

# CORPORATE POSITION PAPER

## **Introduction**

The methamphetamine lifestyle is one characterized by violence, indiscriminate sexual activity, paranoia, weapons, volatile toxins and a host of criminal activities. This lifestyle has claimed the lives of thousands of persons addicted to its powerful feelings of euphoria. Millions of others have had their life irrevocably changed by the mind altering substance. However, one victim of methamphetamine that has largely been overlooked, until recently, is the child living in the world of the methamphetamine addict. In addition to the exposure to perversion and violence practiced by the methamphetamine addict, the child who is unsuspecting and unprotected is often abused and neglected. The child exposed to methamphetamine often is the target of physical and emotional abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, and criminal activities needed to support the ever demanding chemical addiction. Children from these homes are often suffering from emotional and physical conditions brought on by recurring trauma, and ingestion of and exposure to toxic, corrosive chemicals used in the methamphetamine manufacturing processes. Providing a regimen of care that meets the complex needs of these children is costly and involves treatment for methamphetamine use, emotional disorders, behavioral conditions and developmental delays.

Still, prevention efforts are optimal in comparison to a costly treatment regimen that may or may not prove successful in overcoming the addiction. Prevention efforts through training, education and increased awareness by professionals from child protective services (CPS), law enforcement, medical and mental health professionals, prosecutors, child advocates, substance abuse treatment providers, and other community leaders, as well as the general public have the potential to keep a child from becoming a victim of the methamphetamine lifestyle. Working as a coordinated multidisciplinary team, the hazards of the methamphetamine lifestyle can be exposed as a life altering and potentially fatal choice. Healing Helpers Coalition will strive to attain the long-term goal of providing safe, supportive and drug-free environments which will permit children to grow and prosper.

We, the undersigned agencies, by and through our administrative officers in charge (and through our designated representatives listed below), do embrace the multidisciplinary prevention efforts that contribute to the efforts for education, training and enhanced awareness and agree to the establishment of Healing Helpers as more fully set forth below.

## **Background/Problem**

The production of methamphetamine (meth) in home-based drug labs and the dangers surrounding other volatile drug environments confronts the communities of the nation and requires and poses significant risk for all citizens. The chemicals used to manufacture meth, the production process, and the waste generated as a result of that

process pose very real and serious dangers to the public and the environment. These dangers include toxic poisoning, chemical and thermal burns, fires, and explosions.

The children who live in and around meth labs are at the greatest risk of harm due to:

their developmental nature,

the abuse and neglect perpetrated on them by their caretakers and many others who may frequent their homes,

and their inability to protect themselves.

Any child or adult that is living in any drug environment is at significant risk from the dangers associated with parental drug use. In addition to children exposed to methamphetamine labs, Healing Helpers Coalition is also very concerned with children of all substance users and the needs of those children, and seeks to create awareness among all involved professionals of the dangers such as abuse, neglect, drug exposure, etc.

### **Corporate Belief Statement and Guiding Values**

We believe that all children have the right to be loved, nurtured, and provided for in a safe environment. Children who grow up in households where alcoholism is the norm as well as children living in drug environments are often the victims of abuse, neglect, family violence, are at-risk for severe medical complications, and are often plagued by long-term mental health issues unless they receive support and treatment to overcome these risk-factors. Healing Helpers Coalition will help coordinate prevention efforts throughout the United States in an effort to:

prevent methamphetamine/drug abuse;

raise awareness about resources for children when methamphetamine/drug prevention efforts fail; and

aggressively work to break the cycle of methamphetamine/drug abuse caused by those who manufacture, sell, and use drugs.

### **Guiding Values**

Healing Helpers Coalition is guided by and promotes the following values:

Relentlessly promote

the end of drug abuse to prevent children from experiencing the physical, emotional, and psychological damage that exposure to drug environments can cause; and

family environments that are completely free of methamphetamine and other dangerous drugs; and

shared efforts of all involved agencies to actively promote a community policy of intolerance for all abused substances including methamphetamine; and the formation of alliances, partnerships, and organizations across all government and private services that encourages efforts to educate, train and raise the awareness of the risks faced by children in methamphetamine environments; and

the identification and implementation of multidisciplinary services and strategies that are necessary to break the cycle of methamphetamine/drug abuse, and The evaluation of the effectiveness of these prevention efforts to ensure that all professionals and community members are being provided the most up to date information about methamphetamine and their destructive nature.

### **Crisis Team Composition**

To adequately meet the needs of families in crisis, Healing Helpers Coalition will include personnel from the following agencies or disciplines. An overview of their responsibilities is discussed.

#### ***Medical and Mental Health Services***

A medical professional who has been trained in diagnosing and treating children exposed to neglect and abuse, possible chemical hazards, and trauma should be a member of the multidisciplinary team. This health care professional should be trained to diagnose and treat children for methamphetamine exposure as well as exposure to the toxic reagents used in the production of methamphetamine. The professional should be trained to address the complex behavioral and emotional problems experienced by these children (crisis intervention and referrals for therapeutic services) and may include counselors, psychologists, clinical social workers, or other mental health professionals. This professional must be available to coordinate efforts to educate other professionals and the community about the long and short term effects of methamphetamine use and abuse upon the health of the child.

#### ***Child Protective Service (CPS)***

This professional must be thoroughly knowledgeable of the dangers inherent to this lifestyle (parents who are illegally manufacturing or abusing drugs are suspected of child endangerment) and their determination of the course of action during a child welfare investigation, including removal and placement in a foster setting. This professional must be available to coordinate efforts to educate other professionals and the community about the requirements for protecting the child from the effects of methamphetamine use/abuse and production.

## ***Law Enforcement***

Law enforcement includes officers (particularly Narcotics) from a variety of agencies including regional drug task forces, county sheriff's offices, local police departments, and the various Departments of Public Safety (DPS)/Police. This professional must be knowledgeable and skilled in the law enforcement responsibilities for personnel who find children living at illegal drug manufacturing sites or other volatile drug environments and appropriate actions needed to ensure the immediate safety of the children present, ensure that children are placed in a safe environment with a responsible caretaker (not relatives with similar substance abuse problems), the relationship with CPS at the local level, investigation of criminal activities, the filing of child endangerment charges against the adults involved, and information needed to secure a conviction by prosecutors. This professional must be available to coordinate efforts to educate other professionals and the community about legislation against methamphetamine use and abuse and criminal investigations of allegations against people who are alleged of the violation.

## ***Education***

Educators (teachers, staff and administrators) are responsible for promoting information about the dangers of methamphetamine to students and parents. Raising the awareness of this population to the dangers of methamphetamine will include providing information about the effects of methamphetamine, signs of use/abuse, available resources for treatment and the importance of abstaining from use of methamphetamine and other addictive substances.

## ***Prosecution***

Professionals (criminal prosecutors) responsible for the filing and supporting charges of child endangerment, and the short and long-term interests of the child, reviewing evidence, making the appropriate charges for methamphetamine related violations, and filing of child endangerment charges against the appropriate parties, the prosecutor strengthens the coalition's efforts to achieve favorable child protection outcomes. Communication between CPS workers, probation officers, health care personnel, police officers, and prosecutors should continue throughout the period of prosecution. Communication between the criminal and/or family law courts is crucial to avoid creating conflicts or jeopardizing either case outcome. In cases in which one parent or caregiver is not charged with endangerment but lesser charges are filed, the prosecutor can play an important role in safeguarding the child's welfare by influencing the terms of probation. These terms often include drug treatment, parenting classes, and other rehabilitative measures such as parent-child counseling to help the parent change his or her lifestyle and focus on the child's welfare. Compliance with all terms of family reunification care plans or other family court orders also should be included in probation terms. This professional must be available to coordinate efforts to educate other professionals about the legal obligations of the individual and the community and the

long and short term implications for the legal consequences raised by the use/abuse or exposure to methamphetamine use where a child is concerned.

### ***Researchers***

Professionals (researchers) responsible for the coordination of efforts to assess the effectiveness of the established prevention programs. coalition members will adopt measures based upon recommendations from the research and evaluation professionals. Program evaluation will examine process, output and outcome measures. Data will be collected by the partner agencies and delivered to the researchers for analysis and report preparation. The researchers are also responsible for the security of the data, adherence to all rules and regulations pertaining to confidentiality, treatment of study subjects.

### **SPECIAL THANKS**

**Special thanks to Bart Craytor, J.D., Donald Smith, Ph.D., Sharon Walker, R.N., Ph.D. and Generations Center for the valuable assistance in helping to formulate our public position.**

**Adopted 2005**

**Re-adopted with changes by the Board, by unanimous vote, December 21, 2007.**

**Updated: August 1, 2008**