

# HEALING CRIPPLED HEARTS

---

*by Lawrence Chisholm, Exec. Director, National Masonic Foundation for Children*

In 1984, Juvenile Court Judge and Brother Maurice Cohill said in a speech to the Conference of Grand Masters:

The young people of this country are our most precious asset.... numbers of them are being victimized by drugs, pimps, pornographers and, yes, in some cases by their own parents. In my opinion, substance abuse--the use of drugs and alcohol by children and young adults--is the primary cause of the wave of crime which has swept through this country.

Much has been written and spoken about the impact of drugs in our society. So far as I'm concerned, the public, and particularly young people, are still essentially unaware of this menace. Despite the publicity, the problem has still been understated.

The Conference took Brother Cohill's words to heart. At the most recent 1996 Conference of Grand Masters, the National Masonic Foundation for Children celebrated its tenth year of work to improve children's lives. It can be said now that the Foundation has developed the most effective drug prevention program in America, beneficially affecting hundreds of thousands of children's lives.

The Foundation works with educators throughout the country to reach out to children who are in pain, to help their families, and to work with their communities.

When we began ten years ago, there was no clear direction from our government, from private institutions, or from our media, indeed, from any segment of our society, as to what solution might work to prevent drug and alcohol abuse among children and to help children avoid the startling new epidemics associated with that abuse: adolescent depression and suicide, birth defects, teen violence, adolescent pregnancy, child abuse--all the many indications that our country's future was being destroyed before our eyes.

We analyzed where we might most effectively apply the Masonic Foundation's resources. Our conclusion can be most briefly characterized by a quote from an Independent Charities of America publication: "Treatment programs can help those who have fallen off the edge, enforcement can try to hold back the tide, and information can inform, but only prevention programs that help children can create change. The Masonic Foundation for Children brings help to children in pain to prevent addiction before it starts."

The 'flagship' prevention program of the Foundation is called "Masonic Model" Student Assistance Training. The "Masonic Model" typically trains ten Core Teams (from ten school buildings) of 5 to 7 educators (e.g., teachers, an administrator, school nurse, guidance counselor) for one training week. The training covers many subjects but the two most critical are: (1) How

to identify the children who are most likely to head toward addiction--before they begin using, and (2) once the identification occurs, what are the most appropriate ways to intervene in, and interrupt, the addictive cycle.

Our method of proceeding, once a Grand Lodge has committed to involvement, is to first contact a given educational jurisdiction, then to identify the specific school buildings to be involved, then organize the initial training and contract with and schedule the training teams (still largely made up today of the training personnel who designed the original "Masonic Model" training in Pennsylvania).

Freemasonry today can be especially proud of what it is doing in our country's schools to help children meet the modern challenges they face and to grow up to become useful and productive members of society. The "Masonic Model" trains teachers and administrators to identify children who are heading for trouble. This identification is made through heeding school-based concerns, namely, Academics, Behavior, Health, and Attendance. Tracking performance through specific, descriptive observations of these four areas can serve as a remarkably accurate barometer of what special early, preventive attention may be needed. The school Core Teams are trained to work with these four characteristics in a systematic way to head off difficulties before they begin.

Let me mention the work of some of the Grand Lodges that have undertaken this program.

As indicated, the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania has been involved the longest, their work to prevent addiction among youth even pre-dating the establishment of this Foundation. Pennsylvania today has a "Masonic Model" trained Core Team in every educational jurisdiction throughout the State. Over 9000 educators have been trained. For the most recent fully reported school year (1994-5), Core Teams throughout the State received and handled 71,617 referrals; and bear in mind that each of those referrals represent a child in pain, a child headed for trouble. To date, 86% of those referrals have been fully successful, with no further problem. Hard evidence that prevention works.

The Grand Lodge of Maryland began its "Masonic Model" training in 1987 and when Maryland's Governor began seeing its results in the following year he committed the authority of his office to seeing a trained Core Team in every educational jurisdiction within five years and the goal was reached.

The Grand Lodge of Vermont sent a team to study Maryland's program and then established in 1989 their C. A. R. E. program which has since received the Governor's highest award for a community program and the 1993 Achievement Award from the State Board of Education. The State legislature has mandated the training throughout Vermont.

The Grand Lodge of Illinois began "Masonic Model" training in 1989 in the very southernmost part of the State and today has trained more than 500 Core Teams, representing more than 3000 educators throughout North, Central, and Southern Illinois educational jurisdictions. These Core Teams to date have helped more than 30,000 children who otherwise would have been headed toward trouble in their lives.

The Grand Lodge of California began its "Masonic Model" training in 1993 by creating a Training Center at the Masonic Home and campus in Covina. From that ground zero beginning, California Freemasons have established one of the finest Masonic programs in America. There are now eight scheduled "Masonic Model" trainings each year through 1998--and all are full and there is a waiting list.

One of the most rewarding developments as this national program has grown is where local Lodge contact with the local Core Team has been emphasized. The Grand Lodge of Arizona has done an especially good job of this, even having the name of the local Lodge on the name badges of the respective Core Team members during training ! By emphasizing this Lodge-to-Core Team connection, local Lodge financial sponsorship has been so generous that Grand Lodge expenses for the program have been virtually non-existent! From Grand Lodge of Vermont trainings, Core Teams write 'thank you' letters to individual sponsoring Lodges. In many cases where Lodge-and-School contacts are established, Core Team members have visited with the Lodge on meeting nights; the value to the community of this kind of contact is invaluable, not to mention what it does to revitalize the Lodge.

The significance of the growing development of Lodge-and-School contact is that there are nearly 14,000 individual Lodges throughout the United States--virtually one in every educational jurisdiction--each Lodge typically containing some key leaders from that community. Whatever ultimately solves the problem of youthful addiction, a community-based approach will be part of it.

When a Grand Lodge commits to this program, we urge that one of the first moves is to, in turn, enlist support of the individual Lodges. In the best case scenario that has evolved in several jurisdictions community and financial support is directly linked between the formed Core Team and the local Lodge. It is not an exaggeration to say that, in some cases, a virtual community revitalization has resulted from this effort.

When all is said and done, everything we do and hope for in this program all comes down to the individual child, the child in pain, the child in trouble. We never know as we go about our work, which child saved will be the child that will grow to save others.

The Grand Lodge of Michigan was conducting one of its "Masonic Model" trainings recently when the trainers received a phone call from a young high school student named Bill. He asked for and was granted permission to come and say a few words to the Core Teams being trained. No one had any idea what Bill wanted to say and he began haltingly, but firmly, to tell them that they had saved his life. He had reached the bottom and had planned his suicide day. But several teachers, trained to recognize subtle but definite signs, had intervened with Bill, talked with him, encouraged him, and offered their continuing help. With tears in his eyes, Bill told them, I heard you were here, and I just wanted to come over and thank you and urge you to keep doing the work you are doing. It is very important! I am living proof of that.

The late Past Grand Master of Pennsylvania, Right Worshipful Brother Carl Stenberg, was, to those who were fortunate enough to have known him, a most wonderful Brother and man. Writing in a 1987 Short Talk Bulletin titled "Masons Care About Children", Brother Carl said:

We can . . . say with little reservation in regard to another great foundation that as much as the Shrine helped create the crippled children's hospitals, the crippled children's hospitals have helped the Shrine. Perhaps one of the great needs of the Masonic fraternity has been a national cause to unite our efforts. Some day we hope it may be said that not only did Freemasonry inspire the National Foundation but that the National Foundation has given inspiration to Freemasonry.

Brother Carl, thanks to the efforts of you and others like you, Freemasons today are helping to Heal Crippled Hearts through the National Masonic Foundation for Children.

For a set of publications describing its work, write the National Masonic Foundation for Children, P.O. Box 28000, Washington, DC 20038-8000. The telephone number is 1-202-331-1933.