



**The Kristin Anderson Moore Lecture**  
**October 17, 2007**  
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Thank you very much, Belle

I wanted to focus on this topic because I think it is such an important children's issue. I appreciate the serious and thoughtful talk you have given. Of course, the looming budget challenge is an important fiscal and social issue more generally. But it seems to me that the budget realities that Belle has just described represent a critical issue on the horizon for children today and for the next generation of children and their parents.

I want to make a couple of substantive comments, but first I want to thank Belle not only for her remarks, but for being a wonderful colleague and friend over the years. I also want to thank the Child Trends Board of Directors and staff – also my wonderful colleagues and friends – for establishing this Lecture series (even though I am not dead yet). Finally, I want to thank my family and all of you who have chosen to attend today.

Obviously, I have not been planning to retire and go on Social Security or Medicare, and I already have a gold watch, so I am extremely grateful that this Lecture series has been established to provide what I hope will be a good forum to discuss a number of important issues for children today and over the years.

Turning back to Belle's important talk, my comments are those of a social psychologist, not an economist. My purpose is to briefly highlight why I think that the budget is such an important children's issue: first for the development of the next generation of children, and second for the parents who are and will be raising children in the coming decades.

My goal is to expand the conversation to include additional generations. In the same way that we need to consider the frail elderly separately from the elderly retired population and separately from the aging middle-aged population, I think we need to consider the implications of budgetary choices for children themselves and for the cohort of young adult parents who are raising these children.

First, the children.

Belle and I have both focused substantial attention for decades upon the importance of preventing teen pregnancy and unintended pregnancy. And it is good to be able to report that the teen birth rate has declined substantially over the last 10 to 15 years.

Even with this success, though, many babies are still being born to adolescent parents and to parents who didn't intend to be parents, who are unmarried, and who are disadvantaged. The development of these children is intrinsically important. But it is also socially and economically important. We will need them to be positive contributors to our democratic society and to the economy in future years, to support an aging population.

From my vantage point of 30-plus years studying children, I can say with confidence that children's well-being depends on sustained investments that start early and stay late.

For many children, their families are perfectly able to provide the time and resources that the children need to develop well. For other children, though, particularly poor children and children with health and socioemotional problems, public investments seem necessary.

In this regard, the work that I have been doing lately at Child Trends provides some good news. There are a lot of programs that are effective in enhancing children's development that can be introduced in new communities, expanded, or brought to scale. There are also many "promising" programs and approaches. So there is good reason to believe that investing in children will pay dividends.

This seems particularly important in this era of accountability, when it is necessary – at least for children's advocates – to make the case for expenditures. Do programs for children work? Do programs for children prevent problems or foster positive outcomes?

This focus on accountability has been okay with me for a couple of reasons. As a taxpayer, I want to know that public dollars are being spent wisely. But also, quite frankly, it doesn't seem like a good use of children's time to warehouse them in programs that don't contribute to their development.

As part of our Research-to-Results work at Child Trends, we have been looking for programs that work. We compile experimental evaluation studies of social programs that serve children to identify programs that work, as well as identify the common elements across programs that contribute to their success.

Funded by the Stewart Trust and the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, we have more than 230 experimental studies on our Web site already. (You have in your folder information on the LINKS compendium.)

Importantly, most of the programs that have been evaluated have at least some impact on children's development. The impacts are often small, and they often fade with time. But that seems to reflect the reality that most interventions are small and fairly brief and are only poorly implemented on the ground.

For example, we know from research and evaluation studies that positive and sustained relationships are a critical ingredient of the programs that actually enhance children's outcomes. But providing such relationships is a real challenge for after-school programs. Because these programs cannot afford to pay competitive wages and benefits, they have difficulty recruiting, and they are continually faced with high turnover.

Unfortunately, in a scan of communities conducted by Child Trends for Atlantic Philanthropies, we found that fairly few of the programs that actually exist in our communities have been evaluated.

The well-evaluated programs tend to be carefully implemented, high-quality programs. And these high-quality, rigorously evaluated programs tend to have positive impacts. Such programs include, of course, high-quality early childhood programs like the Abecedarian program and the Nurse Home Visiting Program.

More surprising are interventions provided to older children and adolescents that also find positive impacts. For example, the Teen Outreach Program, a community-based mentoring program, the CATCH program to promote cardiovascular health, and the Howard Street Tutoring Program all have been found to have positive impacts on children.

In fact, a project run by Philip Uninsky in New York City implemented more than a dozen evidence-based programs in one small city and tracked child outcomes. Over time, they have found marked improvements in academic outcomes as well as reductions in violence.

I could go on, but you can go to LINKS yourself. The critical point is that there are many programs that work.

Unfortunately, many children and youth, especially low-income children and youth, do not participate in any after-school programs at all. Studies find, in fact, that one third to one half of children in low-income families do not participate in any out-of-school time activities.

In sum, the scientific evidence is clear – improving outcomes for a significant percentage of at-risk American children requires, among other things:

- Improving the quality of programs
- Increasing their duration and intensity
- Making programs available to a larger number of children
- Staying the course – providing children with a sequence of age-appropriate programs throughout childhood and adolescence

It would be nice if it were possible to give kids a single dose of an intervention, like an immunization that protects them from tetanus, but social, emotional, and cognitive development require ongoing investments over time for children to develop well. And such programs are not

cheap. That's why I believe that the budget crisis that Belle described poses such a threat to children's physical and mental health, social development, and education. At a time when research is demonstrating a host of proven and promising interventions to improve outcomes for children, we should not be scrounging around to find the dollars to invest.

A second critical reason to view the budget as a children's issue concerns the families that are or will be raising the coming generation of children. Raising children is challenging under the best of circumstances. Many, many studies have highlighted the stress and tension that contemporary families face.

Parents continually make trade-offs between time spent at work earning a living and time spent with their children. They express considerable tension between these demands. Data compiled by Prof. Suzanne Bianchi at the University of Maryland indicate that, among married parents, each parent puts in, on average, more than a 60-hour work week for paid work, housework, and child care (65 hours for mothers and 64 hours for fathers). Study after study reports that parents feel stressed and rushed. In fact, 4 in 10 mothers reported that they "always" feel rushed.

In addition, both mothers and fathers report that they have "too little" time with their children, too little time with their spouse, and too little time for themselves.

One study found that the children, interestingly, don't complain so much about not having time with their parents as they wish their parents weren't so tired and stressed when they do have time together. And these stresses aren't limited to poor or single parents. Middle-class parents also express substantial distress over work/family conflicts.

When we aggregate several strands of data, what we find is not a pretty picture:

- A lengthening work week for parents over time
- Declining levels of happiness, particularly among women, over time
- A desire among parents for more time with their children
- Considerable work/family conflict and stress

Of course, in some sense this stress reflects the challenges of raising children in any society at any time. Unfortunately, it seems likely that stress among parents will increase in the future. This is the population that is going to feel the greatest effect of the budget crunch.

These disparate facts make me nervous about budget policies that promise greater financial and time burdens on the generation of adults who will be raising children in the coming decades, given that parents are already struggling to make ends meet and find family time.

Despite focusing on kids at risk and family stress, I do want to note that the current discussion is actually precipitated by some very favorable trends. The explosion in medical knowledge and

available treatments, along with an array of public health measures, has resulted in an enormous increase in lifespan. Despite ongoing inequalities, life expectancy has increased substantially in the U.S. (and in other countries). On average, in the U.S., at age 62, life expectancy now stands at almost 21 years. This is really good news! But these advances are not free.

Enjoying the fruits of biomedical advances and accommodating to much longer life spans does not require thought and adjustment. But at its heart, these are wonderful developments. The critical point that I want to make is that these excellent trends for older adults should not come at the expense of children.

I believe that there are many ways to address this issue that work for children, parents, the young elderly, and the frail elderly – Belle has suggested a number of them – and I hope that our discussion will highlight additional ideas.

Thank you.