



OPINION

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"Publish and set up a standard; publish and conceal not." Jeremiah 50:2

Eugene Lorton • 1869-1949

A WORLD OF HURT

Protecting children a never-ending challenge

After a Tulsa teenager died from a drug overdose reportedly taken at a party, lawmakers last session decided they should act. The result was the so-called "social host" law, which could lead to felony charges against adults who allow drug or alcohol use at parties attended by youths.

When a 2-year-old Meeker girl died allegedly at the hands of her stepfather, despite multiple reports to child-welfare authorities, lawmakers again decided to step in. The result: extensive reforms in child-abuse laws, including a child-abuse response team and new requirements on judges.

When an Ada teenager was killed by her mother's ex-boyfriend, out on bond after allegedly kidnapping the mother, again lawmakers moved. The result: a law allowing judges to deny bail for certain violent offenses.

In a perfect world, parents would always, or could always, protect and do what is right for their children. We all know we don't live in a perfect world.

That is why laws sometimes are necessary to provide that protection and help, and why advocates like Anne Roberts will always have plenty to do.

Happily, Roberts, executive director of the Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy, reports that lawmakers and other state leaders are becoming more receptive to the needs of children and families. Of 10 legislative objectives pushed by the institute last year, nine became law.

"Last year was one of the best years ever," said Roberts, adding that she feels certain the coming session will be just as productive.

One reason for so much success was, surprisingly, term limits. "We had 54 new legislators, and I think we were just very diligent. We were too scared not to be," she said. "We had a lot of educating to do."

While much progress was made, much remains to be done, which is why the children's advocates are at it again, finalizing a new nine-point legislative agenda.

A broad-based gathering of more than 400 citizens settled on the top priorities at a two-day forum earlier this month at the University of Central Oklahoma. Participants included both service providers and consumers, like "teens tempted at school to use drugs, moms having a hard time accessing prenatal care, child care, that sort of thing."

On paper, these priorities might sound like so much bureaucratic blather to the casual observer. But as the above examples illustrate, child advocacy is really about real-world problems and sometimes life-or-death consequences.

At the top of the priorities list was opposing any measure that would restrict the growth of state revenues and expenditures — the so-called taxpayer's bill of rights — because of the obvious impact on services for children and families. In a rare move, the OICA board, which usually stays out of agenda development, called for opposing TABOR. "This is one of those cross-cutting issues that is going to impact all the areas we care about, so my board, I guess you would say, took executive privilege to say no matter what else is on the agenda, we want this on there as well," said Roberts.



JANET PEARSON

Editorial writer

abuse prevention and intervention programs offered through the state Health Department and the Department of Human Services also was high on the list. While funding has been increased in recent years, "it's just not enough." Roberts explained these and many other programs suffered major budget cuts during the 2002 downturn and have not yet been built back up.

To improve prenatal care, OICA wants a few Medicaid services that could help improve pregnancy outcomes: Dental care, surprisingly, can help prevent the spread of infection from a mother to a fetus, and social worker services could help with such issues as pregnancy-related depression.

Increased child-care provider rates are being sought to attract and retain good caregivers. "What we're finding is the continuity of caregiver is so meaningful to children. Everything is based on relationships, and if we can't pay market rates, we're going to lose people. It's a critical part of quality child care," Roberts explained.

Another priority is more funding to provide for better health-care services in schools, perhaps through new arrangements with county health departments. School-based health care provides a variety of benefits other than just better health, including marked improvement in student turnover rates.

Expansion of behavioral health-care and child guidance services, as well as the innovative Systems of Care program for families with multiple needs, also is being sought. The wish list also includes development of an array of substance abuse services for youths involved in the juvenile justice system, and new incentives for attracting desperately needed workers to work with troubled children.

Further restrictions on youth access to alcohol, possibly including new restrictions on placement of alcohol in retail outlets, also are being pushed.

In addition to the worthwhile measures listed at the outset, lawmakers last session also approved about two dozen other laws aimed at helping or protecting children: a new farm-to-school produce measure that will put fresh farm produce on lunch tables; a measure designed to make the workplace friendlier to breastfeeding mothers; a new meningitis vaccine measure that resulted after a college student became seriously ill with the condition; legalization of tattooing, which should help address an alarming increase in blood-borne diseases such as hepatitis C; a boating safety act requiring training for children under 16.

Lawmakers are a popular target of criticism, often deserved. But sometimes they get it right. All of these measures have merit and some undoubtedly will even save lives.

Now, it's time to get back to work.

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Have a Heart



STEPHEN PINGRY / Tulsa World

Shelly Brady-Koontz has run, almost single-handedly, the Global Organization for Organ Donation for the past five years.

Local organ donation group fights uphill battle for funding

Pick any appropriate cliché: Small fish in a big pond. Fighting an uphill battle. Tulsan Shelly Brady-Koontz is familiar with them all. She has lived them for the last five years.

Brady-Koontz knows very well the trials of trying to make it in the big pond. For five years she has run, almost single-handedly, the Global Organization for Organ Donation. Easily the most crucial, and most frustrating, part of running such an organization is trying to raise money to keep it going.

In the last five years, Brady-Koontz has spent \$40,000 of her own money. During that time she has raised and spent another \$300,000 on travel, public service announcements, Web sites and other things necessary to keep such a group going. She has never drawn a salary or spent the money on anything other than promoting organ donation.

As difficult as keeping GOOD afloat is, you won't hear any sour grapes or complaining from Brady-Koontz. She remains committed and upbeat about the mission she began after her father received a life-saving heart transplant. She experienced firsthand the importance of organ donation.

If you ask Brady-Koontz how much time she spends on the road or how many miles she travels in, say, a month, she is at a loss for words. That's unusual considering she's rarely at such a loss and has plenty to say on the subject of organ donation. Statistics and information are as much a part of her conversation as the weather.

She can say, however, that she thinks she spends about 20 percent of her time trying to raise money.

"If I could convince 30 companies to donate \$10,000 each to GOOD, that would be \$300,000. With that, we could open up so many more newspapers."

The newspaper angle is a huge part of her campaign. She launched the Circle of Life program in Tulsa. The Tulsa World was the first newspaper to get on board. People who are organ donors have the Circle of Life emblem placed next to their names in the obituary list. On Sundays, participating newspapers, including the World and the Daily Oklahoman, place public service announcements, in an ad form, in the paper. Each of those highlights a donor or a person who has received an organ. All are touching and often inspirational.

Brady-Koontz says, although she has no exact figures, that in the last five years she believes GOOD has received as much as \$4 million worth of publicity from the newspapers.

Convincing other newspapers to get on board is where the need for money comes in. It takes meetings with publishers to convince them of the need.

So far, GOOD has 15 U.S. newspapers enrolled in the Circle of Life program and Brady-Koontz is aiming for more, including 10 more she is actively pursuing.

"What would it hurt for every newspaper in America to honor the people who have donated? If every newspaper would do that, I wouldn't need to do this anymore." She knows, however, that is a



MIKE JONES

Associate editor

long shot.

Even with the cooperation of the newspapers, funeral home directors must be convinced and reminded to inform obituary writers of organ donors. That is why she asks newspapers, especially those already in the Circle of Life program, to update their obit lists and ask funeral homes to ask the families whether their family member was an organ donor. "We need to honor these people who are doing so much for others. They are not only saving a life but affecting the lives of family and friends of the organ recipients," she says.

Having seen the fruits of organ donation, not only in her personal life but in the lives of others, she knows that out of such sadness can come happiness.

Organ donation remains an uphill battle. It still can be difficult to convince people to be an organ donor. Checking one's driver's license and making sure all family members know of your wishes are important. At death, it is often much too difficult for family members to make that decision.

"In many countries in Europe, they have the opt-out system," Brady-Koontz said. In other words everyone is automatically an organ donor unless otherwise noted. "In the United States, we have the opt-in system. Seems kind of backwards, don't you think?" Brady-Koontz says.

It all comes down to money and how to get it. It's a shame that such good work must be reduced to begging for money. But that's the reality. That brings groups such as GOOD up against the big dogs of charities.

Brady-Koontz doesn't begrudge any charitable group from getting its money. She only wishes there was enough to go around for everyone and that it wasn't such a struggle.

There are many ways to get the money. Of course, asking companies and foundations directly for a cash contribution is one way. And then there are the fundraisers.

"Small organizations don't get a break. We've never had the money to have a fundraiser." That is about to change without the need for any funding from GOOD.

Tulsa reggae band Sam and the Stylees got wind of GOOD's money problems and at first offered to play a benefit. Then one of Sam and the Stylees' guitar players, Lance Reynolds, decided that it should be bigger than that. He contacted seven other local bands and they gladly offered to join the "Have a Heart, for GOOD" benefit. None asked for any money to do the show.

Reynolds recruited recent Spot award winner Congress of a Crow along with Harmonious Monk, Mercury Retrograde, Tribe of Souls, Jirrhaff, the Paul

Organ donor facts

More than 90,000 people await organ transplants in the United States. There are at least 800 people awaiting transplants in Oklahoma. As many as 35 Oklahomans die each year while waiting on transplants. As many as 20 people die each day in the United States waiting on transplants. In 2005, there were 14,489 organ donors in the U.S. 7,593 were deceased donors 6,896 were living donors. In 2005 — there were 28,108 transplants performed — about a 5 percent increase from 2004. Organs that can be transplanted are: kidneys, heart, liver, lungs, pancreas and intestine. Tissues that can be transplanted are: heart valves, corneas, bone, skin and connective tissue.

Have a Heart

What: "Have a Heart" benefit for GOOD, \$5 at the door.
When: Saturday, 7 p.m.-2 a.m.
Where: 1974, Second Street and Elgin Avenue
Who: Sam and the Stylees, Congress of a Crow, Harmonious Monk, Tribe of Souls, Mercury Retrograde, the Paul Benjamin Trio and Reynolds Wrap.

Benjamin Trio and Reynolds Wrap. The nightclub and restaurant 1974, at Second Street and Elgin Avenue, a venue well-known to local musicians and fans of original music, agreed to donate the space.

Neither Brady-Koontz nor Reynolds have any idea how much money this event might raise for GOOD. It depends, of course, on how many people show up. Brady-Koontz, however, is enormously grateful for the effort. When she speaks of what these musicians are doing it's easy to see the emotion in her eyes. And she is almost giddy when she sees the banner at 1974 or talks to band members. After all, it's her first benefit.

As benefits go, this one is cheap. It's only \$5 admission at the door. All, all, the admission costs will be contributed to GOOD. It begins at 7 p.m. Saturday and will continue until 2 a.m. The bands are hoping patrons and fans will come in their best Halloween costumes.

The Saturday total will likely be a far cry from that \$10,000 from 30 companies, but, as Brady-Koontz said, anything raised will help.

When Brady-Koontz reflects over the last five years or so — the time, the money, the personal sacrifices — she has no regrets. "I'm grateful for my decision," she said. "I want to see miracles."

And, most important, she said, "we're saving lives."

Such dedication requires money. And being that small fish in the big pond makes finding the money tough. Some local bands are willing to help. And they, along with Brady-Koontz, are hoping a lot of other Tulsans will be too.

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