Protecting our most vulnerable kids

Cincinnati Children's leads community partnerships to help abused and neglected kids recover and thrive.
It was a warm and sunny July afternoon. Logan was playing outside, full of nervous energy. Each car that passed made him anxious, as he waited for the one that carried his new foster parents.

Sarah and Ben drove slowly along the street, looking for the address the social worker gave them. Looking for the right house was a welcome distraction from their own nervous excitement about meeting Logan, their first foster child.

When the right house number finally appeared, they took a deep breath and stepped out to see Logan playing, his bag waiting on the porch. After a brief introduction, Ben picked up Logan’s bag and Sarah held out her hand. Logan slipped his palm into hers and looked up, a hesitant smile across his face.

And in that moment, their lives changed forever.

“**At TIP... Logan had friends his age who understood what he was going through.**

**At an ordinary preschool, he wouldn’t have had that sense of belonging.**” Logan’s mom

Logan was 4 years old when he met Sarah and Ben. He became a permanent part of their family last year.

Sarah and Ben were his fourth foster family in just 16 months. Moreover, because of the abuse and neglect he suffered in his young life, Logan had a long list of challenging behavioral problems.

“We actually didn’t know much about his background when we picked him up,” Sarah recalls. “We were to keep him overnight to get acquainted, and then I dropped him off at TIP the next day.”

Now in its 25th year, TIP is a comprehensive preschool program that integrates clinical and mental health services, as well as speech, occupational and physical therapy for 3- to 5-year-olds who have suffered abuse and neglect.

Building Partnerships to Protect Kids

In the United States, approximately 900,000 children are victims of abuse or neglect each year, and more than five children per day die because of maltreatment. In Ohio alone, 34,000 children a year are victims, and because of underreporting, the actual number could be three times as high.

For the experts at Cincinnati Children’s, these statistics are a rallying cry – and the driving force behind two of our strongest efforts against child abuse – the Therapeutic Interagency Preschool program (TIP) and the Mayerson Center for Safe and Healthy Children.

Yet, addressing the problem of child abuse is complex and requires a closely connected partnership of many.

That’s why both TIP and the Mayerson Center collaborate with an extensive group of partners, including county and city law enforcement, Hamilton County Jobs and Family Services, and other social service agencies and community organizations to help kids escape and recover from abuse and neglect.

Helping Traumatized Kids Succeed

At just 4 years old, Logan had already been through so much. He was removed from his biological mother when he was 3,
“We care for 60 children at a time and most suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder and severe behavioral problems,” says Jane Sites, EdD, LSW, the program’s executive director. “TIP offers them a safe preschool experience that helps them learn to cope with their trauma and thrive.”

The results are remarkable. “Children who participate in TIP for one year – even those who begin the program as the most at-risk – make the most developmental progress of any preschoolers in Hamilton County Head Start,” Sites says. “They hold their own with their peers when they start school.”

But that’s not all. What’s really extraordinary about TIP is that the preschool also offers traumatized kids an environment with peers who have similar experiences. “TIP gave Logan a sense of normalcy,” Sarah says. “At TIP, being in the foster care system is normal. Logan had friends his age who understood what he was going through. At an ordinary preschool, he wouldn’t have had that sense of belonging.”

Today, thanks to TIP, Logan is an active, sunny first grader, who loves taekwondo and plans on being a school teacher when he grows up. He is still learning to cope with his past, but his future is bright, especially with Sarah and Ben in his corner.

“Most cases of abuse happen when a child is young, when their brains are developing and lifelong pathways are being written. Abuse alters that development,” notes Robert Shapiro, MD, director of the Mayerson Center. “And not only does it adversely change how the brain develops, it can have a powerful negative impact on mental and physical health across their lifetime.”

In fact, due to its lifelong, detrimental effects, toxic stress has become a public health priority – and the Mayerson Center is leading the way to respond to this problem through the CRTC. Ultimately, the CRTC will act as a centralized community hub to screen kids for toxic stress and will improve the medical and community responses to trauma.

MAKING A LIFELONG DIFFERENCE
Finding and implementing better ways to respond to abuse across the community is a great start – but it’s not the end goal for the experts at the Mayerson Center.

“The best thing we can do for kids is to prevent abuse before it starts,” Dr. Shapiro says. “If we can help parents create a safe and nurturing home environment for their children, less abuse will happen and children will grow up healthier and better prepared to succeed.”

To that end, the Mayerson Center works with community partners that help parents and families learn better ways to communicate and interact. Because we know that will start a revolution – a more positive home environment means healthier kids. And healthier kids mean a healthier community.

“At the Mayerson Center, we care for about 2,000 kids a year. Imagine if we could reduce that number by half or, ideally, down to zero,” says Dr. Shapiro. His eyes light up. “That’s where my biggest hope lies – helping families create a safe home for kids. If we can do that across the community, we can make Cincinnati thrive.”

To learn more or support our work with abused and neglected children, contact Sarah Sullivan at 513.636.5664 or sarah.sullivan@cchmc.org.
Cincinnati Children’s partnerships with social services, law enforcement and prosecutors are critical to fighting child abuse and neglect. Having all the key players working on the same team ensures that our most vulnerable patients are safe, healthy and on their way to reaching their full potential.

But we also rely on other important partners – our donors. One of our most dedicated supporters is Insuring the Children (ITC). A partnership of individuals and companies in the insurance industry, ITC is dedicated to improving the lives of children who have endured abuse or neglect – and preventing it from happening in the first place. They fund programs that are making an impact, like the Mayerson Center for Safe and Healthy Children at Cincinnati Children’s. To date, ITC has awarded the medical center more than $680,000 toward this important work.

“The Mayerson Center at Cincinnati Children’s is an exemplary leader in this field... ITC is proud to be a long-time supporter of the work they do.”

Ron Eveleigh
Treasurer, Insuring the Children

Together We Make a Difference

We can’t do it alone

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“The Mayerson Center at Cincinnati Children’s is an exemplary leader in this field,” says Ron Eveleigh, executive vice president of the Cincinnati Insurance Board and the treasurer of Insuring the Children. “From research to prevention and training to pioneering a child abuse subcategory of pediatrics, Cincinnati Children’s is making an impact. ITC is proud to be a long-time supporter of the work they do.”

Created by a child cared for at the Mayerson Center, this piece hangs as a reminder to all kids that hope and healing are possible thanks to the experts here.