Michigan Department of Human Services

Articles in Today's Clips

Thursday, May 1, 2008

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Prepared by the DHS Office of Communications (517) 373-7394

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Editorial: In the cold grip of government

by The Saginaw News

Thursday May 01, 2008, 11:33 AM

Most of the time, people in positions of
government power wield it well. They understand the proper care it requires, the good it can do and the consequences of its abuse.
Every now and again, though, people with little minds revel in the small amount of authority they have to play the gotcha game. Kindness, understanding and common sense vanish and innocent people suffer.
Such was the case this month when Christopher Ratte, a University of Michigan archaeology professor, bought a bottle of Mike's Hard Lemonade during a Tigers game at Comerica Park. Ratte said he had no idea it contained 5 percent alcohol and that's why he gave it to his 7-year-old son, Leo.
What happened next is mind-boggling.
A security guard saw the youngster drinking the alcoholic beverage, grabbed it away and sent the boy to the park clinic. Even though Leo said he felt slightly nauseous but showed no signs of drunkenness, the clinic ordered an ambulance and sent the boy to a hospital where the father had a talk with a cop.
A doctor OK'd young Leo's release after a blood test -- he's normal, the doctor said -- but the cop's supervisor said nope, let's get Child Protective Services in on this. So two of the agency's workers showed up and took Leo to their headquarters where he stayed the night -- crying -- without his father or mother, a U-M architecture professor.
Because Protective Services can't allow the parents custody until a court approves it, the now-desperate Ann Arbor mother and father enlisted the aid of Chris Ratte's social worker and foster parent sisters -- who drove all night from Massachusetts to gain Leo's release.
Protective Services refused. In fact, after giving the women the run-around, the agency spirited the boy away until a court hearing the next day. Meanwhile, Leo had no contact with his parents or relatives.
Finally, an assistant attorney general OK'd the boy's release to his mother -- but only if Chris Ratte stayed in a hotel, which he did. At a hearing three days later, a juvenile referee dropped all complaints and said it was all right for Ratte to go back home.

This five-day ordeal needn't have occurred, obviously. A zealous security guard could've at least heard Ratte out. And was it necessary to send the kid to the hospital in an ambulance? And given the horrors Protective Services workers see every day, did this measure up to shunning Leo's weary aunts, keeping his whereabouts secret, running in and out of court hearings and making the dad stay in a hotel?

Why did no one have the courage to say stop, this is stupid, it was an accident? Are these public servants so blinded by paranoia, the process and "protocol" that they would so willingly unleash such a bureaucratic assault on, by all accounts, a loving family just out for a ball game?

Granted, these are overly litigious times we live in, but an uncaring, unjust, tooth-grinding power play such as this seems sufficient justification for some kind of disciplinary action -- or a lawsuit.

DETROIT FREE PRESS

FROM OUR READERS

No way to protect a 7-year-old

MAY 1, 2008

As a retired professional social worker who specialized in child welfare and juvenile justice, I was appalled to learn how an alleged act of child abuse was handled initially by security and police officers at Comerica Park and, subsequently, by the Child Protective Services unit of the Michigan Department of Human Services ("Hard lemonade, hard price; Dad's oversight at Tigers game lands son in foster care," April 28).

What about the 7-year-old boy, who had gone out with his dad to a ball game? He ends up being examined in an emergency room of a hospital and physically separated from both his dad and mom, probably not understanding why he is being separated or having any idea how long he would be separated and what is going to happen to him. I think I can easily say that he was significantly traumatized and abused by the system.

All people trained in law enforcement and social work must have intuition and sensitivity to determine what course of action, if any, needs to be taken. In this case, it appears that all the law enforcement, social work and court personnel, and their supervisors, seriously misjudged the facts, causing at least serious trauma to the 7-year-old boy and untold anxiety to his parents.

William W. Lovett
Charlevoix

Don't shrug this off

I commend Christopher Ratte and his family for staying strong when the authorities took his son in what can only be described as an Orwellian

nightmare. I don't think it's nearly enough just to shrug this off as one family's unfortunate outcome of a flawed child welfare system. The individuals and organizations directly involved should be held accountable for their actions and face the appropriate consequences.

Mary Hayes Weier
Ann Arbor

Unprofessional overreaction

I have been a professional social worker for more than 30 years. I belong to a proud profession of people who are dedicated to helping others. I am not only appalled but embarrassed by the behavior of the social workers involved in the Ratte case. I find it unconscionable that this process continued as it did. It appears that no one championed what needed to be done to resolve this overreaction.

My heart goes out to the Ratte family for what they went through. Social workers are committed to doing a much better job.

Natalie Palay
Saline

Wrong kind of memories

I have such fond memories of baseball games at Briggs Stadium with my father. He taught me to keep score and cheer for the Tigers -- perhaps sometimes too loudly, but nobody ever complained. I am so sorry that Leo Ratte and his father will have no such fond remembrance. What has happened to common sense?

Marilyn Dane
Plymouth

Why sell alcoholic drinks?

I cannot help but react to the stupidity of Christopher Ratte's son being placed into foster care. I also have never heard of hard lemonade.

In my estimation, the vendor is at fault for selling an alcoholic drink to the dad without asking whom it was for. And for the guard to not listen to Ratte and use his discretion accordingly. Why are alcoholic beverages allowed to be sold in a ball park?

Frederic A. Jaques
Novi

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Monday, April 28, 2008

Autopsy performed in infant's death

Monday, April 28, 2008

IRONWOOD -- An autopsy was scheduled to be performed Monday on 7-month-old Aden Michael Cannons, who reportedly stopped breathing Sunday at a daycare facility on Oak Street in Ironwood.

According to an Ironwood Public Safety Department news release, officers from IPSD and Beacon Ambulance personnel performed cardio-pulr prior to the baby being transported to Grand View Hospital, where he was later pronounced dead.

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Tuesday, April 29, 2008

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According to an Ironwood Public Safety Department news release, officers from the IPSD and Beacon Ambulance personnel performed cardio-p resuscitation prior to the baby being transported to Grand View Hospital, where he was later pronounced dead.

The IPSD was assisted by Beacon Ambulance, the Gogebic County Victim Services unit and the Michigan Department of Human Services.

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THE OAKLAND PRESS

Boy, 2, saved from pond

By JACQUELYN GUTC
Of The Oakland Press

COMMERCE TWP. - A 2-year-old boy who nearly drowned after being left alone near a Commerce Township pond on Tuesday is expected to return home from the hospital today.

According to the Oakland County Sheriff's Office, the boy, whose identity is not being released, is expected to fully recover.

The boy and his 9-year-old sister were fishing at the pond of Stratford Villa Mobile Park about 6:30 p.m. Tuesday, when the girl reportedly went back to their home in the 2200 block of Gage Drive to use the bathroom.

When she returned to the pond, she found the boy face down in the water.

Oakland County Sheriff Michael Bouchard said the kids' mother was not home at the time of the incident, but the mother's boyfriend and mother were.

When the girl discovered her brother in the water, she ran to get their mother's boyfriend. He pulled the unresponsive boy out of the water and performed rescue breathing techniques, Bouchard said.

When deputies arrived, the boy was breathing and crying.

He was taken to Huron Valley-Sinai Hospital and then to Children's Hospital at the University of Michigan.

"It's a vivid - and thankfully with a good result - reminder of how very quickly a situation can turn deadly," Bouchard said.

He noted that even when children have adult supervision near water, an accident can happen with the adult looking away for an instant.

"We encourage parents all the time if they're with their kids to constantly keep their eye on them," he said. "Literally, you can't presume anything from a puddle to a deep lake can't kill a child very quickly."

It is unclear at this point what, if any, punishment the children's parents could face.

Bouchard said the Oakland County Sheriff's Marine Division and Oakland County Child Protective Services were notified of the incident.

He said authorities will look into the situation and whether it was reasonable

for the children to be alone.

As for kids being unsupervised near water, he said, "this should be a stark reminder that maybe that's not the best thing to do unless there's protocols."

Bouchard suggested insisting that children wear life vests, so that if they fall in or hit their head, they won't drown.

"We're getting ready to launch boats and swimming pools will be opening shortly. Parents need to be aware and vigilant," he said.

Stratford Villa Mobile Park representatives declined to comment on the incident.

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http://www.theoaklandpress.com/stories/050108/loc_20080501287.shtml

9-year-old testifies: Accused sex offender 'did something to me'

Thursday, May 01, 2008

By Barton Deiters
The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS -- The 9-year-old boy said he did not want to be on the witness stand talking about being molested by a friend's dad, but he did it anyway.

"(His) dad did something to me; I don't want to say," the blond boy told Kent County Assistant Prosecutor Helen Brinkman as she sought to convince a jury Jamie Andrew VanKlaveren, 27, is guilty of sexually abusing eight boys, some as young as 8.

The boy testifying Wednesday was 8 in July 2006 when he stayed overnight at a 13-year-old friend's house to watch scary movies and play video games.

At some point, VanKlaveren fondled the boy over the course of two nights, the boy said. He was sure of his testimony -- "I'm real sure" was his often-repeated claim -- but he was equally sure he watched "Saw II" at the home on DVD, a movie that was not released until October 2006.

The boy said he went back to the house after the molestation because he wanted to play video games and because he wanted to see if VanKlaveren would do it again.

It was days later that the boy revealed to his mother what had happened and she called the police.

"I was afraid I'd get in deep trouble for staying two nights without telling her what happened," the boy testified as to why he did not tell his mother for days.

Brinkman said the boy is just the first of many who will testify to being sexually assaulted, in ways ranging from being fondled over their clothes to sexual penetration.

Defense attorney Brett Stevensen said in his opening arguments that his client is the victim of a hysteria stirred up by VanKlaveren's wife, who called some of the alleged victims' parents and told them VanKlaveren was a predator.

The boy who testified Wednesday was the first to come forward. The other accusations did not come to light until March 2007.

The alleged incidents occurred in Gaines Township, Wyoming and Kentwood and include 14 counts of criminal sexual conduct.

"Mr. VanKlaveren is either a monster or a big kid at heart," Stevensen said in his opening statement, in which he claimed many of the accusers have issues that will make them less than credible.

Testimony was to continue today in a trial expected to last well into next week.

Send e-mail to the author: bdeiters@grpress.com

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Everything Michigan

Muskegon Chronicle

Abuse victim: 'Grow up. Everybody has problems'

Thursday, May 01, 2008

By Susan Harrison Wolffis

susanharrison@muskegonchronicle.com

MUSKEGON TWP. -- When he was a child, he raided neighbors' garbage cans, fighting off stray dogs for scraps. The skin on his hands and forearms was alternately eaten away by bleach or blistered by being plunged into open fire.

He did not know how to talk. His mother -- an alcoholic, abusive, mentally ill -- refused to let him speak in the house. He had a name, but she called her son "It."

On March 5, 1973, when his junior high school principal, teachers and the school nurse finally stepped in and rescued him from a life of torture and starvation, Dave Pelzer -- the boy called "It" -- was 12 years old and weighed only 68 pounds.

"Excuse me. You think you've got problems?" Pelzer asked 3,000 students from nine Muskegon County high schools and an additional 350 adults who attended three speeches he gave at Reeths-Puffer High School Wednesday.

"Rambo is a wimp compared to me."

Now 47, Pelzer was in Muskegon Wednesday at the invitation of Reeths-Puffer teacher Matt Geoghan's psychology students who read, "A Child Called It," the first of a series of best-selling books Pelzer has written that details his childhood in California. A retired U.S. Air Force chief, Pelzer is now on the road 338 days of the year, giving speeches about his past -- and pushing students to think about their future.

"I'm sorry if you think I'm abrasive," he told his audiences. "But I have two words of advice: Grow up. Everybody has problems."

When he was in second grade, Pelzer said, his teacher tried to intervene on his behalf. But California had not yet passed a law making it mandatory for teachers, social workers, doctors and other professionals to report suspected child abuse.

"My mother got my (second-grade) teacher fired for intruding into private family matters," he said.

Not only did the abuse continue, it increased. His mother made him drink ammonia, scalding his vocal cords with chemicals. She stabbed him in the chest, missing his heart by a half-inch and refusing to get him medical treatment.

"She 'forgot' to feed me for 14 days," Pelzer said. "I wanted a cheeseburger, but water would do."

He was banished to the basement, sleeping on a cot with no covers, existing without a toilet or bathroom, only a faucet. For two years, he wore the same pants and shirt. He smelled so bad, he had to sit near an open window in a classroom.

"What's your challenge?" he asked his audiences.

For almost four hours in three separate speeches, Pelzer spoke in a free-wheeling, sometimes hilarious, often confrontational style.

"Quiet," he told the kids when he heard whispers or any other noise coming from the audience. "No talking.

Be quiet. Pay attention. Receive this."

His was not a message delivered as "a victim," he said. "People call me the 'poster child of abuse.' I'm not about abuse. I stand for resilience, responsibility and a quiet code of honor."

When he was rescued by his teachers, principal and school nurse -- people he calls "heroes" -- and put into state foster care, California authorities described his as the third-worst case of abuse they'd ever seen.

"The first two died after they were rescued," Pelzer said. "When I say I'm blessed, you have no idea."

For more than a year, Reeths-Puffer students have held spaghetti dinners, car washes and baked good sales to raise Pelzer's $15,000 speaking fee. They've baby-sat and sold "novelties." They turned to the Child Abuse Council of Muskegon County and found support from the council, Mercy Health Partners, White Lake Community Education, Great Start and Community Mental Health of Muskegon County.

"We just wanted him here," said Ashley Deters, 18, a Reeths-Puffer senior, who was taking photographs of the event for the school's yearbook.

They had prepared themselves for a speech that outlined Pelzer's past, said Alicia Nichols, 17, a Reeths-Puffer senior. They hadn't anticipated someone who challenged them to the responsibilities of adulthood in voices mimicking Clint Eastwood, former President Bill Clinton and California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger.

"It's amazing," Nichols said. "A lot of people need to hear that whole 'grow up' thing."

In between sessions, the psychology students -- who wore matching T-shirts -- crowded around Pelzer to get his autograph.

"I was never this popular in school," he joked.

In fact, he dropped out of high school when he was a junior because he was working 90 hours a week "to make sure I'd never be homeless." He has since earned several college degrees and studies online every day from 2-4 a.m., often in airports as he waits to head to his next speaking engagement.

"Can we talk about the 'f' word?" he asked the kids. "If we can talk about the 'f' word, we can talk about anything. What is it? Focus. Focus. Focus."

Next month, Pelzer will travel to Iraq to work as a civilian counselor with the men and women in the U.S. Army and Air Force. When he returns stateside, he will begin a "nonstop" tour to promote his newest book, "Moving Forward," scheduled to be released June 24.

"I am not a motivational speaker," he insisted. "I am not a professional. I can only tell you that what's in my heart is true. Grow up. Cowboy up. Be an adult. My job is to show you the light, but you have to go toward it."

At each speech, he asked for everyone's undivided attention, punctuating each sentence with: "Does this make sense? Yes or no?"

Then like a preacher waiting for his congregation to respond, he stared down the people in his audiences with his message -- and used his strength of spirit that helped him survive broken bones, abuse and terror until some adults intervened.

"I asked you: Yes or no?"

Pelzer said he went to his mother before she died in the hopes of striking some peace. He asked her: Was there anything they could have done to stop the abuse and change the direction of their lives?

"She told me she planned on killing me the summer (after I was rescued)," Pelzer said. He paused, looked at his audience and said: "I'm sorry. What's your challenge again?"

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The Macomb Daily
www.macombdaily.com

Parent rights activist cleared

Man sued county for wrongful arrest

By Jameson Cook
Macomb Daily Staff Writer

A parents-rights activist who sued Macomb County for wrongful arrest appeared in district court to face a new child-support charge, but the case was dismissed on request of Macomb prosecutors.

Judge Linda Davis of Macomb County Circuit Court threw out the charge against Dan "Danny" Wilson, state director of Parents for Children Inc., on Wednesday - the second time in 14 months a child-support charge against him has been dismissed.

"They made a mistake twice," Wilson said moments after he learned the case would be dismissed. "I'm going to have to amend the federal case to include this one."

Wilson, 56, of Westland and formerly of Chesterfield Township, in March sued Macomb County, the county Sheriff's Department, Prosecutor's Office, Friend of the Court and several county employees for $2.5 million for his Feb. 21, 2007, arrest and overnight stay in the Macomb County Jail. His case was dismissed one month later by 41B District Judge Sebastian Lucido after Wilson claimed officials confused him with another person in another divorce case.

But then three days after the dismissal, a new warrant was approved and bench warrant issued. It had remained outstanding until recently.

An assistant Macomb prosecutor informed Wilson and his attorney, Janet Wilson, his current wife, of the decision in the hallway outside the courtroom Wednesday but did not explain the reason.

Assistant Macomb prosecutor James Langtry, who serves as the office's spokesman, could not be reached for comment Wednesday afternoon.

Wilson said he believes his cause was helped by 10 members of his organization who marched with pickets in front of the courthouse. Their signs touted Parents for Children. The group says it is "addressing corruption and abuse in family courts."

Wilson, who has three children, had owed $10,000 in support in 2005 but paid up by fall 2006 and says he kept up with payments. He recently made his last payment, $163, this month for his son, who just turned 18, he said. The arrest warrant was issued in June 2005.

Wilson said he believes officials retaliated against him for his position as state chairman and founder of Parents for Children and his scrutiny of Macomb County Friend of the Court.

In 1998, Wilson also was arrested and sentenced to 90 days in jail by a circuit judge for failure to pay $6,000 in child support for his two sons with his second wife and for a daughter whose mother he divorced in 1981.

His group, Parents for Children, shortly before had successfully lobbied county officials for the formation of a citizens advisory committee to oversee the Friend of the Court, which handles custody and child support matters.

Wilson at that time also believed his arrest was political and said he had been prevented from seeing his children.

Before that, Wilson served a 4-year term on the Chesterfield board and unsuccessfully ran for county commission twice in the 1990s, campaigning on Friend of the Court issues.

In his federal lawsuit, Wilson says he was arrested by Macomb deputies, held in error at the jail, where he was stripped naked. He says he was given a small blanket with Velcro strips that didn't work and placed in a cell with a cell mate.

Still wearing the blanket, Wilson says he was arraigned at the jail on the felony the following morning before a 41B District Court magistrate via video. He was released later that day.

Wilson alleges violation of his First, Fourth, Fifth, Eighth and 14th Amendment rights; slander and defamation; false imprisonment; assault and battery; malicious prosecution; abuse of process; and intentional infliction of emotional distress.

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Maxey inmates being moved out — Medium-security offenders taken elsewhere in cost-cutting move

By Christopher Behnan
DAILY PRESS & ARGUS

Article published May 1, 2008

The relocation of all medium-security juvenile offenders at the W.J. Maxey Boys Training School in Green Oak Township to private or community-based facilities is ongoing — a process ordered by law to be completed by today.

The transition amounts to the relocation of 80 beds, and will leave only high-security offenders at the facility.

The cost-cutting measure is outlined in Public Act 131, signed into law by Gov. Jennifer Granholm on Oct. 31 as part of the new state budget — a move expected to save the state $9 million annually.

The state Department of Human Services updated the state Legislature of its progress last month, and explained the transition likely wouldn't be completed by today, department spokesperson Maureen Sorbet said.

Most Maxey employees who would be laid off in the process have found other work within the department, Sorbet said.

So far, 34 medium-security inmates have either been released or transferred to private or community-based programs.

Meanwhile, 26 medium-security inmates remain at the facility, including nine expected to stay as high-security inmates; eight expected to be released within 30 days; five awaiting placement in community-based programs; and four still in court hearings, Sorbet said.

"We don't have all the medium-security kids moved out of the facility yet. We do have, and will have as of tomorrow, 26 kids there," Sorbet said Wednesday.

"We're working as swiftly as we can, but we have to work with the courts and other partners" to place the inmates, she added.

Perhaps the most difficult part of the process is finding appropriate facilities for the displaced inmates who have committed a variety of offenses and have a wide range of special needs.

"That's what we're about and that's what we do. I believe those types of placements have been found," Sorbet said.

The department is confident inmates, many of whom have a record of sexual offenses, will be able to get the same quality of treatment at private facilities, Sorbet said.

The W.J. Maxey Citizens Advisory Council, however, has questioned that statement.

In December, the council circulated a letter to state lawmakers and Granholm, pleading with the state to reconsider the cuts.

The letter notes previous population cuts at Maxey, and says the state has a "lack of awareness" of what will be lost once the cuts are made. Most notably, the reductions will diminish sex offender treatment, which is in strong demand at the facility, the letter states.

"Maxey's been there for that," council member Kenneth Rimstad said at the time.

The law also requires the Department of Human Services to reduce Maxey's staff by more than 130 of 268 positions — a process completed April 19, Sorbet said.

Sorbet said roughly 90 percent of those employees have found other jobs within the department. As of January, there were eight other state-run juvenile facilities in Michigan in need of staffing.

Nathaniel Abraham, a youth sentenced to Maxey for murder, was perhaps the most high-profile inmate in recent years.

Contact Daily Press & Argus reporter Christopher Behnan at (517) 548-7108 or at cbehnan@gannett.com.

Huron Daily Tribune
MichiganSThumb.com

05/01/2008

Special Report: A morning in Juvenile Court

Kate Hessling , The Huron Daily Tribune

HURON COUNTY — It's about 9:15 a.m. on a recent Wednesday in the Huron County Probate Courtroom, and a 16-year-old Huron County female is flanked by her defense attorney and Assistant Prosecuting Attorney Stephen J. Allen. Her grandparents sit behind her as the three make small talk, not really mentioning the reason they are here — she violated the terms and conditions of her probation.

All chatting ceases as they rise when Probate Court Judge David L. Clabuesch — who is assigned to oversee the Juvenile Division of Family Court cases — enters the room.

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Allen calls the young girl to the witness stand where she admits to the probation violation.

She was put on probation because of a domestic violence incident in which she hit her mother. Since then, she's been going through counseling and the Families First program which offers families intensive, 30-day crisis intervention and in-home family education services.

Allen explains she was ordered by the court to obey reasonable rules set by her grandparents, which include not being able to associate with anyone more than two years older than her.

Because she disobeyed those rules — as she herself admitted when she told the court she was dating a 21-year-old — Allen recommends the court order out-of-home placement.

The girl's caseworker agrees, saying the situation is at a point where she may require more intensive services than can be provided where she currently lives. The caseworker is concerned future episodes will escalate to violence.

And, if she remains home, the caseworker feels confident all parties will be back in court.

But she doesn't want to be placed out of her grandparents' care. Clutching a statement she wrote the previous day, she cries as she reads her apology and request for "just one more last chance."

"I know that I'm going around in circles, but if I could have just one more chance I know I can do better," she says, adding she has hopes of joining the cheerleading team and attending church camp this summer.

Clabuesch says this situation is frustrating to everyone involved as you have a young girl who's been raised by her grandparents her whole life because that's where her parents dropped her off at a very young age.

"I can understand why a young lady who had parents pull a stunt like that might be angry," he said.

As understandable as it is, Clabuesch tells her she can't let that anger destroy her.

She now has two choices, he says. Take advantage of this second chance, do the very things she read she wants to do in her letter, or return to court where her placement will be determined.

"Either do things my way — and if you're not going to do that ... let's figure out another plan," the judge said, referring to out-of-home placement.

Out-of-home placements range from foster care homes for abused/neglected minors to maximum security juvenile justice facilities (like the W.J. Maxey Boys Training School in Whitmore Lake and the Bay Pines Center for both male and female juvenile offenders between the ages of 12 and 21).

According to the Michigan Department of Human Services, the state's total abuse/neglect caseload was 19,071 with 16,784 in out-of-home care at the end of last fiscal year.

In comparison, at the end of fiscal year 2006, the total abuse/neglect caseload was 18,655 with 16,599 in out-of-home care, which the state defines as children not living in their own parent's home.

The costs of these out-of-home placements are taking a toll statewide on just about every county's budget.

In Huron County alone, Clabuesch estimated they make up about 80 percent of the Child Care Fund — a fund that Huron County Commissioner and Finance Chairman Ron Wruble said is definitely an area of concern when it comes to the county's budget.

"It's a huge concern," Wruble said.

Clabuesch said the fund, which is funded 50 percent by the state and 50 percent by the county, is in excess of $1.4 million.

Wruble said the county had to amend the 2007 Child Care Fund budget for $215,000 to reflect increased costs in the Child Care Fund. Prior to the amendments, the county had budgeted $500,000 in the child care fund.

"It's nothing the department head, judge or anybody else can predict or control for that matter," Wruble said referring to the Child Care Fund's budget. "It's just getting inundated with some tough issues."

Sitting in Clabuesch's courtroom on this recent Wednesday provides a good idea as to what some of those issues are.

Following the 16-year-old parole violator's hearing, the judge enters a pretrial hearing with other lawyers to discuss a case involving the neglect of a 9-month-old baby who is in foster care after recently being removed from home.

Pre-trial hearings are closed to the public so details of the meeting can not be disclosed.

Following the pre-trial hearing, Clabuesch explains the main focus of the hearing is on preserving family, while at the same time doing what's best for the child. He outlined the steps followed in cases like this.

Step one, he says, involves determining the severity of the abuse/neglect — whether it's so bad it warrants immediate termination of parental rights or not.

If not, Clabuesch says a treatment plan is created for the parents to follow, and a series of reviews are held at least every 90 days.

Then after six months, if the parents have not complied with the treatment plan, step two kicks in and the prosecutor can seek termination of parental rights.

If termination is not sought after six months and the reviews do not continue every 90 days, the case goes to termination after one year unless there can be some showing that there needs to be more time, Clabuesch says. But if the parents have complied with their set treatment plan and have made all of their reviews, they are reunited with their parents.

This is step three.

During this time, the child generally is in foster care.

Foster parents are especially critical, not only during this time, but at the time of the emergency removal, Clabuesch says. When police encounter a scene where a child is abused or neglected, they call protective services which in turn calls Clabuesch's staff to get authorization for an emergency removal of the child from the home. Once protective services has the authority to immediately remove the child from the home, they have to find a foster care location for the child.

"That's why foster care parents are so critical to the system," Clabuesch adds, referring to the point that these people are on call 24/7 and the process is the same no matter what time it is — meaning if the call comes in at 3 a.m., protective services personnel, Clabuesch's staff and a home for the child are needed just as quickly as when the call comes in during regular business hours.

The county's cost for foster care placement is around $20 a day, Clabuesch said.

From there, the cost of out-of-home placement skyrockets, as Clabuesch said the cost to send teenagers to a residential out-of-home placement range from $100 to $500 a day, depending on the intensity of the facility's security.

"Of those costs, the county pays 50 percent of that and the state pays 50 percent," he said.

Clabuesch said the rest of the Child Care Fund that isn't spent on out-of-home placements is used for services designed and utilized in an effort to prevent the removal of a child from home.

When dealing with juveniles, he said he has three objectives: (1) know the child knows right from wrong, (2) see them get an education, and (3) see them have a plan for their success.

“When they convince me they have these three things, I’m ready to close the case and move on,” Clabuesch said.

But even as one case closes another opens, as there are somewhere in the neighborhood of 175 children in the Juvenile Division of Family Court at all times, he said. Of those, around 135 are able to stay home.

“And we will have anywhere ranging from 20 to 40 out-of-home at any one time,” Clabuesch said.

He said the court (when judging juvenile delinquents) tries to first go with the least-restrictive placement possible, which is foster care.

And basically, the nature of the problems the child presents — based on the child’s own conduct — determines if a more restrictive placement is needed, Clabuesch said.

“The balancing act that I do is one of the ability to find rehabilitation versus the need to protect the public,” Clabuesch said.

He said a number of intermediate steps focused on keeping kids out of the maximum security placements have been implemented, including a 12-week intensive residential placement in place of the normal residential placement that usually lasts between 9 and 12 months.

“We may send more kids away to less restrictive places because we intervene earlier, and instead of just doing nothing until it’s so severe that you have to lock them down in the most severe placement, we will intervene earlier,” Clabuesch said.

It’s not a severe maximum security placement facility facing a 17-year-old Huron County male who’s in Clabuesch’s courtroom about 11 a.m. this recent Wednesday because he’s violated his probation by refusing to take his medication.

It’s jail.

“I just want to be out of control,” he tells the judge, admitting while the medicine helps him, there are times he just doesn’t want to take it.

Clabuesch holds the young man’s plea, saying if he takes his medicine and obeys all of the other conditions of his probation, he won’t be in trouble. If not, he could serve up to 90 days in jail.

“Don’t let this get to an unsuccessful closure,” he warns the 17-year-old.

Immediately following that case, another group enters the courtroom for a case that goes back years ago when charges of educational neglect were issued to parents whose two children were truant from school.

The family’s caseworker informs Clabuesch the youngest daughter is doing well in school. The other has had some disciplinary problems at school and also has missed quite a few days (though she does have doctor excuses for all the missed days because she was ill).

And, as she sits in the back row of the courtroom with her mother and sister, she begins crying as the court learns she’s currently three months pregnant.

“This is the kind of job that unfortunately creates (my) job security ... people who can’t take care of themselves getting pregnant young and not being able to take care of the baby,” Clabuesch says. “ ... At the risk of offending anybody, I think you need to look to the two ‘As’ and evaluate either an abortion or adoption.”

While he knew some would find the statement offensive, the judge later admitted he knew the girl, now 18, is nearly too far along for abortion to even be a viable option.

The point he wanted to stress, he said, was for her to know she had alternatives other than keeping the child.

“I’m dealing with a situation where there’s children having children,” Clabuesch says, noting the girl is young, unwed, isn’t even finished with high school and won’t be for at least a year — providing she takes summer courses and a full load during the next school year. “ ... And I have a grandma who was neglectful the first time around.”

The court decides to keep the case open, warning the 18-year-old to walk a very straight line or else she’ll face charges of uttering and publishing and/or theft from an incident that occurred in school.

As the concerns of the increasing size of the Child Care Fund have been discussed during numerous county commissioners meetings, Wruble said the board is well aware some of the costs incurred by these cases can not necessarily be controlled.

“Everybody understands what the situation is — (Clabuesch’s) hands are tied.

He’s just dealing with some situations that cost the county a lot of money,” he said. “There’s no way around it.”

In a perfect world, addressing juvenile delinquency — and even child abuse/neglect — would be done with a lot of community-based resources and basic community involvement, Clabuesch said.

“But it’s very, very difficult to get people to get that actively involved and invested for the duration that it takes to fix these kinds of issues,” he said. “They don’t just lend themselves to being fixed overnight by any stretch — anybody who’s invested has to be invested for long terms.”

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THE GRAND RAPIDS PRESS

Standoff suspect charged

Thursday, May 01, 2008

LOWELL TOWNSHIP -- A 23-year-old man involved in a six-hour standoff with police that ended early Tuesday has been charged with felonious assault. He allegedly attacked his wife before she fled their house, leaving him and their 2-year-old son behind, Kent County sheriff's Lt. Kevin Kelley said. Jacob Olthoff was arraigned Wednesday. Police surrounded his house late Monday and later entered the residence, finding the child asleep and arresting Olthoff without incident, authorities said. Deputies used a camera-equipped robot to locate Olthoff, who could not communicate with police because he allegedly broke the house phones to prevent his wife from calling police.

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THE GRAND RAPIDS PRESS

Donations sought to help mothers at shelters

Thursday, May 01, 2008

The Grand Rapids Press

Two Men and A Truck is teaming with the West Michigan Whitecaps, the YWCA of West Central Michigan and WLHT-FM (95.7) to raise money for gifts for mothers in area women's shelters.

The moving company is accepting donations through May 11 of personal care items or other essential items at 4020 West River Drive NW in Comstock Park and 1575 Gezon Parkway SW in Wyoming.

In addition, fans attending the Whitecaps game at Fifth Third Ballpark on May 11 are encouraged to bring donations.

Statewide, there are 20 locations in Michigan collecting items for mothers in shelters.

Anyone interested in joining the effort can call 517-485-4545.

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Schauer embraces ideas from community on helping the uninsured

ELIZABETH HUFF • *THE ENQUIRER* • MAY 1, 2008

There might be no national or state solution to covering the uninsured, but local groups are working on ways to use what money is already in the health care system more efficiently and equitably.

To share these ideas and gather more from the community, State Sen. Mark Schauer, D-Bedford Township, hosted a town hall meeting at Kellogg Community College on Wednesday night. The event was held during national "Cover the Uninsured Week." About a dozen people attended.

Among the medical staff and nonprofit health care heads in attendance was Bob Haiduk, 53, of Battle Creek who borrowed money to fill his tank of gas and came to share a piece of his mind.

"They're talking about 47 million people that don't have health insurance," Haiduk said. "There has to be more than a double standard."

Haiduk said none of the presidential candidates' plans satisfied him. Calhoun Health Plan Executive Director Samantha Pearl agreed.

"I haven't seen anything that gets me excited either," Pearl said. "There's not going to be one single plan that solves the problem."

In Calhoun County already there are about 23,000 uninsured people which is about 16.8 percent of residents, Pearl said.

There are untold economic consequences for everyone — insured and uninsured — when these people don't know how to get affordable health care, wait until they are very sick, miss work and then possibly end up in the emergency room or hospital unable to pay the bill.

"It gets shifted to you and I," Schauer said. "We all pay more."

Pearl suggested some ideas that have worked well for Calhoun Health Plan, such as the Dentists' Partnership. It is a network of dental providers who give free emergency tooth care to the poor uninsured. To receive care, patients must first volunteer for community nonprofits.

Dr. Mary Ellen Benzik discussed her efforts as medical director of Calhoun County Pathways to Health to streamline communication between providers to better manage chronic conditions like diabetes. Already some physician groups have seen results.

In Calhoun County about 10 percent of people have diabetes and 20 percent are a risk of developing the blood disease, she said. Money could be saved by managing their disease early on, before it becomes an expensive problem.

"People are dying younger, which doesn't help our economy either," she said. "We could do tremendous work if we could to that work upfront instead of at the end of life" where the bulk of the costs is.

Elizabeth Huff can be reached at 966-0684 or *ehuff@battlecr.gannett.com*.

May 1, 2008

Donate food through the mail May 10

The Enquirer

Letter carriers will pick up and transport donated food items to area food banks on May 10.

Those who wish to donate non-perishable foods in non-breakable containers can drop them off beside their mailboxes prior to mail collection that day.

Acceptable items include canned soups, canned vegetables, pasta, rice and cereal.

It is a part of the National Association of Letter Carriers “Stamp Out Hunger” drive.

Community Focused-Community Driven-Making a difference everyday!

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Local News

Local poor struggle to find housing

Print Page

By Tony Lascari
Published: Thursday, May 1, 2008 11:36 AM EDT

Housing needs are growing for extremely-low income families of Midland County.

The Midland County Continuum of Care noted the rising need as it asked the Midland City Council how the two groups could partner to find solutions.

"People that are living with incomes far below the median income for our community are struggling," said Sharon Mortensen, the continuum's chairperson.

She said poverty in Midland County has risen to 13.7 percent from 8.4 percent in 2000. A growing concern now is the working poor.

"That's where we're seeing the real needs right now," she said.

First Call for Help's top requests are for housing and food assistance, and the foreclosure rate in Midland County has risen in the past few years. Local shelters are seeing higher demand and low-income apartments in the area now have growing waiting lists, Mortensen said.

A 2003 City of Midland study found a need for 374 additional housing units for extremely low-income residents. Since than, 72 units have gone through property acquisition in the US-10 Business Route corridor, with many that served the low-income population being demolished.

"That adds to the need for additional units," Mortensen said.

To help face the situation, community organizations are looking for any opportunity to get grants that support housing needs.

Recent additions include 15 Homeless Assistance Recovery Program rent assistance vouchers, 10 tenant-based rental assistance vouchers, three units purchased by the Affordable Housing Alliance and four more units that will be purchased this spring by the alliance and Shelterhouse.

Mortensen said this help addresses only a fraction of the increased challenge local agencies face. She said the continuum would like to work with the city if possible to look at solutions.

"If there's an opportunity to work collaboratively in a more broad-scale way, we're happy to do so," she said.

Council member Maureen Donker said the continuum is working hard on this issue to improve the community.

City Manager Jon Lynch said the Midland Housing Commission has been looking at collecting data on affordable housing and fair housing. Councilman Hollis McKeag said he'd like to see a minimum amount of money put into studies and instead "put it toward doing something."

Mayor Bruce Johnson said he would like to learn more about the level of need, what resources are available and what the role of the city can be in finding solutions. He said it would be important to talk to community organizations, landlords and other parties involved.

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Groups at odds over donations

Posted by Brad Flory | Jackson Citizen Patriot May 01, 2008 09:34AM

Categories: Columns

Jackson's old shirts and socks were never worth a fight.

Until now, that is.

Donors may be surprised to learn of a struggle, of sorts, between two organizations that collect used clothing.

Goodwill Industries is a charity that has helped people in Jackson for nearly 60 years.

The Institute for International Cooperation and Development (IICD) is not.

Both groups will gladly take your used stuff.

IICD has blue boxes for donations of clothing and shoes placed in parking lots all over Jackson.

Goodwill would like to point out two things: The IICD is not a licensed charity and does not help anyone in Jackson.

Robert Holderbaum, regional president of Goodwill, says IICD boxes confuse donors and detract from real charity work. He called it a "plague."

Goodwill is sending property owners letters asking for removal of IICD boxes. Not surprisingly, the IICD is displeased.

"Basically, what Goodwill is trying to do is suggest we're not legal," said Mike Day, collections manager of the IICD.

"We're not going to take our boxes out of Jackson just because Goodwill wants us to," he said.

Day said his organization does not need a charity license because "we're not a charity. We're a nonprofit organization but not a charity." Suffice to say, the IICD Web site would lead anyone to think it is a charity.

Goodwill is a charity so well known it needs no explanation. It has two retail stores and three collection centers in Jackson.

IICD is lesser known. It operates a training school in Dowagiac for people who go to Africa and Asia to do development work, Day said.

The school is linked, at least informally, to Tvind, a movement that started in the 1970s in Denmark. Its stated goal is helping poor nations close the gap with the rich. Some critics call Tvind a cult.

Used clothing, which can be sold like a commodity in 1,000-pound bales, helps fund organizations in the movement.

Donors can easily settle this struggle in Jackson.

If you want your used clothing to do good for your neighbors, give it (and household items) to Goodwill or the St. Vincent de Paul Society.

Buy from Goodwill's second-hand stores, too, if you want to help support its work programs for disabled people. Being a cheapskate never felt so charitable.

On the other hand, if your only concern is making sure your old clothes do not go into a landfill, IICD is fine.

What an easy choice for my shirts and socks.

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Thursday, May 1, 2008

Census

Michigan losing its youngest residents

Mike Wilkinson / The Detroit News

Michigan had nearly 39,000 fewer children under the age of 5 last year compared with 2000, a startling decline that experts say could have a dramatic effect on the state's schools, retailers and job market for decades to come.

The census population estimates released today show Michigan had the second highest percentage drop among its youngest residents, behind Louisiana, and the second largest estimated drop just behind New York, a much more populous state.

The implications could be long-lasting: Everything and everyone from physicians to youth sports teams to churches will be affected by the changing needs of the state. And a generation from now, there could be fewer people entering the work force -- and again, fewer families to raise the next generation of Michiganians.

"You've got 30, 40 years of losing these (people) and losing their kids," said Gordon De Jong, a professor of sociology and demography at Pennsylvania State University's Population Research Institute.

A number of states saw a decline in their under-5 population, but Michigan's loss stood out, its long-term aging compounded by families leaving the state searching for work. The state is one of only a few whose overall population declined during the past two years.

Optimism expressed

But not everyone predicts gloom. Dana Johnson, chief economist for Comerica Bank, said the loss of population will continue in the near term as

the auto industry continues to shed jobs and evolve. But he believes the end is in sight and that the state will recover, incomes will rebound and the long-term impact will be minimal.

"This economic migration is understandable, and it's going to slow. This isn't something that's a permanent feature of Michigan," he said.

"I think the idea that Michigan is in some long-term secular decline is not right."

At the KinderCare day care facility in Utica, director Sandy Calcagno said she's had to counsel numerous families who were pulling their youngsters out as they headed for the South and Southwest. In her 14 years in the day care industry, she's never seen such an exodus, and she fears it will affect the kids the most.

"It's definitely gotten worse in the last year and a half," Calcagno said. "It's just hard for those children to adjust (to upheaval)."

Calcagno said she's had four families move to North Carolina in the past year. Since 2000, that state has added nearly 100,000 children under 5. Most of that increase stems from migration from states like Michigan.

Overall, Michigan has gotten markedly older in the past seven years. The median age has risen to 37.5 from 35.5, among the largest increases in the country. The biggest jumps are among those over 45 -- with a nearly 28 percent increase in the population that is 85 and older. They will require more health care and more tailored social services.

"The Aging Office will not be going out of business," quipped Sharon Gire, director of the Michigan Office of Services to the Aging.

Rethinking services

As the baby boom generation starts getting its senior discounts, communities across the state will have to rethink what they offer seniors.

People of the generation that experienced the sweeping cultural changes of the 1960s and 1970s will offer more of their own time to peers as they seek different pastimes, Gire said.

Now representing about 16 percent of the population, seniors will comprise a fifth of it within a decade.

There are fewer women of childbearing age, and the state's birthrate has declined. There were more than 9,000 fewer births in the state in 2006 than in 2000, according to the Michigan Department of Community Health.

The ripple effects can already be seen.

In Southgate, about 400 kids signed up for soccer this year, said Ron Jewell, director of parks and recreation. That's down from more than 600 five years ago. He said some of it may also be attributed to the economic downturn that prompts parents to trim spending.

In Pennsylvania, the destruction of the steel industry in the 1970s and 1980s triggered similar demographic shifts, De Jong said. Cities across the state still are trying to recover, with some areas doing better than others.

"You're having to reverse a long-term migration pattern that has cumulative effects," De Jong said.

After years of welcoming families and children into KinderCare, Calcagno has had to deal with the heart-wrenching separation caused by plant closings and downsizings.

She's seen kids forced to confront, like Michigan, unwelcome change.

"This is definitely a new experience," she said.

You can reach Mike Wilkinson at (313) 222-2563 or mwilkinson@detnews.com.

Michigan Department of Human Services News Release

Contact: Maureen Sorbet (517) 373-7394 or Renee Fluker (313) 456-1236

'100-Voice Choir' rings out in support of foster parenting
Musical event honors Foster Care Month

May 1, 2008

TAYLOR – More than 100 voices will be raised in song at Greater Grace Temple at 7 p.m., on Friday, May 2 to honor foster parents and recruit more foster parents.

Dubbed "Partnering to Make a Difference," the concert will feature 100 foster care workers, parents, and foster youths collaborating through song to find more ways to help vulnerable children who have been placed in foster care due to abuse or neglect. Along with the 100-Voice Choir, the River Rouge Drumline, Eastern Michigan Mime Dancers, and the Fantastic Youth Steppers of Greater Grace Temple will perform. Fanchon Stinger, morning news anchor from Fox 2 News, will serve as celebrity announcer.

Gov. Jennifer M. Granholm has declared May Foster Care Month in Michigan,
honoring foster parents who provide love, stability, and guidance to vulnerable children.

"Foster parents don't need special skills or special resources," DHS Director Ismael Ahmed said. "They have to care about kids and want to help young people become successful adults."

The concert is organized by the Children's Placement Network and the Wayne
County DHS. Organizers have asked foster families attending to bring three additional non-foster adults to learn more about helping children. Michigan has more than 18,000 foster children across the state, with more than 6,000 from Wayne County alone.

“There is tremendous need for foster families, especially in Wayne County,” said Kimberly Jones, family to family coordinator. “We hope to recruit 75 to 100 new foster parents at this event.”

The concert will be held at Greater Grace Temple (O.G. Hayes Memorial Church), 24111 Koths St., Taylor. Admission is free. For more information about the concert, contact Kimberly Jones at (313) 456-1257.

For more information about foster care, go to www.michigan.gov/dhs