

FIRST PERSON

by
Jeanine Harper

The Reality

Amid a recession, when dollars and cents are counted, divided and divided again, we're compelled to evaluate what's most important to us. Children have precious and inherent value. They're entitled to protection and need us to create spaces for them not just to survive, but to thrive.

I've seen this up close as executive director of Greater Richmond Stop Child Abuse Now, which works with the community to prevent child abuse and neglect and to offer maltreated children opportunities to thrive. This year SCAN, as we are known, celebrates its 20th anniversary. We want to take advantage of this commemoration to shine a light on child abuse and neglect in our community; it affects more children than most people may imagine.

As you read this, 84 minutes from now another child likely will be abused or neglected in Virginia.

Last year, 470 children in greater Richmond were abused or neglected.

45 children died as a result of abuse or neglect in Virginia.

SCAN served 1,286 children and families affected by abuse and neglect.

3,663 local children were placed in assessment tracks by the Virginia Department of Social Services because they were at risk of abuse or neglect.

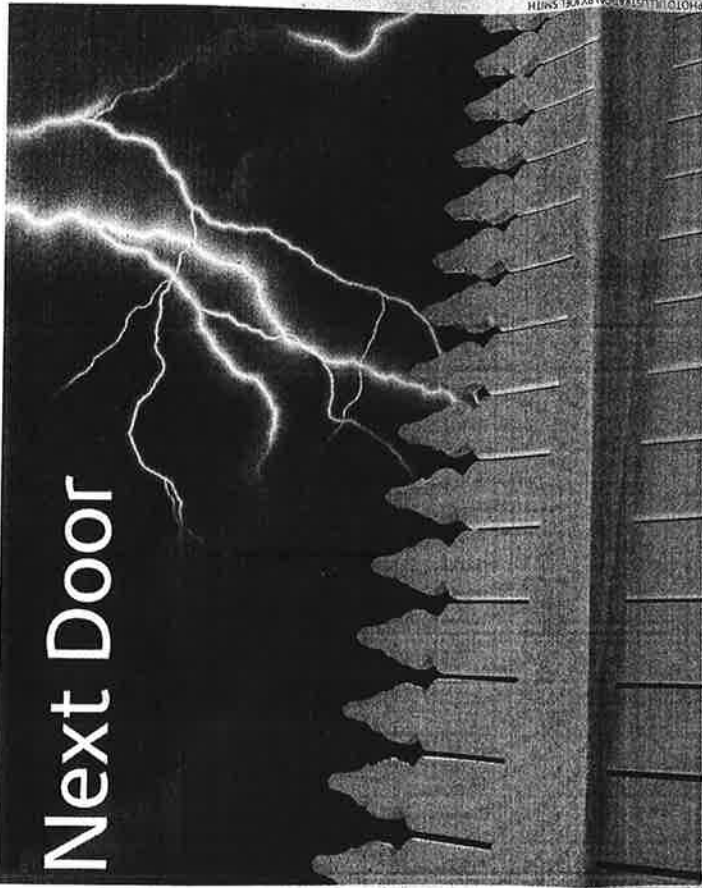
Child abuse and neglect has no barriers – it occurs in every neighborhood and in all communities. It is hard to imagine that the people we live next door to and the people we see everyday are capable of hurting their children. Whether or not you know a child who has been abused or neglected, your life has been affected in some way by this horrible reality.

Children who survive their abuse or neglect suffer from long-term effects. Children who are abused or neglected are more likely to be expelled from school, drop out, be arrested, develop substance abuse problems and die younger. Children lose not only their childhoods, but also opportunities to be healthy and productive members of society. Our tax dollars instead are spent on costly intervention services such as substance-abuse treatment, incarceration or other social services.

What's more, one of the worst outcomes of child abuse and neglect is that it's often passed on when abused children become adults. Sometimes abused and neglected children don't even make it to adulthood. If they do, they're less likely to contribute to society as healthy and productive citizens.

At this nonprofit, we do everything we can to create a community where every child has the opportunity to feel safe and loved. We do it because children cannot

Next Door



protect themselves and because the long-term effects of child abuse affect society as a whole. Through intensive mental health treatment, SCAN helps children heal the scars that abuse and neglect leave behind. We also work with law enforcement and governments to place children in safe, permanent homes. We provide parenting classes and treatment for parents and caregivers who have abused or neglected their children so they'll never do it again. We work with caregivers at risk of abusing or neglecting their children to improve family functioning so that children can learn, grow and develop in safe and nurturing homes. We also educate community members to recognize, react and report abuse and neglect to reduce incidences altogether.

While SCAN's advocacy, treatment and education have and will continue to create positive change in our community, our efforts alone are never enough. You can help:

- Commit to being part of a community where child abuse and neglect are not accepted. Join our movement to end child sexual abuse in our area. Start by participating in our Stewards of Children training and learn how to recognize, react and report child sexual abuse (email Denise Noble at dnoble@grscan.com).
- Become a community of parents and caregivers that's educated on ways to best nurture and

care for your own children. Visit FAMRichmond.org to access one of the best and most extensive parenting information sites. Share it with other parents you know.

Become a powerful advocate for children. Find out the views of your local, state and national officials on policies that affect the well-being of children. Learn how you can talk with lawmakers to give voices to children who cannot speak for themselves.

Join our efforts every day. Volunteer your hands-on help, professional services or financial support to increase SCAN's capacity to help as many children and families as possible. Visit our website to learn more, at grscan.com.

Every day children are hurt. One child is one child too many. Each of us is able to play a role in this fight. Child abuse and neglect has no barriers. From the West End to the East End, children are being hurt. Please join us in our work to shine light where this darkness lies.

Jeanine Harper is executive director of Greater Richmond Stop Child Abuse Now.

Opinions in First Person are those of the writers and not necessarily those of Richmond Giving.