

# In-Home Parent Coaching Prevents Crime

Remarkable research proves that in-home parent coaching programs significantly reduce child abuse and neglect and prevent children from growing up to become criminals.



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*A priority goal of FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS California, an anti-crime organization of over 400 sheriffs, police chiefs, district attorneys and crime survivors, is to reduce child abuse and neglect by ensuring that at-risk parents have access to intensive, evidence-based in-home parent coaching programs.*

## The Annual Toll: Over 107,000 California Children Abused or Neglected in 2007

In California, there were **over 107,000 officially recognized victims of child abuse or neglect**, and over 36,000 children were removed from their homes in 2007.<sup>1</sup> Even those tragic numbers, however, may mask the real toll of child abuse and neglect in California, as the best estimate of **the real number** of children abused or neglected each year **is closer to three times the official figure.**<sup>2</sup>

**"New criminals and new victims emerge every single day as a result of child abuse and neglect. We need to invest now in in-home parent coaching programs that are proven to protect lives, prevent crime, and save money, now and for years to come."**

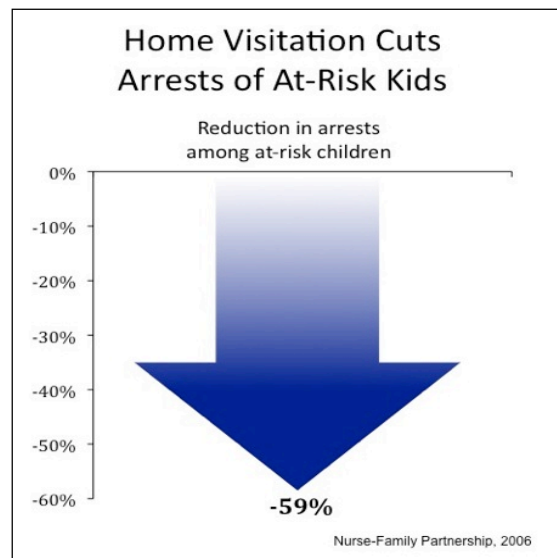
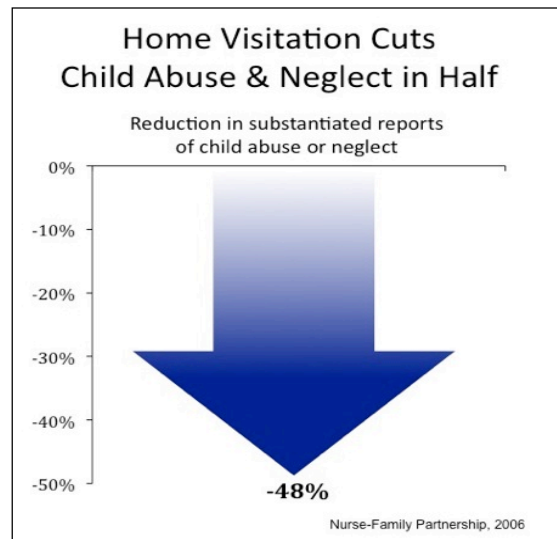
Hon. Michael A. Ramos,  
San Bernardino County District Attorney

## The Future Toll: More Criminals

While most victimized children never become chronic criminals, being severely abused or neglected can lead to permanent changes in a child's brain. Some children have trouble learning empathy, while others develop a predisposition to misinterpret actions as threatening and react violently. This sharply increases the risk that these children will grow up to be arrested for crimes. Research has found that children who were abused and neglected had almost **twice the odds** of being arrested as a juvenile.<sup>3</sup>

## Half of Abuse and Neglect in High-Risk Families Can Be Prevented

Failure to invest now in programs proven to prevent child abuse and neglect puts everyone in California at



greater risk of becoming a victim of crime. But exciting opportunities exist to reduce child abuse and neglect with in-home parent coaching, also known as home visitation, for at-risk parents. In addition to teaching parents essential skills for raising safe and healthy babies, home visitors link troubled parents to necessary services, such as mental health services, substance abuse prevention and treatment, or social services associated with domestic violence.

Programs such as the Nurse-Family Partnership program (NFP), in which nurses visit at-risk mothers at home to provide coaching in parenting skills, clearly demonstrate the effectiveness of home visitation. Rigorous research, originally published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, shows that children of mothers in the program had 48 percent fewer substantiated reports of abuse or neglect. Put another way: In-home parent coaching services **can prevent nearly half of all cases of abuse or neglect** among at-risk children.

In addition, by the time the youth reached age 15, children of participating mothers had **59 percent fewer arrests** than the kids of mothers left out of the program.<sup>4</sup>

### **Saving Lives, Preventing Crime and Saving Money**

Child abuse and neglect costs the country nearly \$80 billion a year. Two-thirds of that is crime costs.<sup>5</sup>

In 2004, \$4.3 billion was spent on preventing or treating abuse or neglect in California, including \$2.4 billion in state and local funding. Most of that went for providing necessary foster care and victim services.<sup>6</sup> Investing more now in

preventing child abuse and neglect, instead of waiting to treat it, will save lives, reduce future crime and soon

begin saving taxpayers money. For example, the Washington State Institute for Public Policy found that nurse home visitation programs saved taxpayers and crime victims \$18,000 for each family served, and \$3 for each \$1 invested.<sup>7</sup>

### **Extensive Opportunities Exist to Reduce Abuse and Crime in California**

Unfortunately, **less than a third of families** at risk for child abuse and other serious

problems nationally have access to in-home parent coaching programs.<sup>8</sup> The highly effective Nurse-Family Partnership operates in only eight California counties

and is not funded to meet the need even in those counties.

State and county leaders have enormous opportunities to prevent child abuse and future crime by investing in intensive in-home parent coaching programs proven to improve safety outcomes for kids.

The evidence is in. We can save millions of dollars in California while preventing most abuse and neglect in high-risk families. The time to act is now.

## Home Visitation Saves Money

One dollar spent on the Nurse-Family Partnership program...




...produces \$3 in savings for taxpayers

Washington State Institute for Public Policy, 2008

**"I know we can reduce the high number of children suffering abuse and neglect by helping at-risk parents take better care of their kids. It saves money and lives. It's a proven solution. It's just the right thing to do."**

Sheriff Lee Baca,  
Los Angeles County

<sup>1</sup> California Department of Social Services. (2009). CDSS County Data Reports. Retrieved from: <http://www.childsworld.ca.gov/res/CtyReport/Jan09/jan09statewide.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Sedlak, A.J. & Broadhurst, D.D. (1996). *Third National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect*. Executive Summary.

<sup>3</sup> Widom, C.S. (2000, January). "Childhood victimization: Early adversity, later psychopathology." *National Institute of Justice Journal*, pp. 2-9.

<sup>4</sup> For the original outcomes on the mothers in the program, see: Olds, D.L. (1997). "Long-term effects of nurse home visitation on maternal life course and child abuse and neglect." *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 278(8), 637-643. For outcomes on the children in the program, see: Olds, D.L. (1998). "Long-term effects of nurse home visitation on children's criminal and anti-social behavior: 15-year follow-up of a randomized controlled trial." *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 280(14), 1238-1244. David Olds, the principal author, updated some of those findings using alternative statistical analysis. Those results are presented on his website under research findings and an interview: <http://www.nursefamilypartnership.org>.

<sup>5</sup> Miller, T., et al. (1998). *Cost of child abuse and neglect, 1996*. Landover, MD: Children's Safety Network Economics and Insurance Resource Center, National Public Services Research Institute.

<sup>6</sup> Scarcella, C.A., Bess, R., Zielewski, E.H., & Geen, R. (2006). *The Cost of Protecting Vulnerable Children V: Understanding State Variation in Child Welfare Financing*. Retrieved from the Urban Institute website: <http://www.urban.org/url.cfm?ID=311314>.

<sup>7</sup> Lee, S., Aos, S., & Miller, M. (2008). *Evidence-Based Programs to Prevent Children from Entering and Remaining in the Child Welfare System: Benefits and Costs for Washington*. Olympia, WA: Washington State Institute for Public Policy. Retrieved on July 10, 2009 from <http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/rptfiles/08-07-3901.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> Every year, over 600,000 low-income women in the U.S. become mothers for the first time, resulting in 1.5 million mothers (who are pregnant or have a child under the age of 2) who are eligible for NFP at any given time. The program is only able to serve about 20,000 mothers annually, due to a lack of funding. Other programs serve an additional 400,000 families. However, hundreds of thousands of at-risk mothers across the country receive no in-home parent coaching. Information from personal correspondence with Shannon Carstens of Nurse-Family Partnership (2006, July 21) and Jane Callahan of Parents as Teachers (2006, May 5).