

# The Children's Defense Fund

## Child Watch Visitation Program

### Manual

*Look into the eyes of the children...*

*Feel through their eyes the threatening, hope-draining world around them.*

*Imagine the pain of a hungry stomach, an untreated ear infection, or the discomfort and shame of sleeping every night in the back seat of a cold car or in a noisy and dangerous shelter.*

*Let what you see disturb you.*

*Let it disturb you so much that it prompts you to act.*

— Marian Wright Edelman, Founder and President Emerita, Children's Defense Fund

*One of the most frustrating times as a parent, for me, was if one of my toddlers began to cry when I was in the next room. Of course, I would rush right over. But once I got there, I wasn't sure whether they were sick or had bumped into the couch. Between the pain, early language development, and their weeping, it was hard to diagnose the situation. So, I relied on a question they could answer simply by pointing. "Where does it hurt?" As we—adults, parents, faith leaders and communities—rush to enter a post-pandemic reality or return to a sense of normalcy this summer and fall, we would do well to pause and ask young people how the last year and half has impacted them. CDF's Child Watch Program is one way that we can take leaders into the community with the question "where does it hurt?" and hear the answers that are provided by young people, parents, and those who serve them and partner with them. CDF's Child Watch program not only takes leaders to hear and see first-hand "where it hurts," but engages them in seeing and listening to how they can help heal and prevent the harm in a variety of ways.*

—The Rev. Dr. Starsky Wilson, President and CEO, Children's Defense Fund

Imagine, for a moment, a group of corporate executives attending a meeting on the importance of providing good, affordable health insurance to all their employees. The group is sitting in a conference room, listening to a speaker who is referring to charts and graphs showing the cost-effectiveness of a comprehensive employee health plan. Fifteen minutes into the presentation, the executives' minds begin to wander back to their offices and the accumulating emails awaiting them. Soon, almost no one is paying attention to the important message being conveyed by the speaker.

Now imagine the same group of corporate executives boarding a van to be driven to a local hospital where they are ushered into the neonatal intensive care unit. They are asked to put on gowns before they enter rooms filled with one- and two-pound infants connected to a seemingly endless array of tubes and machines. As they watch these fragile infants struggle for life, the business leaders learn from a doctor that just a few hundred dollars' worth of prenatal care could have prevented these costly tragedies. They hear from a mother whose anguish at her child's suffering can't even be calculated in dollars and cents. Wandering from one incubator to another, looking into the eyes of America's future, the visitors' attention is riveted on the infants before them.

Then the group reboards the van and travels to a nearby site housing a prenatal care and outreach program. Here, low-income pregnant women receive the medical care, nutritional counseling,



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and additional support they need during their pregnancy. The visitors talk to staff, clients, and a few “graduates” of the program who proudly hold their healthy infants in their laps. The executives are attentive as the program director compares the pregnancy outcomes of its participants with those of a similar group of women who did not have access to such services. One of the mothers describes what affordable, accessible care meant for her most recent pregnancy and delivery compared to a previous pregnancy without the support. Following the visit, the participants are eager to learn what they can do as leaders in the business community to help ease the health care crisis facing children and families. They understand that the decisions they make about health care for their employees affect the lives of children throughout the community.

The executives in our second scenario have been participating in a *Child Watch Visitation Program*. Similar programs, focusing on issues ranging from early childhood development to adolescent pregnancy prevention, have proven to be successful in reaching legislators, members of the media, religious leaders, and other community leaders across the country. Child Watch is like a class in which a targeted group of community leaders come together to hear information about the status of children, see first-hand what is happening to individual children and families, and discuss the steps they can take to help.

Child Watch adds the faces and stories of real children to the litanies of statistics and reports. The three major components of Child Watch are: on-site visits to programs serving children and families; briefings by policy experts and others; and printed background materials. These three elements combine to create an exciting and effective tool to educate America’s leaders about children’s issues and motivate them toward action.

Child Watch programs are planned and implemented by local coalitions in communities across the country. The specific focus, format, and objectives of Child Watch programs vary depending on the community. One program may address issues surrounding housing and homelessness. A program in another city may choose to focus on issues affecting very young children, such as child care and early childhood education. All Child Watch programs share the common goal of effecting positive change for children.

This manual outlines the steps you need to take to build a Child Watch program in your area. It contains information about coalition building, program planning, and creating action plans. Most important, it provides advocates with a powerful tool to use in their work to improve the lives of children and families.

The Children’s Defense Fund’s Leave No Child Behind mission is to ensure every child a Healthy Start, a Head Start, a Fair Start, a Safe Start, and a Moral Start in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities. The Children’s Defense Fund envisions a nation where marginalized children flourish, leaders prioritize their well-being, and communities wield the power to assure they thrive. Our work is guided by values of justice, equity, compassion, trust, and love. To realize our vision, we will pursue a movement-building and institutional growth strategy to build power for child-centered public policy, informed by racial equity and the lived experience of children and youths.

CDF’s Child Watch Visitation Program is one way you can collaborate with others in your community, informed by racial equity and the lived experience of children, youths, and their families, to help leaders prioritize children’s well-being, and to engage communities in wielding the power to assure children thrive, so that we can reach a time when all marginalized children flourish.

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# SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION

## Goals of the Child Watch Visitation Program

For many of us, including many of our nation's leaders, reports and statistics alone are not enough to move us to act on behalf of our children. If seeing is truly believing, then the way to convince ourselves and our leaders that our nation is in the midst of a crisis is to see first-hand what is happening to our children. The Child Watch Visitation Program provides those first-hand experiences and adds life to the seemingly endless stream of statistics and reports.

**The three major components of Child Watch are:** 1) on-site visits to programs serving children and families; 2) briefings by policy experts; and 3) written background materials. They combine to serve as a comprehensive tool to educate our leaders about children's issues and motivate them toward action.

**The program has ten primary goals:**

- 1. To personalize child suffering.** While many people read about the serious difficulties faced by impoverished and marginalized children and families, it is often not until individuals can see and hear and feel these struggles for themselves that they become ready to work for change.
- 2. To create a new cadre of leaders and influential citizens who are concerned about and personally aware of children's needs and primed to act.** The pool of Child Watch participants could include members of Congress, state legislators, their spouses and staffs, business and foundation executives, local public officials and senior agency staff, reporters and editors, leaders from racially and ethnically diverse historically marginalized communities, religious leaders, seniors and civic leaders, and child and youth services agency staff members.
- 3. To create a sense of urgency about children's needs and a climate for change.** Children cannot wait forever for policy makers and community leaders to recognize the extent and urgency of their needs, and America cannot afford to lose a single child.
- 4. To help a critical mass of community leaders make the connections between the child suffering they see and hear and local, state, and federal budget priorities and policies.** It is essential to help decision-makers and those who can influence decision-makers understand that they have not only the ability but also the responsibility to make the choices that will benefit our most vulnerable children and families.
- 5. To show participants that there are positive alternatives and steps they and others can take to correct or alleviate the problems identified.** The complex nature of the multiple crises faced by today's children and youths can seem overwhelming. The Child Watch program includes visits not only to sites that illustrate the range of problems and injustice faced by children and families, but also to sites that send a message of hope about the solutions to those problems and opportunities to work for systemic change and justice.



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- 6. To keep participants involved in an ongoing action network.** Child Watch “graduates” will become a part of a network that the Children’s Defense Fund, along with state and local advocacy organizations, can mobilize for a variety of actions depending on the level of commitment, desire, interest, and ability of participants. Action activities can include volunteerism, advocacy, philanthropy, and program development.
- 7. To affirm good local program providers whose work is often frustrated by funding struggles, isolation, and lack of a support network.** Child Watch not only can give service providers much needed affirmation but also can provide them access to networks that could produce funds, board members, volunteers, and other types of support.
- 8. To build relationships with and among a wide variety of providers and child advocates through a shared undertaking of mutual benefit.** Too often the good work of community groups on behalf of children and families is as fractured as the service delivery system. Child Watch is most often a coalition-driven project, and by working together on a joint project, groups are encouraged to share both information and resources.
- 9. To create a constituency for preventive and early intervention investments.** Child Watch can help overcome the pervasive myth that “nothing works” by introducing opinion leaders to effective programs and agencies. An additional benefit will be the introduction of business and media leaders to effective nonprofit leaders.
- 10. To ensure that the voices, experiences, and perspectives of people who are affected first-hand by the problems we seek to solve are heard and influence the solutions we work toward.** Our advocacy is most helpful, authentic, and powerful when it is informed, guided, and inspired by those whom we seek to stand with. With historical inequities reflected in current racial disparities and an aim of creating just and inclusive communities where every child thrives, Child Watch is a vital opportunity to ensure that children and families from any marginalized communities are not only seen but heard so that their lived experiences and insights may guide the solutions toward which we work.



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### Why We Need CDF's Child Watch Visitation Program

It is a human and moral travesty that 10.5 million American children are living in poverty, that an estimated one in seven is food-insecure, and that 4.4 million children lack health coverage in a nation with a 2019 per-capita income of \$35,6720 and a Gross Domestic Product of \$21.4 trillion. What are the true values of a wealthy, democratic nation that lets infants and toddlers be the poorest group of citizens? We still have more wealth than any other nation in the world, including countries in the Global North with far lower child poverty rates and far better indicators of child well-being. Yet we do not ensure that all our children have what they need not only to survive but to thrive. Is the best America can do?

Every 2 seconds, a public school student is suspended;

Every 48 seconds, a child is confirmed as abused or neglected

About every minute, a child is born into poverty;

Every 2 minutes a baby is born at low birthweight; and

Every 2 hours and 36 minutes, a child or teen is injured with a gun.

The challenge before us is to change these statistics. The future of our children and nation is too important to leave to just politicians, just advocates, just the public sector, or just the private sector. It is too important to leave to just Democrats or Republicans, liberals or moderates or conservatives, or to any one segment of our society. It must be addressed by all of us, by millions of Americans—citizen by citizen, parent by parent, youth by youth, congregation by congregation, foundation by foundation, business by business, neighborhood by neighborhood, city by city, and state by state.

It is our hope that CDF's Child Watch Visitation Program will help a critical mass of leaders understand the range and severity of difficulties facing America's children and families. We need to work with our leaders to understand how our children's problems affect all Americans, and what each of us can do to help. We must also help our leaders to understand how historical inequities and injustices affect children in our local communities today, and what can be done to correct them.

Our message of national crisis must be accompanied by a message of hope backed with specific solutions for change. We must let our leaders know that some things do work: early childhood investment, home visiting, health coverage, mental health care, Head Start and high quality affordable, accessible child care, job training and jobs that pay living wages.

For most children at risk, a boost now and then or flexible help for their parents is enough. They need child care, not foster care; a check-up, not an intensive care bed; a tutor, not a guardian; a Head Start, not 12 years of special education; a scholarship, not an institutional placement. Their parents need higher wages and good jobs. But it has been too hard to get them what they need—even when we know what to do and even when it saves us money in the long term.

Child Watch points out not only the terrible tragedies faced by many of our children, but also the many wonderful programs and people working to help children and their families. Child Watch teaches, through first-hand experiences, that by working together the public and private sectors can make a difference for our children.



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We have all of the pieces needed to make this country a better home for America's children. We know about the obstacles they are facing, and we know about the programs that have been successful in helping to overcome those obstacles. Our task is to personalize child suffering so that leaders can understand and feel deeply the human and fiscal costs of our failure to invest in children. We can, and must, create a bubbling up of outrage and urgency about children's needs. Our leaders need to see the future being wasted. They need to hear from "experts by experience," those who are impacted by the challenges and who have insights to guide us into partnership and action. We also want to show these leaders the positive and more cost-effective alternatives in the myriad of programs and services that are working for children. The Child Watch Visitation Program is a vehicle for making these critical points in a powerful and emotional way.



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### Major Components of the Child Watch Visitation Program

The Child Watch model is based on the belief that seeing is believing, and that facts, figures, and statistics tell only part of the story. Keeping this in mind, there are three major components to a successful Child Watch program:

**1. Written Materials** These are important for several reasons. The hope, of course, is that participants read these materials prior to beginning the program, but even if they do not, the written materials are a tangible, lasting record of the Child Watch program. Statistical information, issue papers, and background articles are valuable reference materials for course graduates as they begin their work on behalf of children.

**2. The Policy Briefings** Behind every child's story and every program visited, there exists a maze of public policy issues. Policy briefings set the stage for site visits and allow course participants to ask pertinent questions of service providers and make the critical connection between the services they see and the budget and policy issues that affect them. Policy briefings also allow course coordinators to point out the many places in which issue areas intersect. Government employees, child advocates, and service providers all can make excellent policy briefers, and a mix of these individuals provides for a well-rounded program.

**3. The Site Visit** This most crucial of course components is what sets Child Watch apart from other programs. You can offer course participants a guided tour through facilities in your city that are serving children and families. You can take participants out of a conference room and into the community to see what our children must face each day of their lives. They will meet the service providers who are engaged in a constant struggle to provide quality services to children despite overworked staffs and inadequate budgets. They will hear from "experts by experience," parents, youths, and children who can speak most powerfully and personally to the challenges and needed solutions. Participants will learn, by seeing success first-hand, that they can make a difference in the lives of our most vulnerable children so that every child may thrive.



## SECTION TWO: COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP ASSESSMENT

The most important phase of the Child Watch Visitation Program is not the implementation of the course itself, but the critical planning that occurs far in advance of conducting a single site visit. While you may be organizing your program in a community in which you have lived for many years, Child Watch likely will introduce you to new people, ideas, and issues. While each local Child Watch coordinator will have a different level of knowledge and experience in his or her community, we want to make sure that you have all the information you need to feel confident as you venture into these new areas.

There are three major categories of information you will need to gather in the preliminary stages of preparing your Child Watch Visitation Program:

**1. Identifying the major players who need to be or should be involved in the Child Watch planning process.** These are the people who have the ability to make your program a success if they are involved, or a failure if they are left out. These people may know a lot about children's issues, they may control necessary human and other resources, or they may simply be important community leaders. Beginning the planning process with the right people sharing your table will make planning, and the entire course, run much more smoothly.

The Child Watch Visitation Program is labor intensive and it should not be undertaken alone. Building a coalition of individuals and organizations to help with the process may be your most important task.

**2. Identifying the issues critical to children in your community.** Should your Child Watch course focus on just one or two pressing problems such as poverty and education or are there a number of problems you wish to address and tie together using the Child Watch model? These decisions will guide the focus of your Child Watch work, including the issue information you gather, the sites you visit, and the policy makers you interview.

**3. Identifying the resources in your community and the individuals who control them.** After you have identified the major children's problems in your community, your next step is to determine the people with the formal and nontraditional power to have an impact on those problems. Your community may be one in which policy makers need a real push to begin focusing on the needs of children. Or your policy makers may be quite active regarding children's issues but your local corporate leaders may need the Child Watch experience. This process will help you target your audience.

## Identifying the Major Players—Building Your Coalition

The planning, preparation, and execution of a Child Watch program is a major undertaking, requiring the support and input of a great many people and organizations in your community. Identifying the proper people with whom to work, accurately ascertaining their strengths and weaknesses, and bringing together an effective working coalition is a job by itself. This section will help you identify your community leaders and provide you with specific advice about how to make a coalition work.

### Working in Coalitions

A coalition is a means of achieving goals collectively that an individual or a single organization would not be able to achieve alone. Another advantage of a coalition is that it maximizes strength and gains broader-based community support for its findings and plan of action.

One critical piece of a working and successful Child Watch project is an effective coalition of community leaders, working together to improve the lives of local children and families. The pages that follow will detail some of the potential pitfalls involved in coalition work and how best to avoid them.

Any coalition or alliance requires some investment and some contribution of resources from its members. The most obvious is money. However, other contributions, intangible (such as key introductions or community trust) and in-kind (use of a van or photocopying), are equally important. The needs of your coalition, then, often will determine who is asked to join.

All participants should contribute resources to the collaboration.

Many successful collaborations, especially at first, receive most of their resources from their members. These resources may be time, space, contacts, in-kind resources, or financial resources. When members contribute resources, their sense of ownership in the collaboration is increased. But there should be a balance in the relative level of contributions from various participants. Sometimes, organizations that contribute large amounts of resources accrue a disproportionate amount of power. While this is sometimes unavoidable, it can prevent other members from feeling included. (From *The Community Collaboration Manual*, National Assembly, page 6.)

Endorsements are also important to consider in recruiting membership for your coalition. You will need to increase public awareness about the Child Watch program and the needs of children in general and you will want to influence public policy or reach groups you could not likely reach alone. The influential community leaders or groups you ask for endorsements may be unable to be directly involved in the work of the coalition, but may lend their names or statements to the project or use their influence to help you reach others.

### Where To Begin

A sample first meeting agenda can be found at the end of this section. Your first meeting likely will be an information exchange and will allow you to answer some preliminary questions:

Are these groups interested in becoming involved in the local Child Watch effort?

What resources does each group have available and to what degree are they willing and able to commit them? One group may not want to be involved with policy work, but instead



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has volunteers available to stuff envelopes, send emails, and make phone calls. Another group may have no “people power,” but would be willing to contribute money or other material resources.

Who do they think should be invited to join the local Child Watch coalition? Spend some time brainstorming, throwing out names for consideration. Aim to include organizations and people from a broad and representative cross-section of your community.

What are the first goals you can set and the first assignments you can make? Someone should take minutes from the meeting, including the list of suggested coalition members, and circulate that information to all meeting attendees. Someone else should arrange for a follow-up meeting: time, date, and location. Determine whether your second meeting should be limited to this core group, or whether selected others should be invited.

### Identifying Your Community Leaders

A brainstorming session with several members of your organization, as well as representatives from local organizations, should produce the beginning of your list of community leaders—the names you see regularly in the newspaper associated with children’s issues, the heads of child and family committees in your state and local governments, and some powerful local businesspeople with the ability to influence public policy. This list is a good foundation from which to build your coalition, but not inclusive by any measure.

Your coalition should also reflect a balanced representation from racial and ethnic groups and the geographical distribution of your program area. For example, if your city is divided into distinct neighborhoods, make sure that the coalition is representative of these major areas. Because children of color are disproportionately impacted by many of the challenges your coalition may be hoping to address and marginalized children are most likely to be served by the programs they will see, be sure your coalition includes members representative of those marginalized children and communities of color.

Outreach to new groups is difficult. It is essential, however, to take sensitive, deliberate, and insistent action to reach into all segments of the community to avoid creating the impression that the coalition is a special interest group without broad-based community support. To do otherwise deprives the coalition of access to a full range of local attitudes toward the project. A broad-based coalition ensures that Child Watch does not become another disconnected organizational effort on behalf of children and families. A strong coalition sends the message that the entire community is behind this effort to improve the lives of children and families.

Strength comes from the diversity of the collaboration. Encouraging as much diversity as appropriate for the collaboration is important. Diversity can result in creativity, increased understanding, and enhanced political clout. Tokenism should be avoided. The group must be open to authentically involving all members in the process. (From *The Community Collaboration Manual*, page 7.)

Building a broad and diverse coalition is also practical. Developing and implementing a Child Watch program is labor intensive and requires different skills and resources. Each member of your coalition has something unique to contribute to the group. An exercise to help you determine the needs of your coalition and who in the community can meet those needs can be found at the end of this section.

## Collaboration Among Diverse Groups

The following checklist, although incomplete, is intended to assist new Child Watch projects in their efforts to reach, include, and retain diverse racial and ethnic groups in their coalitions.

**As a coalition, identify barriers that interfere with efforts to recruit others from diverse cultures and different races/ethnicities.** (A partial list of barriers includes negative stereotypes, different values, organizational behaviors, false assumptions, historical rivalries between groups, grassroots vs. professional involvement, turf guarding, power struggles for control or domination, philosophical differences, and language.)

**Contact and partner with organizations and individuals with grassroots connections, constituencies, or access to different segments of the population.** (Recruitment sources include local organizations; state and local public officials; religious congregations, ministerial alliances, rabbinical associations, and Islamic organizations; community health, education, and human services organizations; women's groups; youth-led efforts, and youth-serving agencies; leadership of Black, Latino, Asian, and other ethnic groups; labor agencies; neighborhood and community advocates; and clubs, fraternal, and civic organizations.)

**Establish meeting times and locations taking into consideration the needs of coalition members.** (Meetings held consistently during working hours and the school day and at inaccessible places may exclude many potential members. Consider sharing leadership and rotating meeting locations to include sites unaffiliated with the coalition membership.)

**Design a method** (or methods) to keep all participants informed of the coalition's activities and progress. This can include group emails, regularly scheduled meetings, and meeting minutes.

**Decide upon a structure** (such as a core group, coordinating or steering committee) to organize the coalition and implement the course.

**Establish the "rules of the game."** You need to have early agreement on these questions:

- What decision-making procedures will be followed (majority vote, consensus, or core group with decision-making authority)?
- Who has authority to sign for the coalition?
- What resources are needed, and who in the coalition can provide them?
- What are the roles and responsibilities of participating groups?
- What are achievable timetables?

Determine a mechanism to resolve problems and deal with group differences.

## Leadership

Even though it is a collective effort, the coalition must have a leader or coordinator (or co-leaders/co-coordinators) to manage all of the different elements in the project, to provide oversight to a number of committee functions and chairpersons, and generally direct the coalition's work. Leadership is effective when it: facilitates problem-solving to help the coalition as a whole continue to function productively; encourages a climate of openness and avoids exclusive control by any one group; and is sensitive to the individual personalities, capabilities, needs, values, and beliefs of members.

## Characteristics of a Successful Coalition

There are a number of additional elements that need to be considered in assessing the strength and effectiveness of your coalition. They include:

- Openness regarding differences in values, attitudes, organizational behaviors, and communication styles.
- Use of negotiation and compromise in decision making.
- Continuous efforts to secure new members and reach out to a broad spectrum of groups.
- Sensitivity to community attitudes toward child and family issues, the political climate, and existing power structures.
- A central location to serve as a base for Child Watch activities (perhaps borrowed office space or the basement of someone's home), and a system to complete administrative functions (such as typing and returning calls).
- A clear organizational structure that assigns specific responsibilities to individuals and member organizations (including subcommittees, spokesperson for media contacts and public relations, budget, and resource development committee).
- A credible public image.

## Identifying Critical Issues: Determining the Focus of the Course

The Child Watch concept is designed to respond to the needs of individual communities. By design, Child Watch in Baltimore will look very different from Child Watch in Boise or Birmingham. CDF is providing this resource with sample curricula, but your local coalition will choose its own focus and direction.

As a group you will likely have a good idea of what pressing problems are facing children and families in your community. You will know, for example, whether your area has a critical shortage of affordable housing, a lack of subsidized child care spaces, or a high rate of teenage suicide and unmet mental health needs.

There are two ways to identify the critical children's issues in your community. You can make a fact-based decision by looking at available statistics and reports or by talking to key child advocates in your area. If your city ranks high in infant mortality rates, focusing on maternal and child health issues would make good sense.

You also can decide based on what the perceived problems are in your community. Remember that all the planning and preparation for a Child Watch course will not be effective if you are not able to get the individuals you recruit to take the course. So even if your city has the largest population of unhoused families in the country, if community leaders aren't interested in that issue the program will not succeed.

What issues are “hot” in your community? Education, health, mental health care, poverty and job loss in the wake of the pandemic are certainly front burner issues nationally, as well as in many states and localities. They may not show up statistically as one of your area's most pressing problems, but can be used easily as a springboard from which to address many other issues. What concerns might your coalition address that respond to historical inequities in your local community? What racial disparities are revealed in the data and in the lived experience of children and families in your community that could inform the focus of your Child Watch coalition?

One of the purposes of the Child Watch Visitation Program is to educate participants about the degree to which child and family issues are interrelated. Our local, state, and national leaders need to understand that poverty is related to housing, housing is related to health care, health care is related to education, education is related to employment. While you cannot target a single issue and address it in isolation, you can use one or two issues as the focal point of your course.

For example, suppose you identify child poverty as the main issue which you would like to address through the Child Watch program. You might connect child poverty to nutrition, health and mental health care, and then link nutrition, health and mental health care to school readiness and achievement. It may help to think of the Child Watch course as a bicycle wheel—your primary subject is at the center of the wheel and all the related issues are represented by the spokes.

It will become evident that most (if not all) of the model programs that you visit will address more than a single issue. A quality child care center will not only provide safe, custodial care for children, but also ensure their nutritional needs are adequately met, provide appropriate health screenings, and engage parents and communicate about ways to promote healthy child development. Good service providers know that they have to work with the whole child, and even beyond that, with the



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whole family. The main point is that even a Child Watch program publicized as a “single subject” course will touch on many different child and family issues.

Each member of your coalition will come to the table with different information and experiences. As a result, it is unlikely that everyone in the group will immediately agree upon one or two key child and family issues. You can use this difference of opinion as a starting point to discuss the ways in which multiple issues can be addressed in a short period of time. When you begin to visit and evaluate sites, pay special attention to those that are comprehensive in nature. When you look for experts to conduct policy briefings, focus on those who are able to link together the many issues of concern to your coalition and your community.

Be careful not to let a disagreement about what issues are most important sidetrack you from the main purpose of Child Watch—to create a strong, new group of informed and committed advocates for children and families. Move the members of your coalition away from a discussion of what is most important for children (it is useless to argue about whether it is more important to have food or shelter) to talking about where it makes sense to begin.

Remember that there is no one right way for your local Child Watch Visitation Program to work. You are not going to choose the “wrong” issue on which to focus. While we hope that specific policy and program reform will result from the Child Watch process, we also want to raise the awareness of, and concern about, children in general in each community. A well-planned Child Watch program will have that effect regardless of the individual issues on which you focus.

The “Course Modeling Exercise,” found at the end of this section, is a useful tool that not only helps coalition members better understand the Child Watch model, but also allows them to feel invested in the program. Encourage members of the coalition to develop a Child Watch model for each issue identified as an area of concern.

### Identifying the Resources and Who Controls Them

Once you have identified the major children’s problems in your community, your task is to focus on how the Child Watch program can bring resources to bear on solving those problems. Simply drawing attention to children’s needs and personalizing their suffering is an important beginning step, but it is not the end result for which we are striving.

Your coalition must answer several important questions:

- What changes do we want to make for children and families? (This answer should be informed by those most affected by the problems you are aiming to solve. Be prepared to revise this answer as you gain more and more input from those with first-hand experience and closest to the situation.)
- What resources do we need to accomplish those changes?
- Who in the community controls, or influences the control of, those resources?

Interpret the word “resources” in its broadest sense—political resources, monetary resources, the resource of influence, or human resources. All of these types of resources can, and should, be put to use to benefit the children and families in your area. One goal of Child Watch, then, is to convince the people in control of your community’s resources to use them on behalf of children.





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For example, suppose your community has had little success getting business leaders to invest in children's programs. You would want to conduct a special Child Watch course for business executives or corporate giving officers to make the connection between early investment in children and increased worker productivity.

Child Watch can make both moral and economic arguments in favor of increased attention to children and families. Even if he or she is purely motivated by self-interest, a business leader cannot help making the connection between the average first-year cost of a premature and/or low-birthweight baby of \$55,393 compared to \$5,085 for a full-term baby, according to the March of Dimes.

The goal in this case would be to increase the use of corporate resources on behalf of children: donations to quality children's programs or lobbying by corporate leaders. Many legislators listen to corporate leaders differently than they listen to child advocates.

Political and business leaders are obvious targets for the Child Watch program. They clearly control many resources. But don't forget that many "average" community members are also in control of needed resources. In the Washington, D.C., Child Watch program, we ran courses targeted toward the leaders of membership organizations (like Concerned Black Men, the AFL-CIO, and the Jaycees) and leaders of religious groups. These leaders had access to large numbers of individuals who could be a source of funding, volunteer hours, and advocacy activities. In fact, some of the most tangible results of Child Watch have come from these individuals.

You also can use Child Watch as a vehicle to allow leaders with a variety of resources to unite in a single cause. In the introduction of each Child Watch course in Washington, we began by asking the participants to think about the many ways they could pool their resources and collaborate on behalf of children and families. That is also a theme that recurs throughout the course. Through Child Watch, we ask leaders from a variety of constituencies to seek out common ground, put their heads and their resources together, and identify ways to make a difference for children.

In the same way that you can expect to address multiple children's issues through Child Watch, you should also identify several target constituencies as participants. Among the many potential audiences for Child Watch are:

- Elected officials (also their staffs and spouses)
- Candidates for public office
- Corporate leaders
- Religious leaders
- Members of the media
- Wealthy individuals
- Foundation executives
- Labor leaders
- Heads of service organizations
- Youth leaders

Brainstorm with your coalition about the resources that these leaders (and others) control in your community. Who on your list can contribute the most to children, and how can participation in Child Watch influence their decisions?

Once you have identified those in control of the resources you wish to access, you have addressed the issue of who should be invited to participate in your Child Watch course.





## CHILD WATCH VISITATION PROGRAM

### Your First Coalition Meeting

First impressions are always important. Your initial Child Watch coalition meeting will in many cases be the first face-to-face contact you have with the members of your community you hope to involve in Child Watch. We have designed this sample meeting agenda to help you feel more comfortable about this first step in introducing the Child Watch model to your coalition.

We recommend that you bring the following materials with you to the meeting for distribution:

One-page Child Watch Visitation Program description

One-page description of coalition tasks

CDF's [State of America's Children® 2021 State Factsheets](#)

Child Watch Visitation Program Anyville, U.S.A.

August 15, 2021

7:00-8:00 p.m.

- |           |  |
|-----------|--|
| 7:00 p.m. | Welcome - Local Child Watch Coordinator<br>The status of children in Anyville<br>Introductions of attendees<br><br>Overview and Goals of the Children's Defense Fund Child Watch Visitation Program    |
| 7:15 p.m. | The Role of the Local Coordinator and The Role of the Child Watch Coalition  |
| 7:30 p.m. | Next Steps to Take (Be sure to ask attendees to take information about Child Watch back to their organizations to secure approval to participate in the coalition, in addition to other "next steps.") |
| 8:00 p.m. | Set Date for Next Meeting  |
| 8:30 p.m. | Adjourn  |



## CHILD WATCH VISITATION PROGRAM

### Coalition Building Exercise

As you begin the task of building a local coalition to support your Child Watch efforts, you may want to start by using this exercise with members of your own organization or a small core group of individuals who are already interested in working on the program. This exercise is designed to help you identify who can and should be a part of your Child Watch coalition.

Depending on the size of the group you are working with, you may want to write on poster paper rather than on notebook paper, so that everyone can see what you are doing.

Begin by explaining the Child Watch Visitation Program to the group with whom you are working. You may want to distribute copies of a one-page description of the tasks associated with a Child Watch course to the members of your group. A generic version of that list follows this exercise.

Considering these tasks, ask your group to answer the following questions:

- What resources do we need to accomplish these tasks? (Remember to include both tangible and intangible resources: i.e, not just money, food, and vans, but also power, clout, and introductions.)
- Of those resources, which do our organization(s) have?
- What resources might the local organizations contribute?
- What distinct ethnic and cultural groups are represented in our community?
- What organizations represent those ethnic and cultural groups?
- What resources do each of those organizations possess?
- What other powerful populations or organizations exist in our community? (For instance, religious groups, prominent service clubs, and women's organizations.)
- Combining our organizations' resources, and those of the other organizations identified, do we have everything we need to conduct a Child Watch Visitation Program?
- If not, how can we fill in the gaps?

The list you have developed can serve as the base of your coalition building process. Your next steps are to determine what groups you would like to invite to an informational meeting to discuss potential participation in the Child Watch coalition.



## CHILD WATCH VISITATION PROGRAM

### Coalition Tasks

While the specific format and content of each Child Watch Visitation Program will vary depending upon community needs and the objectives set by each local coalition, there are basic tasks which need to be accomplished in every location. Local Child Watch coordinators convene coalitions and oversee program design and implementation, but every coalition member should expect to make a contribution to the program—of time, money, or other resources.

Following are the basic tasks to be completed by each local Child Watch coalition. You can use this list for the purpose of identifying the roles to be filled by new coalition members. You can also use it in conjunction with the “Commitment Form” you will find in the Sample Materials Appendix to help active coalition members determine in what aspect of the Child Watch process they would most like to be involved.

**Background Research:** Gathering data, statistics, reports and other materials about children and families in your target area.

**Identifying Sites:** Locating, visiting, and evaluating a wide variety of child- and family-serving programs to serve as potential Child Watch sites.

**Identifying Briefers:** Finding the child and family policy experts (and “experts by experience”) in your community who would be appropriate to conduct issue briefings during the Child Watch course.

**Materials Preparation:** Gathering, compiling, creating, and distributing all program materials.

**Recruiting:** Identifying and recruiting (by phone, email, or letter) community leaders for participation in your Child Watch course.

**Logistics:** Securing a training site, transportation from site to site, and providing for meals during the course.

**Evaluation and Revision:** Designing and administering course evaluations to all participants and working with the coalition to implement recommended program changes.

**Action and Follow-Up:** Ensuring course participants use their Child Watch knowledge and experience to work for systemic change, strengthen families, and help children thrive through volunteerism, philanthropy, or organizing and advocacy.

## Course Modeling Exercise

One effective way to help your Child Watch coalition members better understand the way the program works is to have them participate in an exercise to “model” sample Child Watch courses.

### 1. Begin by preparing a few sheets of poster paper with the following headings:

ISSUE:

TARGET AUDIENCE:

MESSAGE:

HOOK:

SITES:

BRIEFERS:

FORMAT:

ACTION:

FOLLOW-UP:

Speaking to your coalition as a group, ask the following questions:

- Someone give me an issue relating to children and families.
- What specific leadership populations in your community need to be educated about this issue?
- What message do you want this group of leaders to have about your issue?
- Why will this group of leaders be interested in this issue?
- What is the “hook” for them?
- What sites could you visit to convey this message?
- What kinds of experts or policy briefers could provide a context for the visits and answer questions?
- How much time can you expect your target group to spend on the program and how should the program be formatted?
- What kind of action do you want to encourage your target group to take?
- What can you do to follow-up with your target group?

After this exercise, your poster paper may look something like this:

ISSUE: Maternal and Child Health

TARGET AUDIENCE: Legislators

MESSAGE: Many women and children do not receive adequate care. Early investment prevents much greater later costs.

HOOK: Voters are paying attention to you. Saving money wins votes.



## CHILD WATCH VISITATION PROGRAM

SITES: Hospital Neonatal Intensive Care Unit and Pediatrics Ward; Immunization Clinic; Prenatal Care Outreach Clinic

BRIEFERS: City Director of Maternal and Child Health City Health Commissioner, representative from local infant mortality task force, mother who received care

FORMAT: One day, 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

Briefers provide information on van rides to and from sites. Written materials supplement visits and briefings.

Lunch with a speaker to make policy connections and answer questions.

ACTION: Support local, state, and national legislation ensuring basic health coverage for all pregnant women and children.

FOLLOW-UP: Encourage coalition members to stay in touch with legislators to keep them reminded of the importance of these issues. Send letters of support to legislators who take positive action on behalf of children and families. Make contact with the legislators' staff people and keep them informed about new data, innovative programs, or other helpful information. Conduct similar Child Watch programs on other issues.

### **2. Repeat exercise in small groups:**

Now ask your coalition to break up into small (two or three person) working groups to develop similar model programs in a variety of issue areas. Your coalition should choose its own areas of focus, but some ideas are: Housing and Homelessness; Family Support/Parent Education; Mental Health; Education; Early Childhood Programs; Child Welfare/Foster Care; Maternal and Child Health; Restorative Justice; Cradle to Prison Pipeline.

At the conclusion of this exercise your coalition should have a better grasp of what Child Watch is, and how it works. You should also have outlines for several programs you can finetune and use in the future.

## SECTION THREE: PLANNING YOUR FIRST COURSE

You have a coalition in place, and you are ready to plan your first Child Watch course. The “Course Modeling Exercise” you conducted with your coalition will be valuable to you in this planning process. In fact, you may want to use the exercise as a planning guide.

You may choose to begin your Child Watch efforts on a small scale, conducting one or two days of visits for just a few people. You may decide to jump in with both feet, planning a program for a larger group over an extended period of time. Regardless of the size or scope of your initial course, the planning process will be similar. At this point, your coalition should have identified the broad issues you wish to address through Child Watch, as well as the audiences you hope to reach.

At this stage of preparation, you must narrow your choices and refine the objectives of your course. Your coalition may have identified five or six different child and family issues of significance to your community, and several different target groups. Now is the time to decide what you specifically want this course to focus on—for example, youth mental health could be your target issue, and community religious leaders your target group. Making a choice does not preclude addressing different issues or working with other populations at a later date, but you must choose a place to begin.

For ease of discussion, we will assume that your coalition has decided to address maternal and child health health, and that you are targeting religious leaders as the participants in your first course. This section will walk you through the process of planning this course, step by step.

### Selecting Sites for Visitation

Call a coalition meeting (or otherwise solicit input from your coalition) to identify a list of sites in your community dealing with your issue of concern. Suggestions should be as specific as possible. Encourage coalition members to add contact names and phone numbers to the names of sites they suggest. Make your initial list inclusive rather than exclusive. There will be time to cross sites off your list.

In Washington, D.C., a partial list of maternal and child health sites looked like this:

- D.C. General Hospital - Neonatal Intensive Care Unit and Adolescent Clinic.
- Children’s Hospital - Special Care Nursery, Child Abuse Unit, Pediatric and Adolescent AIDS Clinic.
- Upper Cardozo Health Clinic - Prenatal Care, Primary Pediatric Care.
- The Family Place - Counseling and referrals for pregnant women and mothers of children up to age three.
- Compcare Clinic - Community-based, bilingual staff, outreach programs, on-site WIC certification, breast-feeding classes.
- Healthy Babies - Drop-in center for mothers and children, encouraging prenatal care and focusing on treatment for substance use disorder.
- Ballou Jr. High School - School-based clinic providing on-site services to pregnant students.
- Health Care for the Homeless - Volunteer doctors holding on-site clinics for adults and children experiencing homelessness at shelters across the city.



## CHILD WATCH VISITATION PROGRAM

Begin by calling each program you have targeted and speaking to the project director. Tell him or her about Child Watch and ask to visit their program to learn more about the services they provide. *Never promise someone over the phone that you will be bringing influential visitors to see them and their program.* This can backfire if for some reason you determine that their program does not fit within the parameters of your planned course.

In the Appendix you will find a Site Description Form to use as a guide as you interview the program director about the site. You no doubt will learn more about the program than will fit into any of the categories on the form, but it should be useful in recording basic information. You may want to conduct site visits in teams of two. This will help when you are trying to remember details about the site later. With permission, you may want to record some of the conversation on your phone. Remember that as a local Child Watch coordinator, you do not have to conduct these exploratory visits yourself. You can assign this as a project to be undertaken by other coalition members.

### What Makes a Good Site?

The strength of the Child Watch program is that it gives people access to sights, sounds, and experiences they could not have while sitting in a conference room. Listed below are some of the specific factors that contribute to successful, educational experiences for site visitors:

**Children who are awake!** Try to avoid visiting child care centers during nap time, or recreation programs while children are at school. Proximity—seeing children’s faces, hearing from young people—gives the greatest urgency to arguments for social policies which can improve their lives.

**Compelling, enthusiastic, personable directors.** An interesting site quickly can become an awful visit if the program director does not do a good job of explaining the program, answering questions, and addressing policy issues.

**Programmatically sound services.** Centers that offer a variety of social services or work cooperatively with other service providers make good sites. These programs set the stage for discussions about the need for comprehensive services for children and families.

**Proximity to other sites.** Driving all over the city on a single day can be more tiring than educational. Visiting several programs in one neighborhood also can illustrate how one area is working on behalf of its at-risk population.

**Programs serving a mix of clients.** Make an effort to visit programs that serve a variety of ethnic groups. This will avoid generalizations about services only being needed by “those people.” Make sure that providers and other staff members also represent a cultural mix. If the impoverished children in your community primarily represent a single ethnic group, be sure to point out that in other communities, different racial/ethnic groups account for the majority of impoverished children. While working to avoid generalizations, at the same time it is important to educate your leaders about racial disparities and how historical inequities are reflected in current unequal opportunities and outcomes, and what is needed to solve those disparities.

**Interactive experiences for participants.** Making sandwiches at a community kitchen, meeting with tenant leaders at a public housing complex, or talking to mothers in a drug rehabilitation program all help bring participants closer to the people impacted by the problems they hope to address.



## CHILD WATCH VISITATION PROGRAM

**Experts on-site.** While the hospital administrator may lead your tour through a facility, the head of pediatrics or the staff social worker may be better able to answer specific questions.

**Experts by Experience:** Hearing from parents and youths who know the experiences first-hand and are comfortable speaking from their perspective about the challenges and needed change or solutions is the most powerful. In some circumstances, if needed for privacy or other sensitivities, brief compelling videos featuring voices of those with first-hand experience can take the place of hearing from them face to face.

**A combination of “solution” and “challenge” sites.** While one of the important goals of Child Watch is to illustrate and personalize child suffering, it is equally important to show participants that positive, effective programs working on behalf of vulnerable children and families do exist and are worthy of support. Beware of doing such a good job of representing child suffering that participants are left feeling depressed and helpless. Our goal is to work for a day when all children thrive, and we believe with commitment and effective advocacy, we can realize that vision.

**Staff that understands the mission of Child Watch.** Program directors are often tempted to use Child Watch visits to showcase their own program rather than to focus broadly on children’s needs and children’s programs and policies affecting children and families. Make sure that the neonatologist at the hospital knows that you don’t want to spend time talking about the fancy new equipment the hospital bought, but rather about what preventive steps can be taken to make the use of that equipment unnecessary.

You will likely have a sense immediately upon leaving a site about whether it is a good place to bring visitors, but you can find a Site Evaluation Form in the Sample Materials Appendix to help you formally evaluate a program. Do not hesitate to ask the program director about ideas you have of how to enhance the visit. Ask whether the health clinic would be willing to have a few mothers talk about the importance of having evening clinic hours, or whether participants can put on gowns and go into the neonatal intensive care unit rather than just looking through the windows. As you plan the specifics of your program, you should think of the many creative ways to enhance the Child Watch experience for your participants. “Child Watch is More Than a Tour,” found at the end of this section, provides you with some specific suggestions.

There are also some critical things to avoid in planning your visits:

**Voyeurism.** Visiting a child care center is very different than visiting a homeless shelter where adults are likely to feel self-conscious about their surroundings. It is important to prepare participants by asking them to respect the privacy of individuals using the services you observe. The object of the program is not to go “look at” people who are impoverished but to listen to and learn from them and those who are working in partnership to improve the lives of children and families.

**Intrusiveness.** Many sites you visit may be physically small. Take this into consideration when you plan your group size. Taking too large a group into a small space may disrupt the daily operations and make both clients and staff feel uncomfortable. Ask the program director how large a group the site can accommodate comfortably.

**Too much time for too small a program.** One of the values of previsiting a program is to get a sense of how long a site visit should last. How much is there to see? How much information does the director have to share? Some programs require a great deal of time for visits while others can be handled quickly. A good rule of thumb is to schedule too little time rather than too much.





## CHILD WATCH VISITATION PROGRAM

Participants can return to a program to get further information. The days also seem to move more quickly if each visit is full.

**Falling behind schedule.** Once you get off schedule, your whole day may come unraveled. Make sure you allow enough time for participants to go to the bathroom, get a cup of coffee, and chat. Program directors have planned for your arrival during a specific period of time, and a 15-minute or half-hour delay may make a lot of difference to them.

With few exceptions, you likely will be well received by service providers. As a group, they are anxious to talk about their work and show off their successes. They are also concerned about the status of all children and families, not just those with whom they work directly, and will be interested in any effort to improve the lives of poor children and families.

Visiting a program before taking Child Watch participants there is essential. Not only do you need to see the facility and meet the staff to know whether the program will make a good site, but you will need to make a variety of logistical arrangements. Will someone meet you in the lobby of the hospital, or should you find the doctor's office yourself? Where can you park your van? How much time will it take to get from where you have parked to your final destination? While some of these questions can be answered over the phone, nothing takes the place of an on-site visit.

Remember to write thank you notes to the sites you visit. Providers will be more receptive when you call them back if they feel their time and effort was appreciated. The thank you note also gives you an opportunity to update the provider about any further Child Watch activities you have planned.

After visiting all the sites on your list, sit down with the members of your coalition to discuss which sites should be used for your course. Using our example of maternal and child health, you may opt to take program participants through sites chronologically. In other words, you begin with a prenatal care program, visit a neonatal intensive care unit, a well-baby clinic, a pediatric care facility, and then a school-based health clinic.

After your coalition selects the sites to be visited, prepare a short page of "talking points" for each program. At the end of this section, you will find a set of talking points for most major issue areas. You can use these as a foundation for preparing your own talking points, adding issues that are specific to your community, or even to a particular site. At the time you confirm the scheduling of each site for your program, include the talking points with your confirmation letter. Tell service providers that they do not need to limit their remarks to issues listed but can use them as a guide to direct the on-site discussion.

In preparing site talking points, include a mix of questions including general information about the program (such as clients served and types of services) as well as questions about pertinent policy issues (what kinds of public policy issues affect your work?).

Just because you did not select a particular site for your first course does not mean you will never use it again. Create files for each program you visit, good or bad. Save program literature, articles, site description and evaluation forms, and any notes you may have taken. After visiting many sites, these files will become valuable resources.

## Selecting Course Format

You have a pool of potential sites, a target group of participants, and an issue you want to address. How do you put it all together? Selecting a format for your course is more art than science. The first decision is how much time to allot to your program. You want to give yourself as much time as possible, without making the program so long that you will discourage potential participants. Look at your target group—what is a reasonable amount of time for them to spend on a program like Child Watch? Business executives, no matter how interested, are not likely to spend more than a day or two on Child Watch. Elected officials may only be willing to devote a few hours to the program. What about our theoretical group of religious leaders? Understanding and providing service to their community is a part of their job, so they may be candidates for a more extended course, perhaps four or five days.

Do you schedule all of your Child Watch days consecutively, or spread them out over a period of time? Again, it depends on your audience. Business leaders may be willing to give you three half-days if they are a month apart. Student leaders may be more willing to participate in a program condensed into two or three consecutive days. For our religious leaders, one day every other week is probably optimal. Ask people from your target group for their opinions regarding time and scheduling.

Beginning in the morning is a good idea for several reasons. If participants go to work before attending Child Watch, they may get caught up in office activities and be unable to get away. Children at sites (schools or child care centers) are more alert in the morning, and participants are better able to concentrate. Ending in the early afternoon is a good idea. It enables participants to return to their offices during working hours.

In the Appendix you will find sample schedules from several Child Watch programs to give you an idea of the variety of ways your program can be organized.

Policy briefings and discussion periods should link the experiences participants have had during the course of site visits. It is important for participants to have a context in which to place each visit. When you are visiting multiple sites, it is particularly important to draw connections between the sites, pointing out common threads and critical differences. The briefing time is also essential to cover areas that cannot be addressed through site visits. Talk about services you have not seen because they simply do not exist in your community. Discuss why they are needed and what can be done to begin to fill the service gaps.

The members of your coalition should be able to help you identify appropriate policy briefers. Briefers may be local or state child advocates, government officials, or even service providers. A call to your state's child advocacy group should identify several individuals in your area who might play this role. *You can also use those with first-hand experience as briefers—these would include parents whose children are being served in a particular program and graduates of a program.* Hearing a less technical, more personal explanation of a program helps Child Watch participants understand in a uniquely deep and powerful way the effects a service, policy, or system can have on a child or a family.

The sample schedules include information about the policy briefings conducted during Child Watch courses. You will notice that briefings and discussions often are held over breakfast or lunch, giving you another way to maximize the short time you have with program participants. Travel time from site to site also can be used for discussions and briefings.



## CHILD WATCH VISITATION PROGRAM

Your coalition (or a smaller working group) now should draft a tentative schedule. Don't spend time confirming each visit and speaker until you have drafted the entire schedule. As changes need to be made you can adjust your plans. Try to stay within the time parameters that you have set for yourself. If you have planned to conduct a two-day course, don't add on a third day simply because you have more that you want people to see. You can invite people back for a second course if the interest is there.

Looking at your schedule should give you a great sense of accomplishment. You now have a program to talk about and a course to promote. Before sending out a single invitation, you should plan to conduct a dry run of your Child Watch program. Ask each member of your coalition to join you and, if possible, ask them to bring one other representative from their organization. Conduct the program exactly as you would if your group were made up of busy corporate executives. This is your best opportunity to see what changes need to be made. Have you allowed enough travel time between sites? Did you walk in the wrong entrance of a building? Once you have completed and evaluated this sample program, you are finally ready to put your plans in motion.

### Child Watch Is More Than A Tour

Once you become comfortable with the site visitation component of Child Watch, you can begin to think creatively about how to make the most of the time allotted for your program. It is relatively easy to invite a group of community leaders to ride around on a bus for a few hours, making periodic stops at agencies serving children and families. It is more difficult, but also more rewarding, to plan a day filled with visits, activities, interactive experiences, and surprises. Build a day that will be both memorable and educational.

Since the *Child Watch Visitation Program* was launched in early 1990, we have learned a great deal about what works, both from our own experiences and those of local Child Watch coordinators from across the country. What follows are just a few examples of how to enhance your Child Watch program.

**Use travel time creatively.** During the course of most Child Watch programs, a significant amount of time is spent in transit between sites. Here are some ideas of how to make the most of what could easily be wasted time:

- Ask your policy briefers to travel with you from site to site, conducting formal briefings and answering questions.
- Many vans and buses come specially equipped with DVD players. You can show excerpts from documentaries or news shows or a DVD introducing a program you are about to visit.
- Collect the many forms families must complete to qualify for public assistance (this could include Medicaid, SNAP, public housing, and subsidized child care). Ask program participants to try to complete the forms during travel time. Many will be amazed at how often these forms are long and difficult to understand.
- One local Child Watch coalition, concerned because their program participants were traveling in two separate vans, recorded audio tapes with information about the sites about to be visited. They played the audio in transit between sites and were confident that both groups received the same information.



## CHILD WATCH VISITATION PROGRAM

**Take advantage of meal time.** It is a wasted opportunity to call a caterer and ask them to deliver lunch. There are many options for making meals a real learning experience. Remember to reimburse service providers for the cost of any meals they provide for your group.

- One local group asked all their program participants to meet at the area food bank for breakfast. They were served a meal made of items that can be purchased with WIC coupons.
- Serve your group school breakfasts or lunches.
- Join children at a Head Start center for breakfast. This gives you a chance to emphasize the importance of the nutritional aspect of the program.
- Have a meal at a shelter or a community kitchen (you can also arrange to have participants help prepare the meals while they are getting briefed by the program's director).
- Find a job training program (for youths or adults) with a food service component. Order your meal from them and ask if program participants would be willing to address your group.

**Get to know the children and families you are learning about.** As a result of our concern about not being intrusive, we often miss opportunities to interact with clients at the sites being visited. It is essential to talk to each program director to make sure that he or she feels comfortable with these activities.

- Arrange to have a meal with clients at a program.
- If you are visiting a school or a recreation center, ask if each Child Watch participant can be assigned a student "host" for their visit.
- One local coalition wanted to interact with teen mothers, but they were concerned about the teens (and their own participants) feeling uncomfortable. They asked a counselor who worked with the girls to ask questions instead of the larger group.
- Child Watch visitors to a Head Start center were each given different colored and shaped symbols on their name tags. Somewhere in the center a child had a matching symbol. Participants and children were told to find their partners, and the young children served as hosts for the visitors.
- While it is sometimes uncomfortable to talk to program participants about their current situations, it is often easier to arrange for program "graduates" to address your group and talk about what a difference a program has made in their lives and the lives of their families.

**Explore the barriers to care.** It is important for all of us, especially our Child Watch program participants, to understand that just because services are available at low-cost or no-cost, they are not necessarily accessible. Transportation, child care, and the hours a facility is open are all reasons that services are not fully utilized.

- Use your van to trace the bus route a young mother would have to take to get from her home to the child care center, the health clinic, the WIC office, the grocery store and back home.
- Ask Child Watch participants to make calls to try to make appointments at health clinics, the housing department etc. Have them keep track of how many numbers they had to call and how many different answers they got to questions about what documents they need to bring with them.



### CHILD WATCH VISITATION PROGRAM

- Prepare a short shopping list of basic food items and compare the prices between these items at a major grocery store and at the small grocery stores found in most low-income neighborhoods.
- While this list is far from exhaustive, it can give you and your coalition a place to start in discussing how your Child Watch program can creatively personalize child and family suffering. An additional exercise, “Can You Bear the Budget,” is attached. It is designed to give Child Watch participants a sense of the daily decisions faced by families living near or below the poverty line.



## CHILD WATCH VISITATION PROGRAM

### Can You Bear the Budget?

Some Child Watch groups may choose to supplement site visits with other activities to personalize poverty for participants. A budgeting exercise helps individuals begin to understand the daily choices, frustrations, and indignities associated with being impoverished.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits vary a great deal from state to state. Here are some examples of what a single parent family of three would receive if they had no outside income:

Alabama: TANF - \$215; SNAP - \$390

Massachusetts: \$633; \$343

Mississippi: \$170; \$388

Pennsylvania: \$421; \$362

Vermont: \$699; \$346

You should plan to give your participants several scenarios (depending on the size of your group) for your city, using the appropriate TANF and SNAP allocation amounts. Below are two scenarios for a sample city. You will need to confirm information about current benefit levels and eligibility for Medicaid and other services in your state. In each case you should provide each group with a current listing of rental housing from the newspaper and refer them to the “Expenses” section at the end of this exercise for a detailed list of what should be included in their budgets.

#### BOSTON

You are two parents of two young children, ages three and six. You are an immigrant family and no one in your family has a Social Security Number, which makes you ineligible for many tax credits and public benefits. You both work full-time, 9:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m. in minimum wage jobs. Together, you earn \$1,080 a week. Although you do not receive tax benefits due to your immigration status, payroll and other taxes are still deducted from your monthly pay, which means your take-home monthly salary is \$1,708 and your annual take-home pay is \$20,496. Neither of your employers provide health insurance.

You are the single parent of two young children, ages three and six. You recently lost your job. You are at the bottom of a waiting list for public housing that is 14,000 people long. Your only income is your TANF payment of \$633, your SNAP allotment of \$343, and—for this year only, unless Congress makes the recently expanded Child Tax Credit (CTC) permanent—\$550 per month in advance monthly CTC payments. You have no private health insurance, but you are eligible for Medicaid.

#### EXPENSES

Your task is to devise a budget for your family taking into consideration your income. Remember to account for the following expenses:

Rent

Food



## CHILD WATCH VISITATION PROGRAM

Clothing

Transportation

Child Care

Health Care

Phone

School Supplies—don't forget computer and Wi-Fi if remote learning has required it

You may also want to allow for these “non-essential” expenses:

Toys

Books

Entertainment

Furniture

Household items (sheets, towels, toiletries, etc.)

Savings

If you are unable to provide for your family with your given income, think about the resources and services available in the city that could help you.

## Talking Points For Site Visits

The quality of your Child Watch program depends a great deal upon the program representatives hosting your site visits. Speakers at each site need not only be personable and communicate well, but also be able to discuss a range of issues relevant to your Child Watch course. Remember, the real experts in many instances are those with first-hand experience of the challenges and insights into the positive solutions that have helped or are needed. Prioritize and strategize to include as many voices as possible of families who have first-hand experience and insights, ensuring that you do so in a way that is not voyeuristic but respectful, dignified, and framed as an opportunity to learn from those who know the most.

In addition to discussing the goals of each visit with service providers, it is also helpful to present each provider with a list of “talking points” to remind him or her of the issues you feel are most important to address.

This set of generic talking points should serve as a guide to help you develop your own set, which should include information about barriers to care specific to your community.

We have developed one list of general questions, appropriate for a wide range of child and family serving programs, as well as several other lists of talking points that focus on a particular issue area. Depending on the range of services offered by an individual program, you may need to draw questions from several different lists in addition to creating your own. These lists are far from exhaustive, either in the types of issues and sites they cover or in the specific questions they address, but they should give you an idea of how to best design your own set of talking points, tailored specifically to the sites in your community.

### General Questions

- What is the history of your program?
- What population do you serve?
- What are the primary public policy areas that impact your work (e.g., child care, housing)?
- What kinds of barriers do your clients face when trying to access services (e.g., language, transportation, lack of child care)?
- What public policy changes would help you improve the quantity and quality of the services you provide?
- With what other programs in the community do you work?
- What can leaders in the community do to help you and the children and families you serve?
- What kinds of outreach do you do?
- What makes your program a success?
- Discuss an individual client's case or success story.



## Maternal and Child Health Talking Points

### *For a City or County Health Department*

- What are the city or county statistics for uninsured children? What are the local infant mortality rates?
- What are the city or county statistics for uninsured children who are eligible for Medicaid or CHIP? What are barriers families are facing to enrolling their children in Medicaid or CHIP?
- What is the percentage of low birthweight births in this area? What percentage of children are appropriately immunized?
- What is the WIC (Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants and Children) program?
- How many people in your area are enrolled in the program?
- How many additional women and children are eligible for WIC but are not enrolled?

### *For a Public Health Clinic, Neighborhood Health Center, or Prenatal Care Program*

- What percentage of the women you serve are uninsured? Do other local facilities have services for those who are uninsured?
- Has your state extended pregnancy-related Medicaid coverage beyond the required 60-days postpartum? If so, how long has the state extended coverage and has the state limited who is eligible?
- Do you have special services for high-risk pregnancies and those with substance use disorders?
- What percentage of the women you see receive late or no prenatal care?
- Why do so many women not receive the prenatal care they need?
- What can happen to women (and their babies) who do not receive proper prenatal care?
- How frequently do you see pregnant women struggling with substance use disorder? Are quality drug treatment programs for women available upon request?
- If yes, have arrangements been made to care for the children of women in treatment?
- What kinds of mental health services and supports are available, accessible, and affordable for women? What barriers do you see related to preventing, diagnosing, and treating mental health needs?
- What kinds of nutritional problems do you see in pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers?
- Are you able to enroll women in Medicaid or WIC on-site?

## Pediatric Health Talking Points

### ***For a hospital Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU)***

- Describe the babies in the neonatal intensive care unit: What kinds of problems do they have?
- Could these problems have been prevented?
- What long term disabilities may result from premature birth or low birthweight?
- What are the contributing factors to a high infant mortality rate?
- What is the cost per day of caring for a baby in the neonatal intensive care unit? Contrast this with the cost of early, preventive prenatal care.
- What kinds of support services and ongoing care will these children need when they leave the NICU? Are these services readily available in the community?
- How many of these mothers have never seen a doctor during their pregnancy?
- What percentage of those mothers don't have any health insurance?
- What percentage of all hospital births are low birthweight?
- What percentage of all hospital births are to mothers with substance abuse problems?

### ***For a Primary Care Pediatric Clinic***

- What are the most critical health problems found in children?
- How do you see mental health needs changing for the children you see?
- What kinds of preventable illnesses do you see? (e.g. measles, lead poisoning, malnutrition) Why are children not receiving adequate preventive care, including immunizations?
- What do immunizations cost the clinic?
- How much does Medicaid reimburse you for immunizations? How much do private insurance companies reimburse you?
- Has there been an increase in clients needing immunizations since private providers have been cutting back on vaccine supplies?
- Are you open during hours that are accessible to working parents? Do you see patients regardless of their ability to pay for care?
- If so, what percentage of your patients are uninsured? Do other local facilities have services for the uninsured?

## Housing and Homelessness Talking Points

### ***For a Shelter Serving Families Experiencing Homelessness***

- Describe some of the circumstances that caused families to end up here. Do you have working families living here?
- What services (other than housing), if any, are available on site (e.g. child care, job placement)?
- Is the shelter open to residents 24 hours a day? If not, where do families go?
- Are meals provided at the shelter? If not, where do families eat?
- Is the shelter located close to public transportation to help with job and housing searches?
- Are there stipulations for families staying at this shelter (e.g., is there a limit on the amount of time they can stay? Are two-parent families permitted to stay at the shelter?)?
- If such constraints exist, where do families go who do not qualify for your shelter services?
- Is the shelter near a school? How do children get to school?
- What is the housing market like in your community?
- What is your estimate of the number of families living “doubled-up” in your community?
- What kinds of trends have you seen in the demographics of people seeking shelter?

### ***For a Public Housing Community***

- How big is your community?
- Are there other public housing communities in your area?
- Is there a waiting list to get into public housing? If so, how long is the average wait? Are there units that are boarded up because they are uninhabitable?
- What recreational or educational opportunities exist for children in your community? How are tenants involved in working to improve the community?
- Are there tenants in the community who are working?
- Do the rules governing public housing encourage tenants to move toward self-sufficiency?
- Are there services (e.g., transportation, shopping, child care) nearby?



## CHILD WATCH VISITATION PROGRAM

### Early Childhood Education

#### ***For a Head Start Center***

- How many children do you serve? What hours do you operate?
- Are you open all year, or just during the school year?
- If services are not full-day, year-round, what do parents do when the center is not open?
- What services do you provide?
- Why is it important to offer comprehensive services?
- What kinds of problems are typical client families facing?
- Have you been able to measure the success of the program?
- How do you work with children, parents, and the entire family?
- Do you see the need to serve infants and toddlers through Head Start? How many spaces are there in city and county Head Start programs? What is your funding status for the future?
- What impact do you think your program has on the children and families you serve?

#### ***For Head Start Parents/Guardians***

- What difference has having the Head Start program made for you and your family? What changes have you seen in your children?
- What would your child be doing during the day without this service?
- Have you been directly involved with the program in any way (e.g., by going to meetings, planning events, or working as a volunteer in the classroom)?

#### ***For Child Care Centers and After-school Programs***

- What hours is your center open?
- Are there any centers in this community that serve parents working evenings, nights, or weekends?
- What is the fee for participation in your program? Is there a sliding fee scale?
- Is there a waiting list for the program?
- What age children do you serve?
- What kinds of activities do the children participate in?
- Are parents involved in the program in any way (e.g., as volunteers, in a parent group, fundraising)? Do you provide any adjunct services (medical screenings, family counseling, emergency food, etc.)?
- What is the starting salary for child care workers?
- Do you have difficulty recruiting and retaining staff?

## Child Welfare

### ***For a state child welfare agency***

- Describe some of the reasons children require foster care. What can be done to avoid placement in foster care? What efforts are taken to help support and strengthen families so children can stay safely at home and out of foster care?
- What barriers prevent parents from reunifying with their children? How do you help parents overcome those barriers?
- What is the average length of time a child remains in foster care?
- What kind of training is required to ensure foster parents are prepared to meet a child's needs?
- How do you support foster parents to ensure that placements are stable? How often do children move between placements?
- How difficult is it to recruit and retain foster parents? Why do these difficulties exist? How do you target recruitment to ensure a diverse array of foster homes are available to meet children's needs?
- Do you provide any continuing support services to families after a child is reunified with their family? Do you provide continuing support services after a child has been adopted or entered into guardianship?
- How do you ensure older youths in foster care are prepared for the transition to adulthood? What challenges do young people who "age out" of foster care experience?
- What is the annual cost of caring for a child in foster care?

### ***For a Family Resource Center or Other Community-Based Family Support Program***

- What type of support services do you provide for families? What are the most common needs in the community? How do families find your program? Do you take referrals from the child welfare system?
- Do families pay for your services? Do you accept reimbursement from the child welfare system? What other sources of funding do you use to serve families?
- How effective is your program in stabilizing families and preventing foster care?
- How frequently do families need to return to the program?
- How much does it cost for your program to support a family? How does that compare to the cost of foster care?

### ***For a Group Home or Other Non-Family Placement***

- Why are children placed with your agency instead of in foster care? What steps are taken to ensure that children don't stay in institutional care longer than necessary? What services do you provide that can't be achieved in a family-based setting?
- What training is your staff required to receive in order to ensure they are able to meet the needs of children in your care?
- What is the cost of caring for a child in your facility? How does this compare to foster care?
- What steps do you take to ensure children in your facility have a sense of normalcy? How are youths supported in their education? Are they permitted to participate in extracurricular activities and supported in doing so (e.g. transportation to and from practices, support for paying team dues, etc.)?
- How do you ensure connections to relatives and siblings? How do you promote healthy connections (peer and adult) for children in your facility?



## CHILD WATCH VISITATION PROGRAM

### Adolescent Support Programs

#### *For Teen Clinics, Counseling Centers, Youth Employment Programs, etc.*

- What kinds of recreational activities, appropriate and interesting to older teens, are available in this area?
- What kinds of alcohol or substance abuse problems do you see? Are there drug treatment programs targeted toward teens?
- Is space available, or is there a waiting list?
- What is the high school drop-out rate?
- What resources and services are available to improve school climate and prevent drop-out? What are teens doing after they have dropped out of school?
- What resources and services are available to support teens at risk of juvenile justice involvement?
- What diversion programs are available to keep children with their family and community rather than in harmful detention facilities?
- For children currently in juvenile detention facilities, are adequate educational instruction, health care, and counseling services provided?
- What opportunities and supports are available for youths after they have been released from a detention facility?
- How severe is the teen unemployment rate?
- Are there job training and placement programs available?
- Do they train for jobs that pay above the minimum wage?
- What scholarships and other opportunities are available for low-income students who want to continue their education?

## SECTION FOUR: PUTTING YOUR COURSE TOGETHER

Once your coalition has drafted a course schedule, you can begin to prepare course materials for use by program participants, start the recruiting process, and plan course logistics. This section will detail these three final areas of preparation.

### Course Materials

The most important thing to remember as you begin preparation of course materials is to save everything you run across that seems relevant. There is no such thing as having too much information. A few tips:

- Save links to newspaper and magazine articles and organize them by subject area. These will be useful for your own reference and can be distributed to program participants when appropriate.
- Record special news reports or programs about children and families. These often can be shown to complement policy briefers.
- Ask to be placed on email/ mailing lists of local advocacy organizations and government agencies dealing with children and families.
- Save all literature from programs you visit, even if you don't plan to use them in your Child Watch course.

**Statistics:** The Children's Defense Fund produces national (and some state and local) statistics about children and families. But in addition to national information, it is helpful to have a complete profile of children and families in your community. You can begin by contacting your state vital statistics office and your state children's advocacy organization. If they don't have the answers to all of your questions, they should be able to refer you to someone who does.

When helpful, compare the data about your community with data from other communities or the nation as a whole. Often participants are accustomed to local and state circumstances and benefit from the comparison to see how much better their state and community could do.

**Policy Papers:** While program participants are unlikely to read a long report in preparation for their Child Watch experience, they should respond well to a three- or four-page summary of a specific children's issue. These short policy papers can include a mix of local, state, and national information. They should be concise, easy-to-read, and point out both what works and what doesn't in your local community.

Before beginning to write these papers, check with your local (or state) children's advocacy organization. They may have most, or all, of the information you need.

The purpose of these papers is not to tell program participants everything there is to know about a certain subject, but rather to provide them with enough information so that they can better understand what they see while visiting sites and ask informed questions about what they don't understand. These papers also can serve a greater purpose as reference material long after the program has ended. The process of writing these papers also will help you feel more comfortable with discussing the issues you are addressing during your Child Watch program.



## CHILD WATCH VISITATION PROGRAM

**Other Materials:** Use your best judgment in determining how much written material to give program participants. If your course lasts just one day, passing out fifty pages of paper probably doesn't make a lot of sense. In addition to policy papers and statistical information, here are some other suggestions of what you might prepare:

**Site Profiles:** Condense all information about a site onto a single piece of paper in an easy-to-read outline form (you can find a sample site evaluation form to complete in the Appendix). If program participants read nothing else, encourage them to review site profiles before making visits. Listing the full program name, address, website, phone number, and contact person is essential. Participants may wish to obtain further information, or provide assistance, to a program they have visited. Many sites will provide visitors with additional printed material at the time of the visit.

**Articles:** Pick the best articles from your files and attach them to the back of your issue papers. These give added weight to your argument that the issues you are addressing are of universal concern. Remember to date each article and note the source.

**Course Syllabus:** If your course lasts more than a few days and you are distributing a lot of reading material, it helps to let people know what to read and when. You also can use the syllabus to highlight the most important pieces of information. Additionally, the syllabus provides you with a vehicle to note other non-course-related activities in the community, such as City Council hearings, relevant lectures, or even museum exhibits.

**Participants List/Biographical Information:** This will be of interest to both participants and program directors at the sites you visit. Biographical information (which, unfortunately, is sometimes difficult to gather) also will be useful to your coalition as you evaluate what types of community leaders have been exposed to your Child Watch course.

**Resource Lists and Bibliographies:** While these are time-consuming to produce initially, they can be helpful to both Child Watch participants and coalition members. Resource lists can include names and addresses of local policy makers, advocacy organizations, and volunteer clearinghouses. The bibliography can include references to books and articles dealing with a specific children's issue or covering children and families in general. This is another opportunity to gather and share background material about racial and other inequities that are locally relevant, such as articles about local food deserts, historical redlining, the impact of urban redevelopment on neighborhoods of color, de facto re-segregation of local schools. Even if you don't distribute this material to each course participant, it will be helpful to have. You may be able to arrange for a college intern to help you gather this information.

The way you format this information is not important, as long as it is readable and useful. Notebooks are nice; two-pocket folders will work as well, and provide participants with a spot to place additional material. While you may want to hand out a particularly relevant and recent newspaper article at the last minute, avoid simply handing participants a stack of disconnected papers. They are likely to be lost or thrown away. Alternatively, you can email your leaders background material attached as pdf files before the Child Watch tour and send follow-up with any additional materials attached.



## Recruiting

Target groups of Child Watch participants can be extremely broad, incredibly narrow, or anywhere in between. A list of some of the types of groups you might want to target for participation in your Child Watch course can be found in Section Two of this manual.

The target group you select should reflect the goals your coalition has set. Keep in mind that one of the purposes of Child Watch is to encourage community leaders to use the resources they possess on behalf of children and families. Each of the above groups have different skills and resources at their disposal.

Child Watch coalitions are often concerned that they will be unable to recruit well-known individuals in their target groups. In fact, Child Watch coalitions from across the country have very successfully attracted participants to their programs. The first step to take in the recruiting process is to identify the contacts that your coalition members already have in your target group. A simple exercise to use for this purpose can be found at the end of this section.

Look through this list to identify a leader from within the target group—someone who can help identify a list of potential recruits and perhaps even co-sign a recruiting letter. Your invitation to corporate leaders receives additional credibility if a member of the business community is one of the recruiters. You also will need some “inside” advice about how best to appeal to your target group. What time of year is the group most available? Will they more likely attend a morning or afternoon program? What issues are of greatest concern to this group?

The Appendix contains sample invitation and confirmation letters. In addition to the obvious inclusion of logistical information (when, where, and for how long), it is important to tell the individuals you are recruiting why they were selected. “As a corporate funder, you receive hundreds of requests for donations every year. Child Watch will help you to identify the issues of major concern to children in your community and what your company can do to help.” Or, “As a religious leader in this community, you play an important role in the health and well-being of our children and families. The Child Watch program will show you first-hand the suffering endured by many of our children, as well as what kinds of programs your congregation can support to help alleviate that suffering.”

Refer back to the “Course Modeling Exercise” to remember what you identified as the “hook” for your target group. What is their self-interest in learning about and working for children? Keep this information in mind both when write your recruiting letter and when you make any follow-up calls.

Here are some quick tips to remember to ease the recruiting process:

- Determine the number of individuals you have space for in your course and issue three times that many invitations. You can always add an additional course if the response requires it.
- Follow up every letter or email you send with a phone call. Many people just need a gentle reminder, or they may have questions that need to be answered.
- Invite people in groups of two. Ask a minister, rabbi, or other religious leader to bring a member from her or his congregation. Ask an elected official to bring along a staff person. The effect of the Child Watch course is likely to last longer if two people share the experience and can discuss it with one another and plan follow-up actions together.



## CHILD WATCH VISITATION PROGRAM

Always send some sort of response card or registration form, providing a space for individuals who cannot attend the course to express their continued interest in the program. Add these people to your mailing list and solicit them for your next course.

Send everyone a written confirmation with the who, what, when, where, and why restated. Be sure to ask everyone to call, email, or text if they are unable to attend the program for any reason.

Call each scheduled participant two or three days prior to the beginning of the course. This will not only serve as a reminder to them, but also give you an opportunity to answer any last-minute questions or provide directions to the meeting site.

### Logistics

Arranging for course logistics is a necessary evil. This is a wonderful assignment to give to one or two members of your coalition who are very detail-oriented and thorough. Depending on the size and structure of your coalition, one person could be responsible for all logistical arrangements, or arrangements could be subdivided by category (such as meals, transportation, etc.). The basic logistical responsibilities are as follows:

**Identifying a “training headquarters.”** Although the concept behind Child Watch is clearly to keep people out of the conference room and get them into the community, you will need a place to gather in the morning, wrap-up in the afternoon, and hold policy briefings. An ideal facility would have a conference room, a nearby kitchen (with coffee set-up), convenient parking or public transportation, access to phones, and, if possible, a DVD player and screen. Churches, temples, and universities are likely sources of these types of facilities and may be willing to offer them as their contribution to a Child Watch coalition.

**Securing transportation from site to site.** While it may seem easier (and less expensive) to ask course participants to drive themselves to sites, or even to take cabs/ride services, experience has taught us that traveling as a group in a van is both efficient and productive. It ensures that everyone will arrive together, eliminates parking worries, and keeps the group functioning as a unit. It gives participants a chance to get to know one another and exchange ideas and information. It also provides an opportunity for the course leader to provide participants with information about the sites to be visited or to answer questions about the site last seen. Congregations are again a good source of vans (and drivers) to borrow. Renting a van and driver is expensive, but if you are unable to get transportation donated, it is well worth the cost.

**Providing meals.** No one should expect to eat gourmet meals during the Child Watch program, but you will want to provide coffee and juice in the mornings and lunch if your course runs into the afternoon. Creativity when arranging for meals is a great asset. Catering lunch from a for-profit restaurant should be your last resort. Look into food service training programs as a way you can combine a site visit with your lunch. In Washington, we have had lunch at a job training program for homeless teens, and at a nonprofit restaurant training homeless adults to work in the food service industry. You also can have a meal at a local community kitchen, or lunch prepared with salvaged food from your community's food bank.



## CHILD WATCH VISITATION PROGRAM

Lunch in the conference room at your training base doesn't take advantage of the site visit aspect of Child Watch (it is also much more expensive than any of the other options listed above). Remember that if your meals are provided by one of the sites you visit (like breakfast at a Head Start Center), you should reimburse the program provider for any costs they have incurred.

**Tracking expenses.** Someone on your coalition needs to play the role of treasurer, keeping track of everything you spend on your Child Watch course. This will range from photocopying costs to meals to newspaper subscriptions. It is also a good idea to keep track of the approximate value of in-kind donations such as van services, space usage, or even the part-time use of a secretary and computer. This will help you if you decide to seek outside funding for your Child Watch program (see the next section) and as you determine how much each coalition member must contribute to keep the program running.

**Soliciting funding.** If you decide to seek funds from organizations other than those represented in your coalition you may need 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status. Establishing tax-exempt status for your Child Watch program may be a tedious and difficult process, but many of your coalition members should have their own tax-exempt classification which can be used on behalf of the coalition. In addition to the text of any proposal, you should plan to attach a few representative sample materials, such as your course schedule and recruiting letter.

Keep in mind that fundraising is a lot of work, and the relatively low cost of conducting a Child Watch course may make it easier to raise funds by collecting "dues" from your coalition members.

**Confirmation emails and mailing lists.** Confirmation emails need to go out to each of the sites you have selected for visitation during a Child Watch course, as well as to each course participant and policy briefer. Each should include a copy of an updated schedule and participants list.

The person in charge of confirmation emails also should be in charge of maintaining email lists. It is helpful to create at least two different lists: one of community leaders you plan to recruit or have already recruited for Child Watch participation, and the other should contain names and addresses of service providers you may sometime visit and with whom you would like to stay in contact. Confirmation emails to sites also should have suggested "talking points" attached (see Section Three of this manual).

You should plan to take advantage of the skills and resources each member of your coalition has to offer. A sample commitment form can be found in the Appendix and provides a format for surveying coalition members to determine what they can contribute to the program.



## CHILD WATCH VISITATION PROGRAM

### Recruiting—Who Do We Know?

Local Child Watch coordinators commonly ask how to successfully recruit community leaders as program participants. Experiences has shown us that the best results come from “peer recruiting.” If your target group is business leaders, find a CEO to sign the letter of invitation. If your goal is to reach candidates for public office, ask an elected official to host the program.

Your coalition members will be invaluable in identifying the leaders who can sign letters or convene the program. Explain to your coalition members that there is no better way to use their personal contacts than for a program to help children. This simple exercise, conducted at a coalition meeting, will help you learn where you have strong ties in the community.

Once you have completed this exercise, discuss which leaders on your list have the most clout. Who on your list of corporate leaders is most likely to command a large following? Which elected official has a record for bipartisan support? Who in the religious community is well-known outside of her or his own denomination or religious body? Those names that you don't select as program convenors can be added to your list of invitees.

Begin by identifying your target groups of participants. Give each member of your coalition a piece of paper that looks like the outline below:

#### WHO DO WE KNOW IN THE COMMUNITY?

It is important for our Child Watch coalition to have contacts in each of our target groups of participants. Please think carefully about who you know in each of the categories listed below. Think about your neighbors, members of your congregation, parents of your children's friends, campaigns on which you have worked, etc. Our goal is to come up with a list of individuals who will respond to a personal call from a member of this coalition, asking that they take a lead role in convening a Child Watch program for their colleagues.

Please list at least one name in each category. You can list as many names as you like.

#### ELECTED OFFICIALS

NAME:  
TITLE:

NAME:  
TITLE:

NAME:  
TITLE:

NAME:  
TITLE:



**CHILD WATCH VISITATION PROGRAM**

RELIGIOUS LEADERS

NAME:  
TITLE:

NAME:  
TITLE:

NAME:  
TITLE:  
TITLE:

NAME:  
TITLE:E:

MEMBERS OF THE MEDIA

NAME:  
TITLE:

NAME:  
TITLE:

NAME:  
TITLE:

NAME:  
TITLE:

BUSINESS/CORPORATE LEADERS

NAME:  
TITLE:

NAME:  
TITLE:

NAME:  
TITLE:  
TITLE:

NAME:  
TITLE:

## SECTION FIVE: CONDUCTING THE COURSE

Oddly enough, this will be the shortest section of this manual. Almost all of the work involved in the Child Watch Visitation Program comes before the course as you set it up, and after the course as you follow up with course participants and sites. If you have been careful as you planned the course, it will seem as though it runs itself. This section will explain what your role, as a local coordinator (or a designate from your coalition), should be during the actual Child Watch course.

**You are the host.** When participants arrive at your “headquarters” the first day, greet them. People will be a little nervous because they know that this is not a typical meeting or conference. If a recent newspaper or magazine article (that you have not included in your Child Watch materials) is relevant, pass out copies to participants as they arrive. It will give everyone a common point of discussion.

When all the participants have arrived, take the lead and formally welcome everyone and give them a little background about Child Watch and the purpose of the program. Point out the breadth of your coalition membership, and that many people were involved in putting the program together.

Ask everyone to introduce themselves, including their affiliations and why they decided to attend the program. Begin by explaining why you chose to get involved with Child Watch. After the introductions, point out how many different organizations, faith communities/congregations, companies, government offices, and others are represented in one room. Ask people to think throughout the program of ways in which the diverse talents and resources represented can work together to address child and family issues.

Begin the program with a speaker who can give participants a broad overview of the status of children and families in your community. The presentation should be no more than a half hour with adequate time for questions and comments. While setting a policy-based informational stage for your program is essential, you want to get program participants out of the conference room and into a program serving children as quickly as possible.

When you reach your sites, seek out the service providers who have arranged your visits. Introduce them to the group and let them know what you have already seen and heard. This will help them direct their discussion.

**Keep people on schedule.** Remaining on schedule is critical, and part of your role is to make sure that the group gets from place to place on time. Unfortunately, this often means cutting a conversation or discussion short. Encourage people to continue the discussion later or contact the speaker or service provider by email or phone with additional questions.

**Keep participants focused on the issues and the program.** Use your travel time to continue earlier discussions, talk about the site you are about to see, draw connections between sites and issues, or answer questions. It is too easy for people to get on the van and start scrolling through their phones or put in their earbuds. Your job is to give them as much information about children and families in as short a period of time as you possibly can.



## CHILD WATCH VISITATION PROGRAM

**Ask questions.** It is not important that you be an expert on children's issues. It is important that you are interested in the programs you are visiting and the policy issues you are discussing. Don't dominate a discussion, particularly if participants are asking a lot of their own questions. But you can help spark a discussion with a pointed question.

**Draw connections and make comparisons.** If you visit a neonatal intensive care unit and then go to a prenatal care clinic, point out the difference in average birthweight between the children in the NICU and those born to mothers who received early and comprehensive prenatal care. If you visit a homeless shelter and then an elementary school, ask questions about the educational problems faced by children without homes and good nutrition. If you can, talk about current or pending legislation that affects the programs you see. When you visit a community kitchen that serves pregnant women and children, talk about the WIC program—how much money it saves in the long term and how few eligible children it serves.

**Encourage brainstorming.** Use time over meals, in the van, or at the end of each day to discuss ways in which Child Watch participants can get involved with children and families. Volunteer work, financial and in-kind contributions, calling legislators, writing letters to media outlets, contributions to organizational newsletters, and distribution of information are just a few ideas that likely will be suggested. Ask participants to think of one thing that can be done in each of the following categories: advocacy or organizing, philanthropy, and volunteerism.

**Serve as a resource.** If participants have questions you can't answer, do your best to find the answer and get back to them. If you know someone is interested in a particular area, look through your files and see if you have any information that would be helpful to them. Remind people that they can email or call you, policy briefers, service providers, or other coalition members with questions or ideas.

**Encourage collaboration.** You can't force people to work together, but you certainly can make a strong case for effective collaboration and the pooling of organizational resources. Use your Child Watch coalition as an example of a working, broad-based collaborative effort.

Your role during the Child Watch course is primarily to keep things moving, to facilitate discussion, and to encourage ongoing involvement and collaboration among participants.

## SECTION SIX: AFTER THE COURSE IS OVER

Once your course has concluded, you probably will be feeling pretty good—a combination of pride and relief. Take a little time (maybe a day or so!) to congratulate yourself and your coalition, and then prepare yourself for the final phase of work. There are three main types of tasks to be completed at the conclusion of the course: thank yous, course evaluation, and, most importantly, planning follow-up with the course participants.

**Thank You:** Brief thank you notes or emails should be sent out quickly to people who conducted policy briefings, site hosts, and course participants. Although the shell of each letter can be the same, try to personalize the letters as much as possible without making the task too cumbersome. For example, if you visited with a group of clients at one site, ask the site host to pass along your thanks to the individuals who took the time to meet with you. This is also a good time to pass along any positive comments program participants may have made about a site. If your budget permits, and you have an appropriate item in mind, send a token gift to site hosts to express your appreciation for their cooperation. Sample letters can be found in the Appendix.

**Course Evaluation:** There are three ways to evaluate your course. Evaluation forms can be emailed or handed out to participants at the conclusion of their Child Watch course, your coalition can conduct a debriefing to evaluate the program's strengths and weaknesses internally, and you can, over a longer period of time, examine the results of your Child Watch program.

Your participant evaluation form does not need to be complex or scientific. You are searching for honest opinions about how useful and effective the various components of the course were. You need to ask questions about the course materials, the policy briefings, and the sites. Evaluation forms can be tailored to specific audiences. You may want to ask corporate leaders some different questions about the usefulness of the course than you would ask religious leaders. You will find a sample evaluation in the Appendix. Evaluations can be handed out or made available online, but either way do so as soon as the course is over to capture fresh assessments and focused attention.

Soon after the conclusion of your course, while details are still fresh in your mind, gather the individuals in your coalition who were involved in the planning and implementation of the course. Plan to spend several hours talking about how the course went, from the recruiting process all the way through to the final course discussion. Make notes regarding what worked as well as what you would do differently a second time. Some of your suggestions may be administrative (such as emailing the course materials to participants far enough in advance of the first day). Others could be programmatic (for example, your health policy briefer used too many technical terms and was boring).

Compare the notes made on participant evaluations to comments by your debriefing group. You may have thought that a particular site visit was wonderful, but the course participants found it useless. You also may find participants raving about parts of the program that you thought were not successful.

Your debriefing should look at the process as well as the end result. Would recruiting have been more successful if two coalition members had worked together rather than just one person? Did you leave enough time (or too much?) to get from site to site? Did on-site hosts have enough





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information about Child Watch and what issues you wanted them to address? A quality debriefing takes time and a great deal of thought but it will prove invaluable as you plan future courses.

One last note on debriefing. Your work will be wasted if you file your debriefing notes and never refer back to them. Remember to include them in future planning meetings.

One of the most rewarding (but also the most frustrating) evaluation tasks is tracking the “results” of your Child Watch course. It is essential that you encourage participants to stay in touch with you and let you know what they are doing. Remember that Child Watch results can take many forms. Some are easier to track than others.

The activities undertaken by your Child Watch participants could include volunteering at a site you visited, writing letters to policymakers or editorial boards, incorporating information about child and family issues into speeches or presentations, altering corporate policies regarding family and medical leave, making monetary or in-kind donations to children’s programs, or testifying at city council meetings on issues of concern to the child and family service community. A list of the types of activities Child Watch graduates can get involved in can be found at the end of this section. Additionally, be sure to connect early and throughout your Child Watch coalition work with community organizations and leaders in the communities you are hoping to partner with and come alongside in organizing, advocacy, and other action. Those who are impacted by the problems and rooted in the community are best able to advise and guide your active responses so they are effective, well-placed, and well-received.

Not everyone will have a specific story to tell about how Child Watch affected them. You can still be confident in the value of the program as an educational and motivational tool. By exposing people to things they have never seen before, you can be assured that in some way, large or small, you have changed the way they perceive the issue, the people it affects first-hand, or those who are working to change systems, programs, and policies to help children thrive. Your Child Watch graduates may not open a child care center or lobby for comprehensive health care coverage for mothers and children, but they may talk about what they have seen to their families at home, their colleagues at work, and their friends at parties. That is the beginning of change. It is difficult to summarize in a report or quantify to a funder, but it is no less important than other, more tangible, results.

**Participant Follow-Up:** It is likely that each course you conduct will yield one or two “stars.” These are the individuals who call you on a regular basis to tell you about all of their Child Watch inspired activities. They were just waiting to be pointed in the right direction and told what to do.

The majority of your graduates, however, may need a little more guidance and encouragement to get involved and mobilize their networks and resources on behalf of children.

At the conclusion of your course, leave enough time for participants to brainstorm about ways they can get involved. Encourage people to be creative. Make sure that people know that traditional power and prestige are not requirements for helping children and families; they need only to possess desire and commitment. You and your Child Watch coalition can help them find the proper vehicle for action.

The ultimate goal of Child Watch is to expand the number and diversity of individuals and organizations working on behalf of children and families. While change on a large scale, including change in federal policy, is needed, Child Watch is a valuable tool because it allows people to get involved in a way in which they are comfortable. You cannot begin a Child Watch program by telling participants that your goal is to turn them all into lobbyists. Similarly, you cannot try to make all of your graduates become volunteers. You can provide a broad range of options for your



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graduates of ways in which they can help children and families. What follows is a list, far from comprehensive, of types of post-Child Watch activities. Your group will likely think of additions, unique to their experiences and the needs of your community.

**Volunteer.** This includes everything from changing diapers at a child care center to driving pregnant women to clinics where they can receive prenatal care. VITA sites use volunteers to assist people with preparing tax returns. The lowest income families may not traditionally file taxes, but helping them do so ensures that they can receive the Earned Income Tax Credit and expanded Child Tax Credit for which they are eligible. Ask the sites you visit to give you a list of volunteer opportunities in support of their work. Let your graduates know that volunteering is not limited to providing direct services to clients. Helping with office work, arranging computer instruction for staff, and providing pro bono legal or accounting services are all ways in which volunteers can help.

Encourage participants to think of what unique talents they possess and how they can be used in volunteer service. A photographer can offer to take pictures for an agency annual report, a writer can help produce a program newsletter, a singer or dancer can arrange a performance for agency clients.

Remind graduates that you have visited just a few of the many quality programs serving children in your community. If they are interested in volunteering but did not visit a program of particular interest, offer to help them locate one.

**Spread the word.** This can be done both formally and informally. Encourage all your graduates, including those who plan to take other types of action, to talk about what they have seen and learned. Ask graduates to think of newsletters and other media outlets to which they have access. Occasional (or better yet, regular) articles about children's issues and community programs would make a great addition to newsletters produced by churches, synagogues, and other places of worship, neighborhood associations, professional groups, service clubs, and alumni associations. Ask graduates who do public speaking to spread the word. Use social media channels too.

**Adopt “family friendly” policies.** Child Watch graduates from the business community might not have to go any farther than their workplace to take action following the program. Employers can provide medical and family leave, allow flex-time or job sharing for working parents, share information about the expanded Child Tax Credit, provide comprehensive medical coverage for employees and their families, or even arrange for on-site child care.

Businesses also can adopt policies permitting and encouraging employees to get involved in community service. Some businesses may want to “adopt” a single agency, providing a combination of corporate funding and volunteer service. Others may choose to pay employees for several hours of community service each month at an agency of their choice.

Share what you know with the people who make decisions. Ask your graduates to pay close attention to proposed policy changes that would affect children and families. When they hear about pending budget cuts in health care or early childhood programs, encourage them to contact the sites they have visited and ask how individual programs will be affected by the cuts. Encourage them to use what they have learned to recognize the impact of the expanded Child Tax Credit on low-income families and, in 2021, encourage legislators to make the expansion permanent.

Child Watch graduates are primed to write informed, personal letters to both elected and appointed policy makers. A Child Watch graduate can write a letter saying, “your proposed cuts would mean a loss in funding to General Hospital. I visited that hospital and saw the important work the staff there



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is doing to combat our community's high infant mortality rate...." Contrary to popular belief, letters (especially individual ones that are well-written) to public officials carry a great deal of weight. Every letter written to a member of Congress is regarded as representing the views of one thousand voters.

In addition to writing letters, graduates also can testify before policymakers. City councils, local school boards, even state legislative committees provide forums for concerned citizens to share their views. You can help graduates believe that what they have to say is important and worthwhile.

As a Child Watch coordinator, part of your job is to inform graduates of important legislative or policy changes. Be ready to mobilize your alumni when necessary using your email list, and give them a specific task to accomplish (such as calling their city council member or writing a letter to the editor). Again, in 2021 one of the key actions you can encourage graduates to take is advocating to make the expansion of the Child Tax Credit permanent, which likely touches on most of the concerns they became more aware of during the course of the Child Watch program.

**Start new programs.** Some graduates may want to create and run their own programs. One graduate of the Washington, D.C. Child Watch program mobilized his local union and began a city-wide monthly clothing and toy collection and distribution drive. In Los Angeles, a minister began a cooperative program between his church and a child development center to recruit and train foster parents. As a Child Watch coordinator, you should help interested graduates as they brainstorm about how their own resources can be used to benefit children and families.

**Stay in touch with your Child Watch graduates.** Use email, social media, newsletters, meetings, or phone calls to keep your network alive. Stay informed about opportunities in your community of which your graduates can take advantage. Let graduates know if a site they visited is in trouble and needs their help, or if an interesting speaker will be appearing in town. Continue to provide them with new information about children and families in your community. You may want to ask each member of your coalition to be responsible for staying in touch with a few Child Watch graduates. In addition to emails to the entire group, each graduate would get periodic communication with offers to help them direct their resources and good intentions.

After you have conducted more than one course, bring all of your graduates together for an informal meeting. Schedule an early morning breakfast with a short presentation by a city official or a service provider that will allow graduates to meet one another and learn about and be inspired by each other's activities. It is easy to leave the Child Watch program excited and ready to work, but too quickly graduates can begin to feel isolated and alone in their efforts. This type of meeting can help alleviate those feelings.

Child Watch will be a continuous learning process for you, your coalition, the sites you visit, and the course participants. This manual is meant to serve as a guide, to point you in the right direction, and help you to avoid common pitfalls. Many important decisions about your Child Watch program, however, must be made locally by your coalition. By bringing together diverse members of your community to work collaboratively for children and families, you already have accomplished a great deal. Child Watch is simply a tool for you to use to expand the circle of those involved in this effort. Remember that you are never alone. The CDF staff in Washington and CDF state offices are always available to assist you, and all across the country your colleagues are working in their own communities putting Child Watch to work for children and families.

## APPENDIX

### Sample Participant Confirmation Letter:

[Date]

Dear [name],

Enclosed [or attached, if emailed] please find the briefing materials for the [name of coalition] Child Watch Leadership Training Program, and a list of program participants.

We are looking forward to seeing you on [day of the week, time, date] for our first session.

As the training schedule indicates, we will gather at [location] each morning. Transportation to the various sites and meals during the training days are provided.

In preparation for our first meeting, please review the training schedule and read the sections [names of briefing materials enclosed or attached, such as “Children in Poverty” and Moments for Your State’s Children.]

Also familiarize yourself with the profiles of our first two sites, [name of site 1 and name of site 2]

Please dress casually and comfortably for this first session, as it will include a walking tour of [site, or neighborhood].

If you have not already done so, please send us a resume or short biography for our files.

If your plans should unexpectedly change and you find that you are unable to participate in this training session, please notify me immediately. Do not hesitate to contact me at [phone number and email] if you have any questions or concerns about the program.

I am looking forward to meeting you and working with you.

Sincerely,

[name]

[Child Watch coalition] Coordinator



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**Site Evaluation Form**

Date of Visit:

Name of Agency:

Name of Program (if different):

Address of Program:

Contact Person:

Phone Number :

Purpose of Agency:

When it Began:

Short History:

Description of Population:

Description of Programs:

How Many Children Served Per Year:

Capacity:

How Many Children Served Per Day:

Capacity:

Ages Served:

Hours and Days of Operation:

Full-time Staff:

Part-time Staff:

Number of Volunteers Used:

What Work Volunteers Perform:



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Role of the Board:

Number of Members:

Primary Sources of Funding:

Fee Scale:

Board Chair:

Annual Budget:

Current Deficit:

Is Space Owned, Leased, Donated:

What do you need to better serve your clients? (e.g. funding, staff, regulation changes, etc.):

What policy changes (local or federal) would best address the needs of the population you serve?:

Maximum Number of Child Watch Trainees Allowed to Visit at a Time:

Best Days and Times for Visits:

Comments:



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**Sample Site Confirmation Form:**

[name]

[Title]

[Organization]

Dear [Name],

Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in the Children’s Defense Fund’s Child Watch Leadership Training program. This confirms our visit to [site name] on [date and time].

I have enclosed, for your information, our most recent training schedule. This schedule is subject to minor changes.

As we discussed, in addition to touring [e.g., the neonatal intensive care and pediatrics units,] we’d like to talk to a member of [e.g., your social work staff] to discuss [e.g., child welfare issues surrounding boarder babies and other children in your care].

As you know, Child Watch will bring individuals from a wide variety of constituencies (business leaders, clergy, educators, elected officials, concerned citizens, etc.) to a number of sites serving children and families in [community]. As soon as we have available a final list of trainees visiting your site, we will forward that to you. We will provide these groups of trainees with background readings and information to orient them to a broad range of children’s issues as well as introduce them to the specific programs which they are going to visit.

After each series of visits is completed, we will work with the trainees to develop an action agenda designed not only to alleviate the problems they have witnessed, but also to support programs which are working to serve our children.

Our goal is to make our visit a meaningful learning experience for our trainees without disrupting your daily activities. I will be calling you the week prior to our visit to confirm our plans, but please feel free to call me at [contact information] if you have any questions or concerns.

We encourage you to be honest with our trainees — tell them what works and what does not. Let them know what would make your job easier (more money, more staff, etc.). Our trainees will take the information you provide them and begin to think about what they can do to help our children.

We are excited about this program, and the chance to educate so many people about what you, as service providers, already know. We are looking forward to working with you, and appreciate your cooperation and assistance.

Sincerely yours,

[name], [Child Watch Coalition] Coordinator



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### Sample Evaluation Form:

*Evaluations can be provided as written forms to complete and return or online surveys. Do what seems most effective and appropriate for your group.*

[Name of Child Watch Coalition Program] Program Evaluation [date of program]

Your comments about the [name of your Child Watch Coalition] Child Watch program will help us develop more programs. Please complete this evaluation and return it to [name and contact info.] (enclosed envelope).

Continue answers on the back if necessary. Thank you.

#### **I: Materials**

- 1) Did you have enough information about the program prior to the visits?
- 2) Will the materials presented to you serve as a useful resource? How could they be improved?

#### **II: Briefings**

3) Rate the quality of the briefings (1 = poor; 5 = excellent) in helping understand children's needs and gaps in programs

[name of first site briefing]

[name of second site briefing]

[name of third site briefing]

4) How can the informational briefings be improved?

#### **III: Sites**

5) How can the site visits be improved?

#### **IV: General Comments**

The main objectives of the [name of your Child Watch coalition program] are to invite community leaders to see the challenges and strengths and learn first-hand from impoverished, at-risk children and their families and help leaders transform their concern into positive public policy actions and partnership with families, communities, and programs that work. Keeping these objectives in mind, please answer the following:

6) What piece of the program was most significant in meeting the objectives?

7) Would you recommend this program to colleagues? Why or why not?