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THE HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT OF OUR YOUTH

-Hillary Rodham Clinton,  
Chair, Children's Defense Fund  
and Attorney, Little Rock, Arkansas

I am very pleased to be here and even more pleased that the Council is having this kind of program. I have been a member of the Board of Directors of a foundation; I have more often been in the role of a member of a group seeking foundation assistance. I have a high regard for the work that all of you are doing and the importance of it. I am especially glad that you will be focusing on children and youth in the conference today. I have looked at the program and you will be hearing from a number of people who have a great deal to share with you based on their experience.

What I want to do today to start this off is to give an overview of what is needed for our children and youth and how we are going to meet those needs in the face of our uncertain economic conditions, changing family structures, increasing poverty among children and schools which, though improved, still have a long way to go to meet the demands of today's economy and the needs of today's youth. How do we begin to address what

children need for healthy development? How do you as a member of a community, as a trustee, an officer, an employee of a foundation begin to carve out a little piece of what needs to be done?

But before I get to that, let me just share an overview of how I think we got to where we are, because I don't think we can view the development of children and youth and their challenging problems in a vacuum. We have to have some shared understanding of what has happened in the last several decades in this country, or we may not be able to arrive at a consensus about what should be done and how we can tackle a part of that.

I'm always reminded of the story that my husband tells when he talks about how difficult it is to bring people together if they don't see things in the same way. He talks about an old couple sitting up on their porch in north Arkansas, sitting there rocking. They have been married fifty years and George turns to Martha and says, "Martha, we have been married fifty years. We have been together such a long time, and I don't know how much more time we are going to have together, and there are just a few things I want to say to you. You know back in the Depression right after we got married, we weren't married six months before I lost my job, and we didn't know where we were going to turn, but you stayed with me. And then when I got called up in World War Two, I wasn't in action for thirty days

before I suffered that terrible injury and was in the hospital for two years. You wrote to me every day; you pulled together the money to come see me. I'll never forget that. And then after the war we got back on our feet and got our business going, and you remember that terrible fire in '52 that just took everything we had. We had to start all again. And then finally we got started again, and we thought everything was going well, and then remember what happened? We failed again. But you were always there, and I have just one thing to say to you. Martha, you're bad luck."

Different people often see the same facts differently, but foundations and institutions of higher education can begin to help us see in the same way where we are and what is happening to families and children and youth. We can go back and look at where this country was at the end of World War Two with our dominant economic position, which lasted all the way up until about 1973, when, with increasing competition globally, with the oil embargoes, and the other problems that began to occur, real wages peaked. In 1987 average wages fell about 17% lower than in 1973 in real terms.

Now, what does that mean and why would I talk about it before a group that's interested in children and youth?

The basic needs children and youth have for healthy development are strong, functioning families that are

economically able to support themselves. Without a strong family structure and an economic order that supports families, we are already behind the eight ball when we begin to talk about children and youth development. So we have to understand what has happened to families, to wage earners, to real wages since 1973.

I am not going to bore you with a lot of statistics, but I would commend to you a study of what has happened in the country as a whole and in our region as we began to lose higher paying manufacturing jobs, while other jobs were maintained without pay increases and often with pay cuts. The decline of primary high wage paying jobs and the effects that has had on the ability of workers to support adequately themselves and their children cannot be overestimated in terms of how well we are able to care for our children. We cannot remove from our discussion today the economic context in which families are struggling to support children.

When I began working on education in Arkansas, I knew there is a direct correlation between educational attainment and economic prosperity both for the individual and for the society. But I was struck one day when I received a letter from a friend who had gone to Yale with me, who then was working as an investment banker in Europe. He had read about the work my husband and I were doing to improve education. He is one of

these people who is a forward thinker, a little bit provocative. He wrote to tell us he was pleased we were engaged in such an effort, but he said, "I have one question for you. Given the changes that are going on in the worldwide economy, what will you do with all these people you educate? Even if you educate them, where will the jobs be for them?" I had never thought about that. I had assumed that if we raised our educational standards, if we began to reach children who otherwise had not been reached, then, of course, the American Dream would take care of the rest. All we had to do was provide the tools. I have been haunted by that question, as has my husband, for the last four years. We began to recognize how severely the economic structure impacts on all we have attempted to do on behalf of children and youth.

There are a lot of interesting statistics that make that point. The ones I will be using come from "The Forgotten Half: Non-College Youth in America," an Interim Report on Youth and America's Future by the William T. Grant Foundation Commission on Work, Family and Citizenship. Productivity of American workers increased 3% annually from 1947 to 1973, but, from 1974 to 1986, it fell to under one percentage point a year and real wage growth for many workers stagnated or declined. During the twenty-six years from '47 to '73, American families' purchasing power doubled. Over the ensuing thirteen years of relative

economic stagnation, however, median family purchasing power actually declined. In other words, by 1986, American family income had still not recovered to its 1973 level. Family poverty rates which had been cut by more than half between 1959 and 1973, rose after 1973 to a high of 12.3% in 1983 and then fell to the 1986 level of 11.4% -- still 29.5% higher than the 1973 level. The percentage of our population living in poverty grew from 13.8% in 1979 to 18.3% in '85, an increase of almost one-third.

Inner city poverty rates grew even faster. Among families headed by a person under twenty-five, the poverty rate almost doubled. The poverty rate of young white families doubled from 11.7% to 24.7% while the rate for young black families also rose markedly. Income inequality also has worsened as shown in the July 1987 census report. The poorest fifth of all households, which in 1970 received 4.1% of all the nation's income, by 1986 was receiving only 3.8%. The poorest 40% of all households received only 15.4% of 1986 income, an all time low. The top fifth, which includes most of us, received an estimated \$40 billion more in 1986 than it would have if its share of total family income had remained the same as it was in 1980. There is a graph of that 1986 report which is frightening to me. It shows how, between 1981 and 1986, 20% of all personal incomes in real wage dollars held constant, while incomes for 40% of the

population decreased and for 40% they increased. If we chart out over a number of years what that kind of division in income represents, it becomes frightening in terms of its long term implications for our society.

The paradox of a growing economy -- because we are a growing economy, or at least have been -- amid declining real wages has been difficult to explain. The best explanation I have found comes from Gordon Berlin of the Fund Foundation and Andrew M. Sum of Northeastern University who look at numbers and make them understandable to those of us who don't understand them. They say part of the answer lies in the ingenuity of the American people who have kept their standard of living up even while individual real wages were falling by doing the following four things: They postponed marriage. Both potential spouses entered the labor market. They had fewer children. And they went into debt. With two or more people working per family and fewer children, families could maintain a high standard of living even though the real earnings of the family's primary wage earner were declining.

Coping strategies like these, however, cannot continually be repeated. Once both partners in a two-parent family are working, once children are postponed or reduced in number, little can be done to maintain living standards in the absence

of a rise in real wages; and that is not happening for most American families.

Among those most exposed to the ill effects of declining wages, none are more at risk than children and youth. It is estimated that a fifth of our children under the age of eighteen and a quarter of those five and under live in poverty. This is partly caused by declining marriage rates, especially among those who are already poor.

The fact is that poor job opportunities available to young men in their prime years for beginning families, about age twenty to twenty-four, make it impossible for many of them, to support themselves, let alone a family, above the poverty level. Two retail sector jobs are required to equal the wages of one lost manufacturing job. In April 1987, construction workers earned an average weekly wage of \$473; manufacturing workers, \$399; retail trade positions, \$178. Whether or not the loss of employment in manufacturing is the root cause of the problem, the impact of the decline has been felt more heavily on people who are young and especially those at the bottom level of the educational skills attainment ladder. The consequences of these sharp earning declines have been projected to include a marked reduction in the ability of young men regardless of race to support a family. Real earnings for 20-24 year-old males fell so sharply that by 1984, only 41.7% of them could support a

family of three at incomes above the poverty line. This was down markedly from the 59.4% who earned above poverty line wages just eleven years earlier.

When we look at these statistics, we see the problems affecting children and youth in a much larger context than just the school and the family. Young people are not oblivious to our current economic realities which make it increasingly difficult to enter into marriage, support children, and care for children effectively. These circumstances affect obviously the strategies we employ to provide effective assistance to at-risk children and youth.

In our region of the country, the South, what are we going to do to move ourselves forward? I would commend to you the Report of the Commission on the Future of the South, a commission my husband appointed, chaired by former Governor William Winter of Mississippi. I'm sure some of you know people who served on it. Their report called "Halfway Home - a Long Way to Go" talks about the need for development in the South in a very broad way. Now remember back six years, ten years, to what we in this part of the country thought of as economic development. We thought it consisted of enticing someone from somewhere else to come here. "Smokestack chasing" is what it was often called. If we could just convince someone to get out of "crummy old dying" Detroit or Chicago and move to Kentucky or

Tennessee or Arkansas or Georgia, we were going to be moving right along. Of course in the last six years, we have seen how many of those industries that we got to move from Chicago and Detroit have moved on to Taiwan and Bangladesh. And we have also seen something more important, that economic development cannot depend on what kinds of jobs we bring here as much as on what we do to invest in our people, to become more self-sufficient, to generate more of our own economic opportunities. Much attention also is given in that Report to what we can do for children. There is a discussion of pre-school education. Who could have predicted six or ten years ago that in a report largely devoted to what needs to be done to improve the economy there would be a section devoted to pre-school education?

It is not just in our region of the country that awareness is dawning. The Committee for Economic Development chaired by Brad Butler, the former Chairman of Proctor and Gamble, has just issued a second report on investing in children calling for widespread recognition by the private and public sectors that if we do not begin investing in children at the earliest possible opportunity, we will not be able to make the impact we need to improve their chances for productive lives.

I think there's a consensus building that the healthy development of children and the future economic growth of this

country have to be linked. Their mutuality must be recognized, and if we, as a civilization, are to overcome the transitional difficulties we're in, we have to begin to invest in the future, which primarily involves investing in our people, particularly our young people.

What do we do to have the greatest impact? We can start at the very beginning. We know, for example, programs which improve the prenatal health of a mother pay off in terms of the quality of life of a newborn child. A program which provides better nutrition and medical care to a pregnant woman, particularly if she is a teenager, will reduce the chances of a low birthweight baby, or a child with birth defects, and will make it easier to help the mother accept more of her responsibility because of that initial intervention. So, work aimed at the pregnant woman, particularly one who is poor or a teenager, pays off.

There is an important study going on at several locations funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. We have one of the sites in Little Rock. What it is doing is identifying low birthweight babies, a characteristic which is often, but not always, correlated with poverty or inadequate prenatal care, and working with those babies and their families from the moment of birth until the age of three through parenting education, a structured childcare setting and additional medical attention to find out how much needs to be done to get that child to a

developmental stage which is at a par with where the child should be at the age of three. Information from this study can be accessible to your foundations to find out what models might be suitable for use elsewhere.

Accessible prenatal and medical care for children are equally important. We still have in many parts of the country, and unfortunately particularly in our region of the country, too many pregnant women and children who do not have access to quality health care. We need to be more creative about providing incentives to government and private medical personnel to provide that care. There is a tremendous opportunity for foundations to serve as brokers for bringing together different parts of the health care system with such incentive money, the old carrot approach, to say, "What can you do together to answer these needs"? If you are a local community foundation, how many women in your catchment area are not receiving prenatal care and what are the reasons? What is the rate of infant mortality in your city, in your county, in your state?

Infant mortality is directly correlated with poverty, poor education, inaccessible medical care. It is a continuing puzzle why this country has not put in the resources to attack the problems associated with infant mortality that we have on other problems. Surgeon General Koop has said that he wants our

infant mortality rate at 9% by 1990. We are not going to make it. A child has more of a chance of dying the first year of life in so many parts of our country than in most third world countries. We have a higher rate of infant mortality than places like Costa Rica. Parts of our country are worse than Bangladesh and parts of the South unfortunately have the reputation, well borne out by the facts, of being the worst.

If we focus our attention on trying to bring healthy babies into the world, we'll begin to assure the healthy development of children. And if we couple that with intensive work with the mothers, with visits to their homes, and followup calls, so that they receive the help they need to be better parents, we will have better children in our first grades.

We've done something in East Arkansas which proves that. About ten years ago we decided that we would provide a concentrated approach to the area with the State's highest level of infant mortality, the Delta along the Mississippi River, an area with a heavily black, very poor population. The State put in a team which consisted of doctors, nurse-midwives, home health nurses and other health care providers from the Arkansas Health Department. This area now has one of our lowest infant mortality rates, and the State's rate has been at or below the national average for the last five years. There's not any great

mystery to it. The young girls come there because they are made to feel welcome. They are either on a reduced fee scale or under Medicaid, and they are able to get not just medical services but the support services they need as well.

We also have to remember, however, that it's not just a question of bringing a healthy baby into the world. We also have to have well baby clinics accessible to children. We began to solve our problem with infant mortality in the first month of life in Arkansas only to see, after about a decade of effort, that we were losing babies as they got to be eight or nine or ten months old and they got the flu, or became dehydrated, and their mothers didn't know how to or couldn't get them to medical care. Sometimes the only doctor in an area wouldn't accept Medicaid. We've had to go back to the drawing boards to be sure we are taking care of children who are kept alive after birth only to be turned back to homes that have inadequate sewage, unsafe drinking water, poor medical care.

Once we get a child, who by most odds is not going to have a very good chance of being a productive citizen, into the world healthy -- what then? It is also clear that we now know the positive effects that early childhood education with both the mother and the child can have. If we know it, why don't we do more of it? Well, it's difficult to do well. That's part of it, and I'm not talking just about childcare, even though we are desperately in need of childcare arrangements for working

parents. I'm talking about something a little extra for kids who otherwise will show up at kindergarten or first grade, as they did when my daughter entered public school with them, who don't even know their last names, certainly don't know their colors or their numbers, and don't have enough self-discipline to be able to stand in a line for longer than five seconds. We can do things that will make it easier for those children to succeed.

Headstart has proven itself time and again. High Scope, the project in Ypsilanti, Michigan, has proven itself. We are experimenting in our state with a number of early childhood programs, because we don't have any particular model in mind. I don't think anybody should. What works in one community may not work as well somewhere else, but we are attempting to have not only site-based programs like Headstart, but also to establish in-home programs, because I believe that the most longlasting effects of these efforts, if successful, will not be just on the child but on the family.

We have to try to change the family's view of itself. One program which shows great promise in our state is a program that we borrowed from Israel, the Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters. It has a terrible acronym for this country in the 80's, because if you take the first letter of each of those words, it spells HIPPIE. It sends my legislators crazy when I tell them about the HIPPIE program, but I say that's

the best we could do given what we started with. That program works with low income, poorly educated mothers to enable them to work with their own children. It came out of the Israeli experience because Israel has universal daycare. All children go to daycare in Israel. Starting in about 1970, lots of immigrants began coming to Israel from African countries, places like Ehtiopia, and, unlike past immigrants, these people were poorly educated, and even though their pre-school children would go to the universally available daycare, they still didn't do very well in school. They were not able to grasp the academic success essential for a challenging country like Israel.

There was no support for education in those immigrant families. The families, even though Jews for centuries, came from predominantly Moslem countries. They were illiterate. The mothers had limited self-esteem, didn't believe they had any contribution to make or that their children could do much better. The program was designed to go in and tell the mother: "You can help teach your own child," and the results in that country, in Chile, and other places where it has been in operation, have been not only to improve the ability of the children to do well in school but to help their mothers want to get involved in their communities. They are no longer afraid to go to the school to ask what could be done to help their children.

We have seen on an anecdotal basis the same thing happen in our state as we have begun to push forward. I'll never forget going to a training session. One of the paraprofessionals, who is drawn from the same community as the people with whom she is going to work, came back after two days of training with an amazed look on her face to say that she had gone home and tried out the material on her own four-year-old, and she was absolutely amazed how he responded. She said, "You know, I never knew I had anything to teach my child."

If you are a mother who believes that you do not have anything to teach your child, how can you be expected to support a teacher of your child? There's no tradition, there's no basis for an understanding of what education can mean. We need early intervention in a variety of ways. All kinds of models and programs have to be tried. We are eventually going to have to institutionalize preschool programs either through the schools, community centers, churches or elsewhere, but we should not be bound to accept one model over another, because rural areas are more difficult to reach than urban areas, and different cultures have different needs. We should stimulate as much good quality early childhood intervention as we can. To that end, our state has contracted with High Scope to train a number of our childcare workers and university teachers who teach home economics and early childhood development so that they then can

go out and train others. Missouri has an exciting program about teaching parents to be teachers. A lot is going on. Much, much more needs to be done.

Now, assume that we do have some stimulation and intervention going on in the early childhood years, the preschool years. What happens when children get to school? What kind of development needs do they have there and are they being met? I think we've done a lot, particularly in our region, to catch up in the last four or five years. I give a lot of credit to a number of people, especially to several of the Southern governors. The "Nation at Risk" report that President Reagan asked Secretary Bell to produce had a galvanizing effect. Secretary Bennett has used his bully pulpit to argue strenuously that we need to do better, but I think it's time now for a lot of us to take a step back and think about what doing better in our schools means.

Here again is a great opportunity for foundations to serve as brokers or catalysts because schools by themselves are impervious to change. They are bureaucracies. They are institutions that consist of people who come to them for all different reasons from the most devoted, idealistic, committed people you could find anywhere in this country, to some who don't know anything else to do with themselves, and everything in between. They have responded, I think, satisfactorily to the

pressures and challenges that have been placed on them in the last four or five years. The real hope for what happens inside schools lies with convincing those who are in them to be more imaginative, more flexible, to take more risks, to meet the individual needs of children rather than follow some kind of preordained script handed down from on high.

To initiate that kind of change in mentality requires a lot of careful thought at the school level, the superintendency level, the state level. You will hear later today from Phil Schlechty who has been working in Louisville about what they are doing to reorganize schools. There are lots of opportunities out there, but we still don't have the kind of development capital, incentive seed money or grant money to move that process along the way it should be moved. Schools will not be able to meet the challenges of average children in the future, let alone those who come to their doors at-risk who deserve and require more help, if they are not reorganized. It is not just a question of imposing on them new requirements, new personnel, new curricula.

We have a lot of new standards now in place; but to maximize their effectiveness, we have to create a new mentality about teaching. We have to give more respect to teachers. We have to encourage the school boards and superintendents to take more opportunities to interact with teachers. We have to encourage more collegial cooperation.

One thing which I think would improve the quality of education about 100% in five years is to increase by one hundred-fold the number of women superintendents and principals. I don't say that facetiously. I think if you go into schools and talk with the people who understand children, who are sensitive to their needs, many of them are women who have absolutely no chance of ever exerting any leadership in the present system. What I find after going from school to school is that often the good teachers, many of whom are women, have adopted a strategy of defensiveness toward the outside administration. They basically close their doors, and say, "I'm not going to let those people get to me and my students, and I'm going to do the best I can this year." The principal, who is often a fellow who took the night courses and wrote the thesis at the school of education about basketball theory and is working his way up to be superintendent, doesn't have a clue about how to get the most out of his teachers, how to encourage that development, that spark, that enthusiasm. He's not a bad guy, he's a good guy. That's why he's there. He's a good guy, but he is not a leader in education.

Anything any of your foundations can do to educate school boards about what lies out there in their teacher and principal corps would be a big help. Anything you can do to help identify quality teachers who could assume more leadership would be an

enormous help, because we cannot have the schools we need if we do not have new leadership. We cannot recruit into our schools the quality of people we need if they don't think there's any opportunity for advancement there for them. And it's not just financial. It certainly is financial to a great extent, but it's also working conditions, it's respect, it's status, it's feeling like somebody is going to listen to you. There is much that can be done in the whole public school area to encourage this kind of openness, flexibility, and careful attention to educators and what we can get out of them. But you have to bring people in to help design strategies for the schools to achieve those goals. We can't just give the money to the schools and tell them to do it.

In public policy in America in the last decade, we have too often been like the old couple I told you about earlier. We did not see the same events in the same way. Now I believe we are beginning to build a consensus about how things are and what strategies we should pursue for change. I believe our first priority in our homes, communities and nation should be to focus attention and resources on our children. You can help fulfill that priority and be part of a better future for all of us.

Thank you.