



Promise the Children
taking action for our youngest citizens

the Advocate

Winter 2008-2009

A Case for Comprehensive Health Education

By Meryl Baier

What is comprehensive health education and what are the oppositions to



putting it in place in our nation's public schools? What would be the objection to including health education as part of the core curriculum (that which is mandated

by the state to be taught)? While some states have curriculums and frameworks in place for use at each school district's discretion, only Maine mandates that health education be taught in public schools consistently across districts. We can do better than this for our children.

2007 saw a 3% increase across the nation in teen pregnancy. Our society should be progressing toward elimination of this problem and yet we see it escalating. The solution is simple. Now is the time for age-appropriate health education that includes comprehensive sexuality education to become part of the core curriculum in every state.

We are aware of the cultural and religious barriers that keep schools from mandating such programs. Schools are stifled by constraints such as time and staff restrictions and the added demands that a mandated curriculum would bring. But the health challenges that our children face would be addressed by a

comprehensive health curriculum, and far outweigh the social taboos that are keeping implementation at bay.

The following list of misconceptions puts it all in perspective. Read through, and give careful consideration to whether we are truly educating our children for the 21st century.

1. Age-appropriate comprehensive health education (CHE) teaches kindergartners about sexuality. Untrue.

Age-appropriate means exactly that. No educator would promote a human growth and development course for five year olds nor would it be allowed by any governing public school board. Subject matter in a CHE curriculum is appropriately designed to the age group that is being addressed. In kindergarten, a child learns body parts to identify proper and improper touching – physical safety. In fourth grade, children are taught (often through the DARE program) how to avoid smoking, drugs and alcohol abuse. High school programs address healthy relationships, mental and physical health, *and* sexuality and reproduction – which includes safe sex practices, responsible choices and contraception.

2. Our school system can't afford the staff and financial commitment that a CHE program would take. Untrue.

Age-appropriate CHE programs are cross-curricular. This is perhaps the most important point when advocating for this program. Cross-curricular means

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Health Education, cont.

that the curriculum can be taught and addressed in most subjects. This avoids specially-trained new hires and unavailable classroom space, which could be cost-prohibitive for school districts. Most commercially available curriculums include teacher training manuals, cross-curricular guides and are financially affordable. A school system in Massachusetts uses one that is \$5 per student.

3. The social constraints of this community would prove unsupportive and thereby prohibit the teaching of this curriculum. Every community has its make up and, often, concerns are socially

and religiously based. It is important to remember that we are speaking of public school. All children of all types of backgrounds and beliefs attend our public schools. One belief platform cannot dictate a curriculum. CHE programs have liberal opt-out policies for those who believe that certain information needs to come from the home. But the line must be drawn that the information dispersed in a public school is for all children and the decision not to educate is left only to the parents for their own child.

As Unitarian Universalists, we have long provided comprehensive sexuality

education within our own walls. Now it is time to move beyond our internal structure and advocate for a curriculum that would be available to all children, would fully encompass all health issues, and provide the building blocks for a healthy life.

If we are truly to work towards a holistic education that addresses the whole child in the public schools, then we must join with other like-minded faiths, such as the UCC, and advocate educating beyond the most rudimentary subjects – fully embracing a public education that includes health for life.

A Look Back at our General Assembly 2008 Workshop

What Inspires UUs to Care for Other People's Children?

By Becky Richardson

The Planning Committee at General Assembly granted Promise the Children space for a workshop entitled “What Inspires UUs to Care for Other People's Children.” Our board members Gail Forsyth-Vail, Rev. Michelle Walsh and Rev. Cheryl Lloyd were facilitators and addressed the theme from a historical, theological and personal point of view.

Gail emphasized the historical importance of caring for all children in our society and the challenges presented by

the distractions of fear and war, observing: “A theology of hope provides a measure against which we might consider our current advocacy and justice work on behalf of children. This is a call not just for charity, but for justice, structures and systems that support and nurture the coming generation. It places children in the center of families and communities, where they thrive best, and calls upon us to acknowledge that the care of children benefits not just the children, but all of humanity.”

Michelle added, “We deepen our sense of the transcendent as we deepen our knowledge of ourselves and our connection to the larger web and our formative experiences in childhood that have enabled us to widen our circles of care or that have led us to constrict our circles of care. Promise The Children is one national organization you can participate in to widen your circle and broaden your connection to the web so that the ‘primal promise’ of each child can become a reality in the United States at least.”

Cheryl spoke from her experience, saying, “For one answer, I believe that we need to look back on our own lives to see if anyone, other than our parents, held out a hand and made a difference... I know that helping hands were present in my own life. I went to New York City public schools. I struggled because of undiagnosed learning disabilities, I had a mother who was abusive and, when I was fourteen, my father died. Had it not been for my grandparents and important mentors who took me under their wing, I don't think that I would be here today speaking with you.”

“I cannot forget my past and I never take what we were able to give to our children for granted. So this is what motivates me, gives me a sense of responsibility for making life better for other peoples' children. It is a feeling of gratitude for the help that was there for me and for circumstances that allowed me to see that my own children had the help they needed.”



(l-r) Promise the Children president Rebekah Richardson with board members Doranne Jung and George Richardson, MD



From the President

Dear Friends and Volunteers,

While children are 20% of our population, they are 100% of our future. They are members of our future workforce, the professionals who will provide our healthcare and well-being and the citizens who will live out hopes and dreams. Children provide joy in our lives.

In the extreme stress of daily living, excuses are made to put aside the healthy development of our nation's children. We see it evidenced in the cutting of essential funds for quality preschool care, for all day kindergarten, and for enrichment programs in our public schools. Little attention is given to children's healthcare, mental healthcare and access to public subsidies for food.

Promise the Children highlights the importance of public policies that support young people by focusing on their education and wellbeing. Our work includes researching public policy, partnering with local and national organizations to

develop effective actions and maintaining regular contact with our volunteer advocates by mail, e-mail and telephone. We also offer legislative action training through to young adults in our churches.

As a non-profit, Promise the Children relies on funding in varied forms. Annually, we plan two fund raisers with the financial goal of \$10,000. We have an additional goal to raise \$15,000 through grants and large donations. Finally, we rely on fund raising from individuals and special church funds for the remaining \$15,000 that will support our educational programs for youth, our staff and our advocate support system, which alerts you to take action in support of our children.

Please help us keep you informed with a gift of \$10, \$15, \$35, \$100 or more. Your gift is one way to support children in these troubling times, and we thank you.

With warm regards,
Rebekah Richardson, President

Our Campaign Continues...

Promise the Children advocates for equitable and free public education for all children, emphasizing a holistic curriculum for healthy development. To this end, we have enlisted advocates in an ongoing campaign to overhaul the No Child Left Behind Act. Your involvement is needed to send a message to lawmakers that this unfunded mandate needs to be reworked to ensure that all children get the education that they deserve.

Our Successes...

To date, we have mailed over 400 cards to legislators from 145 of our UU volunteer advocates. Our purpose is to urge our federal legislators to vote to:

1. Fund all federal mandates that relate to public education;
2. Use established assessment tools that measure a student's progress as well as standardized testing;
3. Fund the ongoing professional development of our teachers,

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Thank You to Our Major Donors

Funds of First Church *Boston, UU*

George & Rebekah Richardson

Spinney Mudge Fund of the
UU Church of Greater Lynn

UU Fund for Social Responsibility
of the UU Funding Program

Our New Intern

Promise the Children is very fortunate to have Kamila Quijano join our staff as a nine month intern. Kamila comes to us through the Episcopal Diocese as a Micha intern. Raised in the Philippines for 16 years, she received a scholarship to study in Victoria, Canada at one of the United World Colleges where she studied the International Baccalaureate. She then went on to Earlham College in Richmond, IN where she graduated in May 2008.



Our new intern Kamila Quijano (l) and her friend, Yeguang Chi.

As a Micha intern, Kamila's goal is to work professionally with a public service agency, deepen her communion with God, be transformed by those with whom she lives, works and worships, and discovers her path for life's journey. We welcome Kamila to take part of that journey with us and share her unique skills and genuine joy for life.



Take Action

Eliminate funding for abstinence-only-until-marriage programs

Over the past 10 years, Congress has invested more than \$1.5 billion in programs that mislead young people and promote scientifically-inaccurate information. April 2007 brought the long-awaited Mathematica study, which put a federal stamp on what we already knew: Abstinence only education does not work to change young people's behavior. Not only are these programs ineffective at helping young people abstain from sex, but many programs promote the myth that condoms provide no protection from HIV transmission or unwanted pregnancy.

Now is the time! We've waited too long for America to become a sexually healthy nation. Tell the new Congress to eliminate all federal funding for failed abstinence-only-until-marriage programs. To send an e-mail message to your elected officials, go to www.congress.org and enter your zip code. You will be directed to your official's page where you can send this important message!

GA, cont.

To sum up – history, our formative experience and our own upbringing influence our commitment to our community of children. Promise the Children offers you the opportunity to advocate on behalf of children and youth in many different ways. In this critical time, we hope that you will reflect on your own experience and decide how you can support the healthy development of our nation's young people.

Campaign, cont.

4. Fund tutorial programs that engage skilled volunteer and professional tutors.

If you would like to find out more about our ongoing campaign, please visit our website at www.promisethechildreanu.org and click on the "Issues" tab. There you will find postcards to print out to use in your church or school.

If you would like more information, contact Becky at rkr@promisethechildreanu.org.

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The logo for Promise the Children, featuring a colorful silhouette of children playing and a dog, with the text "Promise the Children" in a bold, sans-serif font.
Taking action for our youngest citizens
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