

THE EVOLUTION OF AN AGENCY - PACT

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Parents and Children Together (PACT) grew out of a community's concern for its children and their protection. It was an idea born out of need and a genuine commitment to prevent child abuse in Morgan County. When a community, on its own, decides that the time is right for a new idea, a new approach, then nothing can stop its development and growth.

Like every other community, Morgan County efforts on behalf of children had been historically directed toward treatment of child abuse, investigation, casework, counselling, and foster care. However, in 1978 a new idea emerged that would change the course of one community's answer to the child abuse problem.

Several women met together in 1978, just to discuss the problem of abuse and to see what could possibly be done to change the course of children's lives. This group was not an outgrowth of any organization. It had no identity or past, for it was just a group of individuals who had shown interest in child abuse. That was their only commonality.

In that room that day, sitting in a circle, these people made the determination that the only way to stop child abuse was to prevent its happening. That's not an innovative idea today, but in 1978, it was an entirely new approach. Other

people around the nation were coming to the same conclusion, but each group seemed to develop this new approach on its own. The time was right for an entirely new course of action, and PACT sprang from this beginning.

This group of women came up with many new approaches to the child abuse problem: Parenting Classes, Emergency Day Care, PreNatal Classes, Newborn Problems and a full range of in-school educational programs for children. All of these possible ideas were discussed in the 1978 meeting; however, the group was somewhat tentative due to a lack of funding.

One participant presented to the group a copy of a planning project she had written for a class at the University of Alabama. This project outlined the planning steps necessary to implement a Parenting Education Class. This seemed to be a written blueprint along which the group could proceed.

As the group continued to discuss just what program would be implemented first, one of the eight stated emphatically, "We can do the all." She believed strongly that child abuse prevention required a broad base of programs and was willing to make a personal commitment to the effort. This volunteer, Gail Hurst, signed a personal note at the bank for \$1,000.00 to get the program started. PACT repaid Gail when revenue sharing monies were received; however, when she stepped out in faith with this loan, she set the standard for the future of PACT. This level of commitment has become a trademark of the organization.

This group of charter members targeted key people in the community whom they felt could give PACT a broad base of community support. These included the District Attorney, District Judge, Publisher of The Decatur Daily, Superintendent of Education, owner of WMSL radio station, Decatur Junior Service League, Decatur Charity League and a bank President. These founders reached out into the community and sold the need for such a program to the people who could make a difference.

The Board was formed and included most of the people previously named. Barrett Shelton, Sr., Publisher of The Decatur Daily helped to secure revenue sharing monies. Mike Moebes, DA, helped incorporate PACT. In the by-laws, Decatur Junior Service League and Decatur Charity League were given their places on the board, and the presidency rotated between the two clubs. This insured support from these large groups who would provide the necessary manpower for PACT programs.

The programs began quickly and efficiently as PACT had been organized.

1. Newborn Program - Decatur Charity League volunteers called on every new mother in the hospital with child development information. They also taught classes in the hospital for new mother.
2. Parenting Classes - Decatur Charity League began to teach a PACT - developed parenting curriculum to high-risk parents referred by DPS.
3. Emergency Day Care - PACT earmarked funds to provide

emergency day care for children in high-risk situations. Children are referred by DPS and were in serious protective service families.

4. "Little Kids Bug Me" - A four hour curriculum was taught to all eighth graders on sibling problems, parent-child relationships, adolescent pregnancy prevention, and child abuse and neglect.
5. PreNatal and Continuing Child Care Classes - Taught by RN volunteers, this PACT - developed program prepared expectant parents for labor, delivery, and early parenting.
6. Parent-Sharing Groups - These groups were led by qualified professionals to deal with such subjects as Single-Parenting and Parenting Teenagers.

All of these⁶ programs began within a year and were all taught by PACT volunteers. The community responded with tremendous support and interest. PACT received an Appalachian Regional Commission grant, State of Alabama Perinatal funds, and became a United Way agency. PACT had truly come into its own as a viable force for children in Morgan County.

As a part of PACT's responsibilities under the ARC grant, the organization reached out to the twelve North Alabama counties and helped many of them develop community programs to prevent child abuse. PACT helped organize NAPACT, North Alabama Parents and Children Together, a coalition of northern Alabama counties whose one goal was

child abuse prevention.

Over the last four years, PACT has continued to develop new programs and implement them in Morgan County.

1. "It's Your Problem" - A three hour fifth grade curriculum taught to students in Morgan County schools. This program deals with peer pressure, making decisions, and solving problems. (1981)
2. Parents Anonymous - The old parent-sharing groups evolved into Parents Anonymous which is a self help group experience for parents who feel they need help with the parenting experience. (1982-84)
3. "Better Safe Than Sorry" - This two hour program for third graders is designed to prevent sexual abuse. Utilizing a puppet show, this program really impacts kids in a positive way to promote this necessary lesson. (1983)
4. "I'm In Charge" - This five session curriculum for parents and children is aimed at children in self-care on "Latchkey" children. It covers skills and knowledge necessary to protect children who are staying alone. (1984)
5. Babysitting Course - This four session curriculum is taught to children who want to be PACT certified baby-sitters. Basic child care skills, development, first aid, and general babysitting skills are taught.
6. "What Tadoo" - This program is designed to teach

kindergarten children basic safety skills including stranger-danger, and good-bad touch. It uses a video "What Tadoo" and discussion led by a PACT volunteer.

This broad range of programs, all designed to prevent child abuse and neglect, is delivered by PACT trained volunteers. A reservoir of over 200 volunteers participate in this continuum of programs, most of which were developed by the organization.

PACT is a true "grass-roots" effort. The need was defined by the community. The response was determined by the community. The work is done by the community. The great success of this program has been due to the fact that PACT has repeatedly given Morgan County what it wants and needs, and it has delivered the programs with quality and effectiveness.

There is no doubt that any other community who makes a similar commitment can achieve this same success.