for violence. Violent media often fails to show the consequences of violence. As a result, children learn that there are few, if any, repercussions for committing violent acts.

Exposure to media violence isn't the only problem children encounter with too much TV, computer games, and video. Number of hours of screen time is a contributing factor in childhood obesity. According to a report by The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation entitled *The Role of Media in Childhood Obesity*, preschoolers spend as much time with screen media as they do playing outside. Much of the media targeted to children is laden with elaborate advertising campaigns that promote unhealthy foods such as candy, soda, and snacks – the typical child sees about 40,000 such ads per year on TV alone. One study in the report



documented approximately 11 food commercials per hour during children's Saturday morning television programming.

What about TV as a "babysitter" to help out parents? Isn't watching TV a sensible, safe thing for children to be doing while busy parents do what they need to do? The American Academy of Pediatrics states that children two years of age and under should be watching no television at all. Babies and toddlers learn from human interaction and creative play, and the TV screen provides none of this. There is some research to indicate that TV interferes with a toddler's language development. Children three to five years of age should watch no more than one hour a day of high quality programming. In no case should a young child have a TV or other screened media in his or her bedroom.

Local efforts to raise community awareness about the impact of the media on young children's health and well-being are underway:

- The Greater Rochester Health Foundation's ten-year strategic plan *The Prevention of Childhood Overweight and Obesity in Monroe County, NY* has outlined strategies to reduce screen time among children.
- Many schools and organizations are promoting the Center for Screen-Time Awareness campaign to turn off screened media in April and September 2009.

- The Children's Film Festival, taking place during Rochester Association for the Education of Young Children's *Month of the Young Child*, is facilitated by Children's Institute and curated by the Rochester High Falls International Film Festival in partnership with several early childhood organizations, the Mayor's Office, the Monroe County Library System, the George Eastman House, and other community groups. The event links physical activities with short (under nine minutes) artistic films with gentle messages, brochures for parents to guide children's TV viewing, and trainings on the impact of the media for caregivers, teachers, and others who come in contact with young children and their families. In addition, facilitated discussions with children after each screening help promote literacy through discussing new words and concepts from each film, and talking about related books with similar themes.

All of these efforts send the message that a community dedicated to the well-being of its children pays attention to what children are watching, and to when and how children are using screened media, including television, electronic games, video, computers, iPods, and cell phones. Such a community steers its children away from excessive or inappropriate screen time into more healthful activities, and when children do view entertainment, ensures that that it is quality programming like the selection of films from the Children's Film Festival.

Appeared as an editorial in the Democrat & Chronicle on April 25, 2009, Rochester, NY. Connie Valk and Ruth Cowing, guest essayists.



pathways
National Early Education and Care Accreditation
A PROJECT OF CHILDREN'S INSTITUTE

Congratulations Park Ridge Child Care Center! The center completed Pathways Accreditation in June 2009 – the first center in the nation to receive this distinction of high quality early education and care.

Special thanks to Professor Len Loopo and his students from the Maxwell School of Syracuse University: Anek Belbase, Angelica Suarez, Ashleigh King, Carla Fosca, Emily Jensen, Luke Dougherty, and Margarita Aibkhanova. The seven talented students developed and presented a business and marketing plan for the growth of the Pathways Accreditation program.



children's institute

Turning Tragedy into Triumph

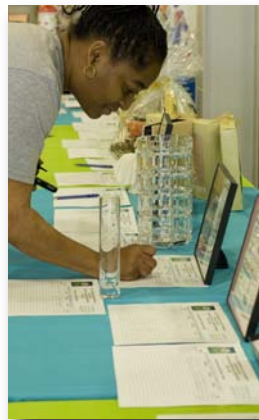
Most of us can't even imagine what it is like to cope with the loss of a child. Ann Marie and Osmond Simm experienced the horrible reality of losing their son, Ryan, as a result of a car accident in November 2007, and they have chosen to turn that tragedy into an opportunity to help others.

Ryan was born on November 23, 1988 in Rochester, NY. He graduated from Aquinas Institute and attended Columbus State University and Monroe Community College. Ryan began playing soccer at the age of five and loved the sport. He played on the school teams for Churchville-Chili, North Star Christian Academy, and Aquinas Institute. In addition, Ryan played for various travel teams including the Greece Cobras, Rochester Junior Rhinos, and Chili Pythons. According to his mom, Ryan's skills enabled him to play any position on the field including goal keeper during his middle school years at Churchville-Chili. At the time of his death, Ryan was being recruited by Mars Hill College in North Carolina to play for their soccer team.

Ryan loved small children and had a natural ability to connect with them. He was a member of the Gates Presbyterian Church Youth Group and traveled to Jamaica as a member of a work team. He also volunteered his time at the Center for Youth. Last year, when Gates Presbyterian Church, where the Simms' are members, decided to build a school in Jamaica for three-, four-, and five-year-olds who are living in poverty within the small village of Green Island, Anne Marie and Osmond decided to hold a fundraising dinner in celebration of Ryan's life. They were able to raise \$12,000 in support of the Jamaican school project.

This year, the Simms' chose to keep Ryan's memory alive by hosting a silent auction at Unity Health System Total Sports Experience (TSE). All proceeds raised by the auction were donated to Children's Institute.

As Ann Marie talked to local business owners to secure donations for the silent auction, you could see the pride in her face and feel her excitement about sharing the life of her son with those she met. She knows that her work will make a difference for many children in the Rochester area. Ryan would be proud of his mom.



Giving Opportunities

Over the years, the work of Children's Institute has shaped programming and service delivery to children in the Rochester area, nationally, and in other parts of the world. Our donors are our partners in helping to ensure that children have the opportunity to succeed in school and in life because they have the support needed to grow up emotionally and socially healthy.

Private donations are a vital source of support for our work, providing critical funding for research, evaluation, and program development. Every gift, whether large or small, has an impact on children, families, and communities.

You can make a gift by sending a check payable to Children's Institute or by using your credit card. Gifts of stock can easily be donated by electronic transfer, and planned gifts may be made through bequest provisions.

Special gift opportunities that allow donors to support a particular program or area of interest are also available including early literacy, early childhood education and school adjustment, childhood obesity prevention, and research in the field of strengthening children's social and emotional health. Our development staff is always happy to discuss options with you to help find a good match for your particular interests.

We invite you to support our work by contributing to Children's Institute. Your gift has the potential to be life-changing for a child, a family, and a community.

For further information, please contact:

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New Board Members (continued from page 2)

Mr. Schwartz received the Joe U. Posner Founder's Award in 2004 from the Rochester Area Community Foundation, as well as the 2008 Philanthropy Award with his wife, Vicki, from Sojourner House.

A professional educator for more than 35 years, **Dr. Arthur "Sam" Walton** has dedicated his career to improving the quality of life for children and families who have been placed at risk. As a visionary and leader in the education arena, he brings a wealth of experience to our board of directors. Currently Dr. Walton is the founding director and a professor in the



Ed.D. Program in Executive Leadership, the founder and director of the Urban Institute for School Leadership, the founder and CEO of the Center for Excellence in Education, and the founding dean in the School of Education at St. John Fisher College. A native of Buffalo, NY, and former public school teacher, Dr. Walton has served as superintendent of the Albany City and Berkshire Union Free School Districts and held a variety of leadership roles in the New York State Education Department. He also serves as a consultant to a number of government agencies and urban school districts across the nation.

Many thanks to outgoing members for their service: Sarah Amering, Aaron E. Black, Paula Briggs, Donna Fielding, and Wade Norwood.

News & Views

NEWS & VIEWS • SUMMER 2009

A publication of Children's Institute • A not-for-profit agency
(585) 295-1000 (phone) • (877) 888-7647 (toll-free)
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to our mailing list, or if you no longer wish to receive this newsletter.

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institute

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Same Address/New Look

Children's Institute is proud to introduce our new website,
www.childrensinstitute.net

We encourage you to visit and learn how the work of Children's Institute increases the chances of success for children and families.

- Review our various training and online course opportunities
- Check out our spotlight which features new initiatives and up-coming events
- Learn more about our research-based programs and how to get them into your community



Save the Date...

Please join us for our
Community Update

To hear about exciting efforts that
support our children -
America's future generation of leaders

Featuring Same Sky Sharing –
a new initiative to support children
in our military families

Thursday, October 22, 2009
Continental breakfast: 8:00 a.m.
Program: 8:15–9:15 a.m.

Strathallan Hotel
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