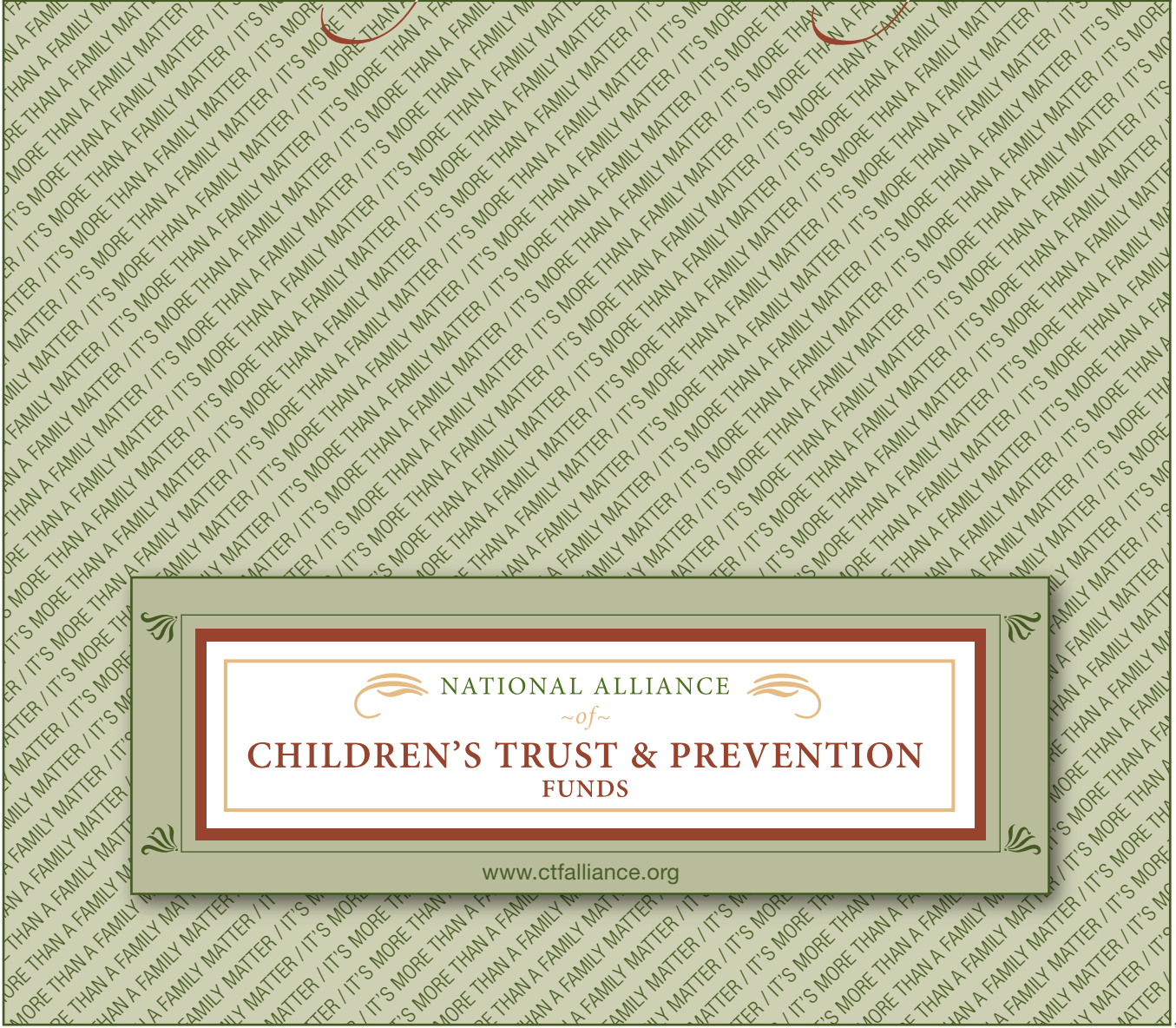


EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Preventing Child Neglect

IT'S MORE THAN A FAMILY MATTER




  
 NATIONAL ALLIANCE
   
*~of~*
  
**CHILDREN'S TRUST & PREVENTION**
  
**FUNDS**
  
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# Preventing Child Neglect

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NATIONAL ALLIANCE

~of~

CHILDREN'S TRUST & PREVENTION  
FUNDS



[www.ctfalliance.org](http://www.ctfalliance.org)

The **National Alliance of Children's Trust and Prevention Funds** (Alliance) holds the unique position of serving as the membership organization for state children's trust and prevention funds. Children's trust and prevention funds form the backbone of our nation's infrastructure to support children and their families. The Alliance, with funding from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, is working to increase attention on and knowledge about strategies that help reduce the likelihood that child neglect will occur.

We know that all children benefit from strong families and safe communities where their needs are met. Most children are growing up with these supports. Unfortunately, many are not. Even loving, nurturing parents may have difficulties meeting their children's

needs. Some communities face challenges in providing an environment that promotes positive outcomes for their children. When children's needs are neglected, their growth and development can be affected, with life-long costs to them and to all of us.

Child neglect is the most pervasive area of child maltreatment and is responsible for the majority of foster care placements for children. The impact on a child's physical and emotional development is serious and significant and there are many challenges in preventing it from occurring. The issues related to child neglect are broader than those relating only to individual families. There are protections that need to be in place in communities and throughout our country before we are likely to see much-needed positive changes in this issue.



There is a thin line between parental neglect of children and societal neglect of families.

Teresa Rafael, Executive Director,  
NATIONAL ALLIANCE of CHILDREN'S TRUST & PREVENTION FUNDS



NATIONAL ALLIANCE of CHILDREN'S TRUST & PREVENTION FUNDS

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# Preventing Child Neglect

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Child neglect<sup>1</sup> is an act of omission and the most prevalent type of child maltreatment. The limited understanding of the complexities associated with its incidence, prevalence and devastating impacts are illusive in large part due to its “hidden” nature. Relationships between neglect and poverty, substance abuse, mental illness, interpersonal violence, and histories of trauma are not well understood. Thus, the base of evidence is limited and uneven. The Key Informant Interview Protocol, one aspect of the child neglect prevention initiative, is intended to generate and disseminate expert knowledge, develop a conceptual framework and support effective practice implementation.

The Key Informant Interview Protocol is a qualitative research method in which the researcher conducts in-depth interviews on a specific topic in which knowledgeable and/or experienced participants can provide significant contributions to the investigative inquiry. A structured or semi-structured questionnaire is administered one-on-one (both in-person and telephone interviews are acceptable techniques) to selected informants that allows the researcher to seek insights, ask follow-up questions, explore different points made during the course of conversation, and identify distinctions in perspectives.

In this research, from November 2012 through January 2013, Alliance Senior Consultant Caren Kaplan, MSW, conducted 22 key informant (KI) interviews in accordance with the key

informant method. These 22 individuals with varied expertise, experiences and perspectives about child neglect and its prevention each voluntarily participated in individual hour-long telephone interviews. The overarching framework of the interview was anchored in the socio-ecological model and respondents were asked questions in which their responses addressed each level of this model – child, parents/family, neighborhood/community and society.

More specifically, the interview focused on the following elements:

- ✦ Protective and Risk Factors at each of the four levels of the Socio-Ecological Model
- ✦ What is working well at the family, community, system and policy levels to prevent neglect
- ✦ What efforts are needed to be made to make significant progress on preventing neglect
- ✦ Identification of the role and contributions to be made by the Alliance
- ✦ Identification of the roles and contributions to be made by the State Children’s Trust Funds.

In addition to interviewing the key informants, the researcher gathered information and reactions from the Alliance National Parent Partnership Council Members at the initial stages of data collection.

Analysis of the KI interviews was performed using a basic pragmatic thematic analysis approach where themes were

<sup>1</sup> Child Neglect is a failure to meet children’s basic needs – whether the failure is the responsibility of parents, communities, or society – and this void places children in harm’s way.

identified and categorized and summarized from the data. Interviews were also re-read in full to extract quotes that reflected key themes. Relevant literature and research findings are provided where appropriate to validate and/or expand upon the results of the key informant interviews.

Poverty was the dominant risk factor identified by KIs and a prevalent topic of discussion. Twenty of the 22 KIs used the word “poverty” during the course of their interview. This issue, also referred to by such phrases as “economic hardship,” “insufficient resources” and “deprivation of basic needs,” was the only risk factor identified by the KIs in each of the four levels of the socio-ecological model. Several KIs commented that other countries (e.g., United Kingdom, Denmark, New Zealand, and the Netherlands) have been able to reduce child poverty and support families in meaningful ways.

Other frequently identified risk factors of child neglect were: history of trauma; maternal depression/mental health; substance abuse; and devaluing vulnerable families (including families of color) and minimizing the challenges associated with raising children. The most frequently identified protective



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**This issue, also referred to by such phrases as “economic hardship,” “insufficient resources” and “deprivation of basic needs,” was the only risk factor identified by the KIs in each of the four levels of the socio-ecological model.**

factors of child neglect were: understanding of and focus on brain architecture; universal early childhood education and development; development of standards of adequate parent care/parenting behaviors; and resources to meet families’ needs.



### **Protective and Risk Factors at the Child Level**

Protective Factors at the Child Level identified by the key informants included social and emotional competence of child; “easy child” temperament; willingness to accept nurturance; capacity and willingness to attach to the parent and make social connections; resilience/stubborn will to survive; and regular involvement in multiple contexts – day care, pediatrician visits and involvement with other caregivers.

Risk Factors at the Child Level include unmet basic needs, physical or mental health disabilities, difficult temperament or temperamental mismatch between child and caregiver, special needs, chronic health problems, behavioral problems, developmental demands, poor or challenging attachment, normal child behaviors that parents find irritating such as crying, tantrums, difficulty toilet training, young child, many children and children that are closely spaced together.

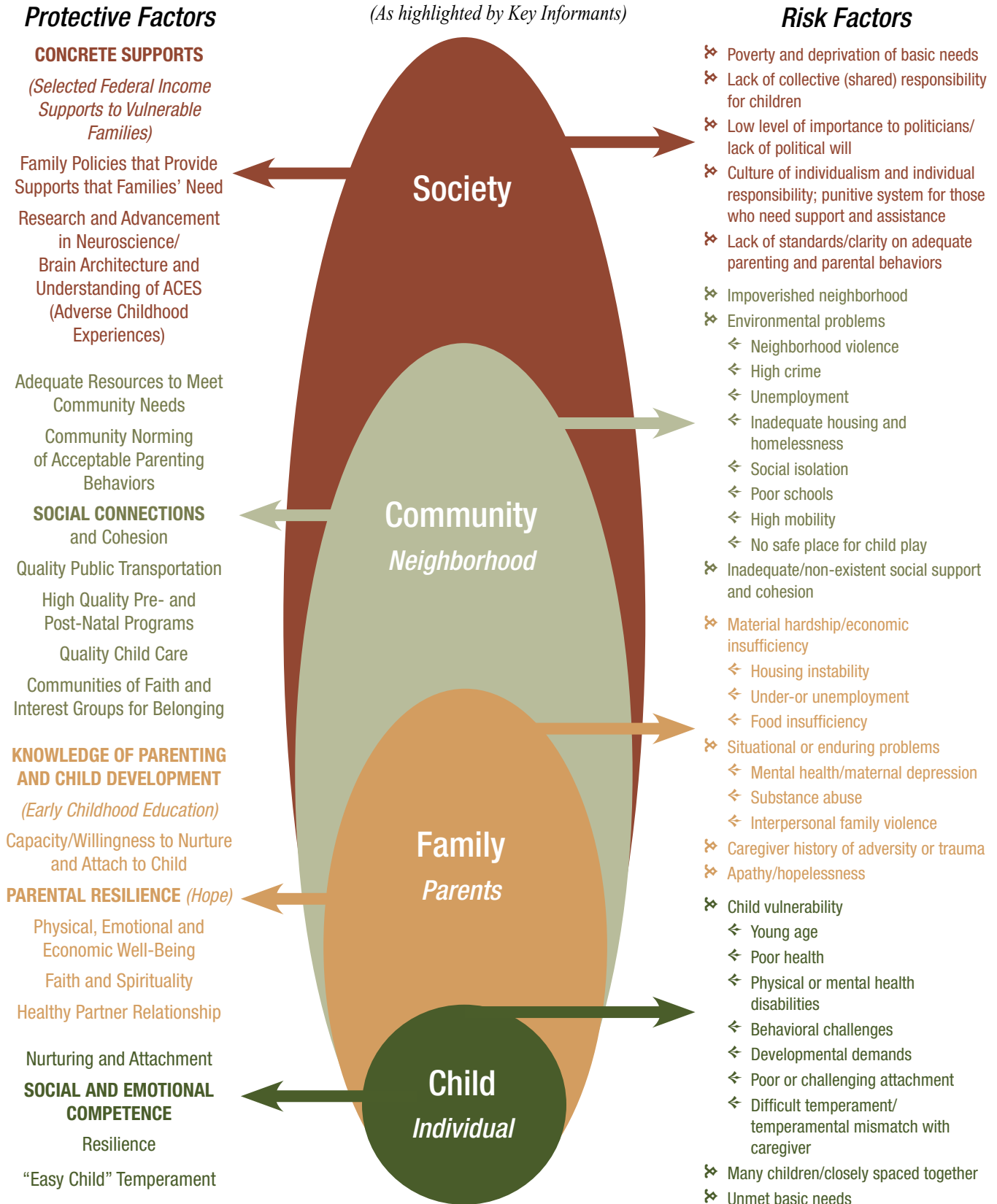


### **Protective and Risk Factors at the Parents/Family Level**

Protective Factors at the Parent/Family level identified by the KIs include knowledge of parenting and child development; capacity and willingness to nurture and attach to the child; resilience; social connections and social supports; faith community and spirituality; satisfactory employment; adequate housing; sufficient education; physical well-being and health

# Understanding Neglect within an Ecological System and the Role of Protective and Risk Factors

(As highlighted by Key Informants)



care; involvement of other caregivers; and healthy partner relationship.

Risk Factors associated at the Parent/Family level that were identified by KIs include economic insecurity, housing instability, food insufficiency, under-employment or unemployment, inadequate social supports and/or social isolation, single parenthood, large-sized family; substance abuse; mental health problems/maternal depression; untreated and/or chronic physical health issues, interpersonal violence; and parental history of trauma or adversity.

### Protective and Risk Factors at the Neighborhood/Community Level

Protective Factors at the Neighborhood/Community level that were identified by the Key Informants include adequate resources to meet the community's needs (i.e., concrete supports), social connections and cohesion; cross discipline and systems' connections to broaden our understanding and knowledge and better enable us to address community challenges; caring communities; quality public transportation and housing stock; high quality pre-natal and post-natal programs; and communities of faith/interest groups for belonging.

Risk Factors at the Neighborhood/Community level identified by KIs address an array of environmental challenges – neighborhood violence, high crime, high mobility, poor schools; inadequate public transportation; unemployment; homelessness and sub-standard housing; social isolation and the lack of shared responsibility for children; and no safe or acceptable place for children to play and/or community members to congregate.

### Protective and Risk Factors at the Society Level

Protective Factors at the Society level that were identified by the KIs include selected federal income supports such as Earned Income Tax Credits, Food Stamps, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, FUP Housing Vouchers; Employer related benefits such as family and medical leave; paid parental leave following the birth of a child and the research and advancement in neuroscience and the brain architecture.

Risk Factors at the Society level that were identified by the KIs are poverty and the deprivation of basic needs, the lack of collective responsibility, absence of support for families in distress; relative unimportance to political leaders; lack of political will; current norms that support/tolerate inadequate parenting behavior; culture of individualism and individual responsibility; provision of support is punitive and stigmatizing; lack of public knowledge about brain research; and family policies that inadequately provide the supports that families need.

### What Works and What Can We Do Now

In terms of possible strategies and prospective solutions to inhibiting or preventing child neglect, three adjectives were used in abundance – “quality,” “universal” and “early.” The presence of resources does not meet the need as long as the resources provided are of poor quality. Universal availability enables all to benefit and eliminates the division between the have and have-nots. Research supports prevention efforts initiated at birth – with newborns.



In terms of possible strategies and prospective solutions to inhibiting or preventing child neglect, three adjectives were used (by KIs) in abundance – “quality,” “universal” and “early.”

A recurrent theme was the need to change social norms – both in terms of the assuring that families raising children are well supported as well as limiting the tolerance and acceptance of inadequate parenting styles and behaviors that harm children. Individuals suggested that we embrace strategies, projects or approaches that are effective, and do more of them. Included in this list are: Home Visiting – universal and targeted; Family Connections; Project Safe Care; Triple P – Positive Parenting Program; Strengthening Families Initiative; Nurturing Parent Program; Early Head Start; Incredible Years and Circle of Parents. In addition, several interviewees made the case for joining forces where the target population is the same or overlapping. For example, increased involvement in effective treatments for substance abuse, interpersonal violence and/or mental health conditions is likely to positively impact the well-being of families in these treatment populations who are experiencing child neglect. In addition to investment in comorbid conditions, respondents identified less obvious endeavors to “join” in order to prevent child neglect: Ounce of Prevention; Comprehensive Community Change Initiatives; Half in Ten; Differential Response Systems (child welfare); Promise Neighborhoods (DOE); Choice Neighborhoods (HUD); Invest in Children (Cuyahoga County, OH); Project Gain (Milwaukee, WI); and Help Me Grow.

In identifying specific opportunities at the national (Alliance); state (Trust Funds); and local (CTF funded entities) levels, KIs repeatedly mentioned the role of “convener” – to increase

public awareness and understanding of child neglect and its prevention (using ACES and brain research); to build consensus; and to determine, plan and take selected actions.



### Our Future Work in Preventing Child Neglect

In confronting the issue of child neglect prevention, there is a need to embrace a spirit of risk taking and innovation. Some unique possibilities that were mentioned by KIs are – establishing venues for universal respite – 24/7 locations where children/youth can go to be safe as well as a venue where parents can drop off their child when they need a breather; universal screening for maternal depression postnatally; standard screening by pediatricians to assess family vulnerabilities (SEEK model); creating new narratives and sharing the stories of success; arranging for ‘power’ leaders to experience impoverished environments; developing standards of acceptable parental care and behaviors; creating a website where, with the use of zip codes, caregivers can identify all free activities available to do with their children (sorted by age group); providing mobile services and bring multi-service delivery



In confronting the issue of child neglect prevention, there is a need to embrace a spirit of risk taking and innovation.

providers to the families; creating an exchange/matching mechanism in which individuals who want to volunteer to help families can be “matched” with families needing assistance; and leveraging the Affordable Care Act provisions (e.g., advocate for



community health needs assessments; engage accountable care organizations; promote health plan coverage of maltreatment-related sequelae and symptomatology).

Despite the comprehensivity that is required in understanding child neglect, in considering prevention strategies, practices, programs and policies, KIs indicated that we will not get very far by attempting to tackle neglect in a global way. The scope of whatever is undertaken must be narrowed so that it is doable, achievable and meaningful and will make a concrete contribution. Wisdom from the KIs indicates that we should build on that which is promising:

- ✦ Support or engage in research that will expand or strengthen the evidence
- ✦ Identify what is working and do more of it – programs and practices that have demonstrated evidence should be spread
- ✦ Join others in their endeavors that serve the same or similar target population but whose central focus may differ from

preventing child abuse and neglect – such as housing, child care, and neighborhood development.

- ✦ Begin a new conversation with anyone who will listen and all who should know and understand child neglect – Given the decreasing size of our youth population, there are tremendous human and economic costs that we can ill afford that are associated with forgoing prevention activities. These children are our future.

No single strategy will work for all families and communities. No single discipline or interest group has the answer. If we draw lines between one another and the systems in which we work, we will miss innumerable opportunities to work holistically and to promote the strengths and capacities of all families and their communities. The findings of the Key Informants make it clear that neglect is more than a family matter and that preventing it will take all of us.

# Preventing Child Neglect

IT'S MORE THAN A FAMILY MATTER

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The individuals listed below were instrumental in an advisory capacity at the initial stage of the key informant interview process. The Alliance National Parent Partnership Council is a major contributor in the work of the National Alliance of Children's Trust & Prevention Funds.

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The Alliance ensures all states have a strong and effective children's trust or prevention fund capable of leading and investing in strategies, policies and best practices that prevent child abuse and neglect before it occurs. The Alliance initiates and engages in national efforts that help state children's trust and prevention funds in strengthening families to prevent child abuse and neglect. This includes promoting and supporting a system of services, laws, practices and attitudes that supports families by enabling them to provide their children with safe, healthy and nurturing childhoods.

For more information, email [info@ctfalliance.org](mailto:info@ctfalliance.org) or visit [www.ctfalliance.org](http://www.ctfalliance.org)

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