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Dollars and sense child abuse prevention

Healthy Families is the largest statewide child abuse prevention program and offers voluntary home visits by trained family support workers to families in stressful life situations.

We are fortunate in Monroe County to have the Healthy Families program, provided through Wesley House Family Services, in Key West through Marathon; but the Healthy Families Florida program needs statewide expansion to cover all the Keys and to prevent child abuse before it ever starts throughout Florida.

As the Legislature struggles to fund Florida's priorities, it is important to remember that times of economic hardship put children at even greater risk for abuse. Children cannot wait for an economic upturn.

The Florida House and Senate have the opportunity to revisit the budget in the area of child abuse prevention by supporting the governor's recommendation of \$12 million to expand Healthy Families statewide. Healthy Families works. Results from an independent evaluator show that Healthy Families is working to prevent abuse – 98 percent of children served had no maltreatment within 12 months after the family completed the program and 74 percent of the families who completed the program attained a greater level of self-sufficiency.

Healthy Families saves money. Prevention is far more cost effective than intervention. Healthy Families reaches families within two weeks of the birth of their child and equips parents with the tools they need early on so that they can use effective parenting skills from the start. Weekly home visits ensure that families stay on track and learn to cope with the challenges of daily living in positive ways.

The children in Florida do not have a voice in the Legislature. Money talks. Our legislators need to think in terms of "dollars and sense" by voting this session to expand the Healthy Families program for all Florida's children.

Sherry Read
Program Manager
Joseph Barker
Executive Director
Healthy Families, Monroe Wesley House Family Services