



WESTCOAST CHILDREN'S CLINIC

Dear Friend,

November 2005

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It is always a challenge to write a letter for the annual fundraising campaign – to convey a year's work, and connect with everyone we haven't been in touch with since last year. It reminds me of the most ubiquitous of letters at year's end – the Holiday Letter. Usually begun with season's greetings, it quickly veers into a list of accomplishments and announcements. What *is* the best way to acknowledge that WestCoast has had a remarkable year without sounding self-congratulating or self-aggrandizing? **There are some extremely worthy accomplishments to mention: the hard fought new program called STAT which aims to see, screen, stabilize and transition children the first day they are brought into foster care; or serving twice as many children and families in our outpatient clinics, as we did the previous year. Last year we saw close to 600 children and families for a total of 18,000 hours of therapy. Most compelling then, is to write a letter that goes beyond the statistics and does justice to a year's worth of work. One that breathes life into WestCoast's mission: to provide psychological services to children and families regardless of their ability to pay for them.**

Making it a little more daunting, is wondering how weary our letter receivers are of pleas for help on the heels of Hurricane Katrina. In the supermarket, I heard a woman remarking that it would be impossible to forget the images left in the wake of the storm. Then her friend asked her how many times she had thought about the tsunami the year before. The truth is, we live in a world too full of Katrina stories. And while some disasters remain out of our control, there are the social disasters which we have more opportunity to impact. Every day in America over 2,400 children are confirmed as abused or neglected. Each day 4 are killed as a result.

Beyond the physical destruction, Katrina opened our eyes to social issues that are too often invisible. It made us look at what Marion Wright Edelman calls the most unbearable dissonance between promise and performance in America – between our capacity to prevent child deprivation, death and disease, and our lack of political and spiritual will to do so. Contradictions between promises to leave no child behind on the one hand and ignoring the poor on the other, were carried into our living rooms. We saw entire families standing on their roofs, waiting for help; pictures of the old, the sick, and the children, mostly black, left behind.

And what of the Bay Area's own New Orleans? Our own 9th Ward families struggling for more stable ground? In the Bay Area, hundreds of children are taken from their parents' home **every month**, because of the complicated circumstances of abuse, and more often neglect, and placed in foster care. It is the beginning of their relocation. And what about the siblings who can't be placed in the same foster home? Or the ones lost between multiple moves, in multiple towns and counties?

There are over 4,000 children living in foster care in Alameda County today. Since September 1st our STAT clinicians have treated every child new to Alameda County foster care in the first hours away from home. We've seen over 250 children in our first two months in operation, an average of six each day. When children are first brought to the Assessment Center and see

the toys, the food and nice people, their initial response, is "This is the happiest day of my life." But, as the hours wear on, their realization grows that this visit isn't ending with their return home, and their view profoundly shifts to become "... the worst day of my life." They wish they hadn't told what happened to them, or complained at all. Because ... when am I going to see my mom? And where is my brother going? And where will I sleep? Tonight? Tomorrow?

These are the questions posed to our clinicians who work at the Assessment Center. And so, our clinicians explain to a four year-old girl that while there is a lot that can't be answered, they talk about the things that can be answered. They reassure her that they will be seeing her wherever she goes next, and will help her find answers to her questions. They tell her that they will let her know what is going to happen next. Though the rupture of her life has already begun, our clinicians make that tentative transition to another home a little bit less traumatic. This kind of intervention is particularly critical for very young children, whose signs of distress might be overlooked or even dismissed. These early interventions dramatically improve a child's chance for a healthy adjustment, and overall stability.

Besides the innovation and development of our STAT program, WestCoast continues to expand the reach of its services for those children needing longer term care. Many families continue to come to our clinic, but for those children who can't, our clinicians travel to see them. They travel up to two hours away, from our offices in El Cerrito and Oakland to Suisun City, to Livermore and Tracy, and to Fremont. One staff member's clinical territory is 371 miles round trip.

In this last year we have transformed the dimension and nature of our services in an effort to make them both accessible and relevant for a population of children and families that have been historically left out of traditional clinic services. In one year, more than half of our services have become mobile. We are then, extremely grateful to, and proud of, our staff who work long hours, in stressful conditions, on top of driving hundreds of miles to see children who otherwise would still be waiting for help.

Finally, we are grateful for and encouraged by an opportunity made possible by a generous donor who will *match every dollar we raise this year*. So, more than ever, we are asking you to help. These funds will help pay for services for children who have no insurance, Medi-Cal or other means to pay. It will help families who need psychological services and have no means of acquiring them. Ultimately, your donation will pay for the potential and promise of children whose contributions have yet to be made.

The annual campaign means more than the dollars it brings in, although we couldn't pretend to live without them. Beyond the money, each return envelope reminds us that we are not alone in our efforts to make a difference.

And so this year we move forward, inspired by the spirit and sheer will of the children we serve. We are aware that WestCoast's success reflects its essential parts: a talented, tireless staff, committed Board, and loyal community of friends and donors whose generous investment in our mission sustains us.

With sincere thanks for your help, and best wishes for the year to come.

Stacey Anne Katz, Psy.D.
Executive Director