

TENDING TO THE SPIRIT: A PROPOSAL FOR HEALING THE HEARTS OF BLACK CHILDREN IN POVERTY

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Abstract: This article describes the public and private responses necessary to develop skills for low-income children to succeed. In order to fully comprehend the challenges facing these children, the article begins by explaining the statistics behind childhood poverty, including that children raised in poverty perform well below average in school and attend schools with significantly less resources. The article then turns to the concept of resiliency, which is a theory that children who develop positive internal strengths can overcome the burdens of poverty. Finally, the article explores how resiliency can be developed in children by examining three methods currently used in communities: Storytelling, the Girl Scouts of America, and the Alabama Blues Program. The article concludes by finding that, in addition to meeting the basic needs of impoverished children, children's spirits can soar through these community programs—by being therapeutic, empowering, imaginative, challenging, and educational—and inspired to overcome the barriers of poverty.

INTRODUCTION

The statistics regarding black children are always mind-boggling and seldom seem to change for the better. Black children have the highest rates of poverty and the lowest levels of general well-being. Access to decent healthcare is a continuing challenge.¹ Black children attend the poorest performing schools and drop-out of school at higher rates than other populations. Further, they are more likely to be born to unwed and underage mothers, and poor housing condi-

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¹ See Children's Defense Fund, 2003 Facts on Child Poverty in America (Oct. 2004), <http://www.childrensdefense.org/familyincome/childpoverty/basicfacts.aspx> (last visited Nov. 10, 2005).

tions reflect the poverty existence. Finally, it is not surprising that far too many black children end up in the foster care system.

As a society, of necessity we must respond to the needs of our children who live in poverty. There are private organizations, such as the Children's Defense Fund and the National Center for Children in Poverty, which advocate on behalf of these children who live in poverty in a land of plenty.² In the state of Alabama, citizens have organized two groups, Alabama Arise and Voices for Alabama's Children, to bring attention to these issues.³ State and federal agencies also struggle to combat these problems but, unfortunately, suffer from a shortage of necessary resources and, at times, resolve. Nevertheless, our public officials and private organizations should continue with renewed resolve to ameliorate the scourge of childhood poverty.

Such a response is necessary to address the basic needs of all children for decent housing, adequate healthcare, sufficient nourishment, and appropriate educational opportunities. For the total well-being of children, however, attention must also be given to their spirits.⁴ Here, we speak of their general sense of who they are as human beings.⁵ How

² See Children's Defense Fund Homepage, <http://www.childrensdefense.org> (last visited Nov. 19, 2005); National Center for Children in Poverty Homepage, <http://www.nccp.org> (last visited Nov. 19, 2005).

³ See Arise Citizens Policy Project Homepage, <http://www.arisecitizens.org> (last visited Nov. 19, 2005); Voices for Alabama's Children Homepage, <http://www.alavoces.org> (last visited Nov. 19, 2005).

⁴ The idea of focusing on the spirit is inspired in part by the family therapy work of Harry J. Aponte. HARRY J. APONTE, *BREAD & SPIRIT: THERAPY WITH THE NEW POOR, DIVERSITY OF RACE, CULTURE, AND VALUES* 1 (1994). In the introduction to his work, Aponte suggests,

[t]his book is about doing therapy with the America's new poor, who are distressed more by the want of spirit than about the want of bread. . . . Behind this philosophy are certain assumptions about poverty in America. Among them is that America's poor may be the richest in the world, certainly in comparison to the third world. However poorly patched together and ridden with holes, our social safety net does provide most people with the basics to sustain life. People certainly suffer deprivation, but I believe that at the core they suffer a poverty of *despair*. This is poverty that robs people of their souls—of meaning, purpose, and hope.

Id.

⁵ See *id.* at 15. Aponte's work focuses on doing therapeutic work with families and communities racked by poverty in a manner that considers the whole person and not just his or her basic needs. He observed the universality of dispirited people:

Poverty attacks people's sense of self and their familial and social network, which I view as their emotional and social immunological defenses. Once poverty breaches these defenses, people are vulnerable to all sorts of personal problems. However, the results of society's failings are not exclusive to the

do they see themselves in their world? Is it clear to them that the vast possibilities of life stretch out before them? Are they uplifted by a strong sense of self-esteem? Do they love themselves and have the capacity to love those around them? Do they possess the hope that generates a belief in a better tomorrow, even in the face of life's certain challenges? And finally, do they have the strength of spirit that infuses ethical character and self-determination into their very beings?

This essay will explore these themes in detail. First, the staggering statistics on childhood poverty will be examined. Then, the article will focus on the concept of resiliency, a theory that promotes the idea that children can overcome the burdens of poverty if given the opportunity to develop positive internal strengths. These inner strengths will only flourish if supported by a community that offers positive models for overcoming the challenges of life. Finally, the article will consider how the spirits of children might be strengthened through their participation in uplifting activities that promote resiliency.

I. OUR CHILDREN IN POVERTY

As Mariam recalled her childhood, she had vague memories of time spent with her parents. Her parents worked constantly just to try to pay the minimum of bills. Unfortunately, often needs would be unmet. She remembered staying at her grandmother's house until late in the night. She remembered never having anyone to help her with her homework or talk to about things in her life. As school became more difficult, her grades began to slip. Mariam kept repeating "if only I had someone to help me." She would often go to school hungry or sick. Her clothes always would look worn down. She did not have many friends. The only children who seemed to want to play with her were the children who constantly stayed in trouble.⁶

Far too often, Mariam's story is replicated for minority children in poverty, who overwhelmingly lag behind in many aspects of life. Society must address key issues to help them navigate these challenges. To un-

poor. While money can hide failure, people in the moneyed classes are also hurting. We are seeing today in America the undermining of society's basic social structures—from the individual to the family to the community. Depression, alcoholism, drug abuse, and violence are not exclusive to the poor; loneliness, divorce, and the alienation of generations from one another are part of everyday life. Pain, stress, and fear belong to everyone.

Id.

⁶ This is a composite story reflecting individuals and family circumstances observed by Baity in the Birmingham, Alabama neighborhood in which she was raised.

derstand children in poverty as a whole, and poverty among minority children as a distinct group, it is important to remember that poverty is multidimensional.⁷ Poverty is “dynamic, complex, institutionally embedded, and a gender- and location-specific phenomenon.”⁸ Poverty also “has important psychological dimensions, such as powerlessness, voicelessness, dependency, shame, and humiliation.”⁹

Quite obviously, children live in poverty because their parents or guardians live in poverty, which means that children are in households whose incomes are below the federal poverty level.¹⁰ Recent statistics indicate that approximately 12 million children live in poverty and 26 million children are poor, defined as households with total income between 100% and 200% of the federal poverty level.¹¹ The Children’s Defense Fund estimates “that the cost of meeting basic needs for a family of three exceeds \$30,000 a year, far surpassing the official poverty level of \$15,219. Work does not guarantee a family income that can meet these needs.”¹² Moreover, poverty impacts all groups in America, but impacts black and Latino children at rates that are above the national average.¹³ “Nearly 1 million Black children live

⁷ DEEPA NARAYAN, VOICES OF THE POOR: CAN ANYONE HEAR US? 4 (2000).

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ David M. Betson & Robert T. Michael, *Why So Many Children Are Poor*, 7 FUTURE OF CHILD. 25, 27 (1997).

Nearly 10% of children would be poor even if children were distributed uniformly among adults. The reasons for that amount of child poverty, then, are directly related to the reasons for adult poverty – the skills and labor supply of workers and the market demands for labor of various types. Another 4.6% of children live in families in which the adults achieve self-sufficiency but do not earn or receive enough income to cover the additional needs of their children. An additional 7.5% of children are poor because they live in families with more children per adult than the average family.

Id. at 31.

¹¹ NAT’L CTR. FOR CHILDREN IN POVERTY, LOW-INCOME CHILDREN IN THE UNITED STATES 1 (2004), *available at* <http://www.nccp.org/media/cpf04-text.pdf>.

¹² CHILDREN’S DEFENSE FUND, DEFINING POVERTY AND WHY IT MATTERS FOR CHILDREN 2 (2005), *available at* <http://www.childrensdefense.org/familyincome/childpoverty/definingpoverty.pdf>.

¹³ NAT’L CTR. FOR CHILDREN IN POVERTY, *supra* note 11, at 2.

While the largest group of children in low-income families is white, black and Latino children are significantly more likely to live in families with low incomes, and they account for the increase in low-income children. 58% of black children—5.8 million—lived in low-income families in 2002 (up 4% from 2001).

in 'extreme poverty' with after-tax income (including food and housing benefits) below *half* the poverty line."¹⁴

Accordingly, over twenty percent of America's children live in households that cannot afford the basic necessities of life. The effects of these circumstances are difficult to ignore. First, significant numbers of children face each day with food insecurity, or without sufficient food to meet daily nutritional requirements.¹⁵ For some children, actual hunger, or going without any food is a fact of life. Food insecurity leads to poor nutrition, which causes disastrous health consequences, including obesity, illnesses, anemia, and learning and behavioral problems.¹⁶ Second, poor children live in inadequate housing and often face outright homelessness. Many poor children frequently settle in one school district or neighborhood, and poor housing stock are located in neighborhoods with social problems such as crime and drugs. Further, many children live in housing with lead-based paint, which when ingested causes serious health consequences and lower intelligent quotient scores. Such housing also is infested with roaches and mold, which can cause higher rates of asthma and infections.¹⁷ Third, poor children receive inadequate and irregular health care, which compounds the problems just discussed. Poor children have limited access to dental care, which again, further adds to health concerns. Moreover,

Id. Similarly, sixty-two percent of Latino children lived in low income families in 2002, up one percent from 2001. *Id.* At the same time, the percentage of white children in poverty has shrunk by two percent so that only twenty-five percent of white children live in poverty. *Id.*

¹⁴ CHILDREN'S DEFENSE FUND, ANALYSIS: NUMBER OF BLACK CHILDREN IN EXTREME POVERTY HITS RECORD HIGH 1 (2003), *available at* http://www.childrensdefense.org/pdf/extreme_poverty.pdf. Further, the Maternal and Child Health Bureau did a study on children in poverty in *Child Health USA 2002*, and found:

While 2000 brought the lowest childhood poverty rate since 1978, childhood poverty continues to exceed that of adults by 71 percent and the elderly by 58 percent. Poverty affects living conditions and access to health care and nutrition, all of which contribute to health status. Very young children and black and Hispanic children were particularly vulnerable. Related children under age 6 had a poverty rate of nearly 17 percent. A much higher proportion of black (30.4 percent) and Hispanic (27.3 percent) related children under age 18 were poor compared to related white children (12.3 percent).

Maternal and Child Health Bureau, U.S. Dep't of Health and Human Services, *Child Health USA 2002*, at 12 (2002), *available at* <ftp://ftp.hrsa.gov/mchb/chusa02.pdf>.

¹⁵ See CHILDREN'S DEFENSE FUND, OVER 13 MILLION CHILDREN FACE FOOD INSECURITY 1 (2005), *available at* <http://www.childrensdefense.org/familyincome/foodinsecurity2005.pdf>.

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ See ARLOC SHERMAN, POVERTY MATTERS: THE COST OF CHILD POVERTY IN AMERICA 22-32 (1997).

babies born in poverty are born too often with low birth weights and attentive, cognitive and developmental problems.¹⁸

Failing to meet the basic needs for survival negatively impacts the general well-being of poor children.¹⁹ Their families are under severe stress, which can cause depression and problems that impact family relationships.²⁰ Poor households tend to have fewer resources for coping, especially those resources necessary for meeting the developmental needs (educational and social) of growing children.²¹ Consequently, school achievement is low because of delayed cognitive development and social and behavioral problems.²² Needless to say, such children have limited job prospects that could lift them out of poverty. Compounding the problem further is the fact that poor teenagers have a much higher pregnancy rate, thus possibly extending the consequences of poverty to the next generation.²³

Another phenomenon that adds to the hardship that places many black children in poverty is single parent homes, especially those headed by black mothers.²⁴ According to the U.S. Census Bureau, children who live in a household with one parent are substantially more likely to have family incomes below the poverty line than are children who live in a household with two parents.²⁵ The majority of children who lived with one parent lived with their mother.²⁶ "The poverty rate for black children living in households headed by single mothers was 47 percent, almost five times the rate for black children living with married parents (at 10 percent)."²⁷ Furthermore, children of unmarried mothers are at a higher risk of having an adverse birth

¹⁸ *Id.*; see also Jeanne Brooks-Gunn & Greg J. Duncan, *The Effects of Poverty on Children*, 7 FUTURE OF CHILD. 55, 58 (1997).

¹⁹ SHERMAN, *supra* note 17, at 32.

²⁰ *Id.* at 27-32.

²¹ *Id.*

²² Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, *supra* note 18, at 61-63.

²³ *Id.* at 63.

²⁴ For example, "[i]n Alabama, female-headed households with children are six times as likely to live in poverty as compared to married couples with children." John R. Hill, *Americans' Poverty More Than Simple Material Want*, MONTGOMERY ADVERTISER, Jan. 11, 2006, at A5.

²⁵ FORUM ON CHILD AND FAMILY STATISTICS, AMERICA'S CHILDREN: KEY NATIONAL INDICATORS OF WELL-BEING 115 (2005), available at <http://www.childstats.ed.gov/americaschildren/pdf/ac2005/appendixa.pdf>.

²⁶ *Id.*

²⁷ KRISTIN ANDERSON MOORE & ZAKIA REDD, CHILDREN IN POVERTY: TRENDS, CONSEQUENCES, AND POLICY OPTIONS 2 (2002), available at <http://www.childtrends.org/Files/PovertyRB.pdf>.

outcome, such as low birth weight or infant mortality.²⁸ Studies show that children are at greater risk for adverse consequences when born to a single mother because the social, emotional, and financial resources available to the family may be more limited.²⁹ Research has showed that with incomes below the poverty level, the family's basic needs such as food, housing, health care, child care, transportation, taxes and other necessities were insufficient.³⁰

Moreover, research has shown that with income below the poverty level, the family's basic needs such as food, housing, health care, child care, transportation taxes and other necessities were unmet.³¹ Such deficits have a significant impact on cognitive development and educational outcome.³² Schools with high proportions of low-income children had higher numbers of inexperienced teachers, fewer computers, less internet access, and larger class sizes than schools with lower proportions of low-income children.³³ Furthermore, children who experience poverty have the most gain from quality schools with sufficient resources.³⁴ Consequently, there is often a major gap in the achievement and testing scores of poor and minority children that places them at a competitive disadvantage in pursuing educational opportunities.³⁵

Poverty among minority children is an issue that is far too often ignored. These children need help in order to succeed in life. Without the help they need, childhood poverty will affect them long term in life. Generally, people believe that it is quite silly to start runners in a track competition 200 yards behind each other. Then why, in the education race of life, do many people feel it is not a problem? Every-

²⁸ *Id.* at 2–3, 5. There are 44 births for every 1000 unmarried women who are in the age cohort of 15 to 44 in 1998. *Id.*

²⁹ *Id.* at 2–3.

³⁰ *Id.* at 5.

³¹ SHERMAN, *supra* note 17, at 22–26.

³² Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, *supra* note 18, at 61–62.

³³ SHERMAN, *supra* note 17, at 28.

³⁴ MOORE & REDD, *supra* note 27, at 5.

³⁵ In Birmingham, Alabama black eighth graders lag behind in reading and math. See Mary Orndorff, *Reading, Math Improve Here in Early Grades in 7th, 8th Grades, Scores Dropped by at Least One Point*, BIRMINGHAM NEWS, Mar. 29, 2005, at 1B. This problem is, in part, due to the distribution of teachers: “34 percent of classes in high-poverty schools are taught by ‘out-of-field’ teachers, compared with 19 percent of classes in low-poverty schools.” Derrick Z. Jackson, *Why School Achievement Isn't Reaching the Poor*, BOSTON GLOBE, Nov. 30, 2005, at 17. The problem of teacher qualifications is compounded by a gross under-funding of low-income schools. *Id.* (stating that California districts spend less on teachers for low-income schools than other schools and that “[b]y the time a student at a high school that is mostly Latin American and Latino graduates, her district will have spent \$173,000 less on her teachers than is spent on teachers in schools with few African-American and Latino students”).

one needs to start at the same line with access to substantially similar resources. The next section will consider methods for empowering those born to circumstances of poverty.

II. TENDING TO THE SPIRIT—THE CASE FOR RESILIENCY

Amos grew up in a small, semi-rural, northern community where his African-American neighborhood was the only one in the municipality. The majority of the residents had fled the segregated South in the 1920s and 1930s. Most were poor, working-class people who at times struggled at the margins of subsistence. The housing was substandard and most had no indoor plumbing. Life within the neighborhood centered around a Baptist church, a local municipal playground, and the interweaving of family drawn together by marriage, blood relationship and a common hope for a better tomorrow. Despite what appeared as perpetual poverty, Amos and his childhood cohorts, surrounded by caring and supportive adults, were encouraged to be the best and achieve whatever success life had to offer.³⁶

In this section, the article will examine how society can do more to tend to the basic physical needs of black children by exploring ways that tend to the spirit of the children and provide hope for the future. While society is tackling the daily challenges caused by poverty, society also must develop the means to uplift the inner spirit of black children and methods to encourage hope in the possibility of a better future. The hypothesis is that children have better outcomes when they are involved in activities where adults care about them, where creativity and imagination awakens the human spirit within, and where collaboration with other children engenders respect for each other and pride in a common endeavor.

At the heart of this inquiry is the idea that not all children who experience the hardships of poverty end up living tragic lives or stay at the margin of society. Often, from their ranks arise the leaders of communities and families, who provide the wherewithal to improve the quality of their lives. Like *Amos*, these success stories are surrounded by loving adults who care about the children and encourage them to succeed in spite of their limited circumstances. These are children with strong spirits who soar and make a difference in the

³⁶ This is a composite story reflecting individuals and family circumstances observed by Professor Hobbs in the Bridgewater, New Jersey neighborhood where he grew up. See generally Steven H. Hobbs, *Ralph Ellison as Oral Storyteller*, 26 OKLA. CITY U. L. REV. 927 (2001) (providing additional reflections from Steven Hobbs).

world. The task is to understand how these children maintain their strong spirits and to consider ways in which more children can find that path to brighter days.

One promising approach is to consider the concept of resiliency. Resiliency is a field of study that attempts to identify why and how individuals, especially children, manage and overcome life's challenges. One simple way to express this idea is as follows: "Resiliency is the ability to spring back from and successfully adapt to adversity. An increasing body of research from the fields of psychology, psychiatry, and sociology is showing that most people—including young people—can bounce back from risks, stress, crises, and trauma and experience life success."³⁷ Fundamentally, this approach acknowledges the idea that children (as well as adults) can be subjected to negative risk factors by which predictions can be made about their quality of life.³⁸ As discussed above, children in poverty face a host of negative risk factors, such as poor health care, limited educational opportunity and poor housing, which impact their quality of life. Resiliency theory studies environmental factors and personal coping strategies that prevent negative outcomes and promote general well-being and "healthy, competent adults."³⁹ To phrase it differently, there are a set of positive factors and strategies that feed and strengthen the human spirit.

The resiliency approach demands an assessment of factors that guard against the consequences of negative risk factors.⁴⁰ Called protective factors, "researchers are beginning to identify important features which confer protection against the poor outcomes usually asso-

³⁷ Resiliency in Action, What Is Resiliency?, <http://www.resiliency.com/htm/whatisresiliency.htm> (last visited Nov. 15, 2005).

³⁸ BONNIE BENARD, FOSTERING RESILIENCY IN KIDS: PROTECTIVE FACTORS IN THE FAMILY, SCHOOL, AND COMMUNITY 2-3 (1991).

³⁹ *Id.* at 2.

⁴⁰ ERIC VANCE & HORACIO SANCHEZ, CREATING A SERVICE SYSTEM THAT BUILDS RESILIENCY 1 (1998), *available at* http://www.dhhs.state.nc.us/mhddsas/childandfamily/technicalassistance/risk_and_resiliency.htm. Much work has been done to identify the negative risk factors associated with poverty. Accordingly, we can identify some of the possible negative outcomes.

These large studies contained hundreds of children with outcomes varying from successful to extremely poor. In looking at the characteristics of children with different outcomes, the researchers have identified consistent risk factors which are often associated with the development of negative outcomes, such as school failure, psychiatric illness, criminal involvement, vocational instability, and poor social relationships later in life.

Id. at 2.

ciated with living with many risk factors.”⁴¹ Various scholars have cataloged an array of protective factors that help children emerge from poverty with soaring spirits. Researchers Dr. Wolin and Professor Wolin, in a study of children from troubled families, present a cogent, descriptive formulation of how resiliency can affect children.

Research shows that children of disturbed or incompetent parents learn to watch out for themselves and grow strong in the process. Young survivors figure out how to locate allies outside the family, find pleasure in fantasy games, or build self-esteem by winning recognition in school. Over time, the capacity to rise above adversity by developing skills such as these expands and ripens into lasting strengths or aspects of the survivor’s self that I call *resiliencies*.⁴²

From this and similar descriptive formulations, researchers can develop identifying traits, which are characteristics or life skill sets that comprise the protective factors possessed or experienced by resilient children.⁴³

The resiliency literature suggests that there are internal and external protective factors. Internal factors focus on an assessment of those traits and characteristics that are within the child. For instance, some children have “social competence,” or the ability to successfully navigate interpersonal relationships at home and in the world.⁴⁴ To

⁴¹ *Id.*

⁴² STEVEN J. WOLIN & SYBIL WOLIN, *THE RESILIENT SELF: HOW SURVIVORS OF TROUBLED FAMILIES RISE ABOVE ADVERSITY* 5 (1994).

⁴³ *Id.* Wolin and Wolin list a set of resiliency factors that are representative descriptions of these concepts.

Insight: The habit of asking the tough questions and giving honest answers.
 INDEPENDENCE: drawing boundaries between yourself and trouble parents; keeping emotional distance while satisfying the demands of your conscience.
 Relationships: intimate and fulfilling ties to other people that balance a mature regard for your own needs with empathy and the capacity to give to someone else.
 Initiative: taking charge of problems; exerting control; a taste for stretching and testing yourself in demanding tasks.
 Creativity: imposing order, beauty, and purpose on the chaos of your troubling experiences and painful feelings.
 HUMOR: finding the comic in the tragic.
 MORALITY: an informed conscience that extends your wish for a good personal life to all of humankind.

Id. at 5–6.

⁴⁴ BENARD, *supra* note 38, at 3. Benard describes the social skills which comprise social competence:

borrow from our grade school report cards, “this child plays well with others.” The resilient child also has developed problem-solving skills that enable the successful and creative management of life’s challenges.⁴⁵ “These skills include the ability to think abstractly, reflectively, and flexibly and to be able to attempt alternate solutions for both cognitive and social problems.”⁴⁶ This is in part what Wolin and Wolin mean when they suggest that resilient children find pleasure in fantasy games because it accesses the imagination where one can play out alternative scenarios to problems.⁴⁷ Another internal factor involves a sense of autonomy whereby a child can establish his or her own identity and has a sense of independence.⁴⁸ Such a child can stand on his or her own two feet and can resist peer pressure.⁴⁹ Finally, a resilient child has a “sense of purpose and future.”⁵⁰ They expect that, even given today’s trials, tomorrow will be better and new opportunities can be pursued.

External protective factors are found in the child’s general surroundings or environment, including the family, the school and the community.⁵¹ First, children need caring and supportive environments.⁵² As Wolin and Wolin suggest, they need allies or mentors who demonstrate a sincere interest in the child’s welfare. Next, children often succeed when those around them have high expectations for them.⁵³ Finally, children’s sense of purpose is enhanced when they have

This commonly identified attribute of resilient children usually includes the qualities of responsiveness, flexibility, empathy and caring, communication skills, a sense of humor, and any other prosocial behavior. Resilient children are considerably more responsive (and can elicit more positive responses from others), more active, and more flexible and adaptable even in infancy. Furthermore, a great number of resilient children have a sense of humor, that is, they have the ability to generate comic relief and find alternative ways of looking at things as well as the ability to laugh at themselves and ridiculous situations. As a result, resilient children—from early childhood on—tend to establish more positive relationships with others, including friendships with their peers.

Id. (citations omitted).

⁴⁵ *Id.* at 3–4.

⁴⁶ *Id.* at 3.

⁴⁷ *Id.* at 4.

⁴⁸ *Id.*

⁴⁹ BENARD, *supra* note 38, at 4.

⁵⁰ *Id.* at 5.

⁵¹ *Id.* at 5–6.

⁵² *See id.* at 5.

⁵³ *Id.* at 11–13. Again, Wolin and Wolin’s formulation above contemplates achieving success in a supportive school environment. *Id.* at 13–14.

the opportunity to participate in the life and work of their family, school, and community.⁵⁴ Everyone has a need to be a part of something bigger than themselves. As Bernard suggests, “[t]he challenge clearly for these social institutions—and especially for the schools—is to engage youth by providing them opportunities to participate in meaningful, valued activities and roles—those involving problem-solving, decision-making, planning, goal-setting, helping others.”⁵⁵ The next section will consider opportunities where youth may be afforded the chance to build a positive future by developing resiliency.

III. IT TAKES A VILLAGE

To succeed at enhancing protective factors in children, there must be a multiple systems approach that utilizes an array of family and community efforts.⁵⁶ This article will consider the attributes of three different avenues of spirit development, including the power of storytelling, the scouting movement, especially for girls, and the excitement of playing blues music.⁵⁷

A. *Tell Me a Story*

Storytelling tends to the spirit in varied and magical ways.⁵⁸ Obviously, a story has more import than just a medium of entertainment; telling and listening to stories also can access emotional and intellectual cores whereby positive change becomes possible.⁵⁹ A story has the

⁵⁴ BENARD, *supra* note 38, at 17.

⁵⁵ *Id.* at 13 (citation omitted).

⁵⁶ See generally APONTE, *supra* note 4; VANCE & SANCHEZ, *supra* note 40.

⁵⁷ Having had some experience with each of them, we have seen the soaring spirits of children who have participated in these activities.

⁵⁸ See ED BRODY ET AL., SPINNING TALES, WEAVING HOPE: STORIES, STORYTELLING AND ACTIVITIES FOR PEACE, JUSTICE AND THE ENVIRONMENT 3 (2002).

⁵⁹ Joseph Sobol et al., *Storytelling, Self, Society: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Storytelling Studies Once upon a Time: An Introduction to the Inaugural Issue*, 1 STORYTELLING, SELF, SOCIETY 1, 3 (2004). Recently, scholars have worked together to formally study the field of storytelling as an academic discipline. In the inaugural edition of a new journal dedicated to scholarly inquiry into storytelling, the following observation was made about the universal and interdisciplinary appeal of story.

Storytelling is a medium in its own right, an artistic process that works with what we may call the technologies of the human mainframe—memory, imagination, emotion, intellect, language, gesture, movement, expression (of face and of body) and, most crucially, relationship in the living moment—person-to-person or person-to-group. It is a medium that has played a fundamental role in the evolution of these human body/mind-technologies; and it

power to heal and to repair broken spirits by touching that part of the soul society tends to keep hidden away.⁶⁰ In many ways, a source of strength is accessed that is grounded in many of the protective factors discussed above through storytelling.⁶¹

First, storytelling enables individuals listening to stories to recover from traumatic events and circumstances. Storytellers have told stories to various groups after tragic events, such as the terror attacks of September 11, the killings at Columbine High School, and the horror of modern warfare.⁶² Researchers have discovered that listening to story can sooth the emotions of the listener and aid in positively re-framing the listener's view of the world changed by the trauma. Called the listening effect, it has been documented that listening to stories permits individuals to access a safe place whereby they can temporarily remove themselves from the sharp points of painful events.⁶³ In this place, they can renew their spirits, accept the loss, sense that they will survive, and begin to plant the seeds for a hopeful future.⁶⁴

is a medium that continues to carry a fundamental charge for developing and for maintaining persons and cultures within their human elements.

Id.

⁶⁰ See THE HEALING HEART-FAMILIES: STORYTELLING TO ENCOURAGE CARING AND HEALTHY FAMILIES, at xiii–xiv (Allison M. Cox & David H. Albert eds., 2003).

⁶¹ Stories are a vehicle through which we can help our young people learn, use our imagination, improve communication skills, promote cultural awareness, develop critical thinking, promote literacy, and even change the world, one story at a time. See RONA LEVENTHAL & KATIE GREEN, INTRODUCTION TO THE SECOND EDITION: TEN REASONS TO TELL STORIES IN THE CLASSROOM, in SPINNING TALES, WEAVING HOPE: STORIES, STORYTELLING AND ACTIVITIES FOR PEACE, JUSTICE AND THE ENVIRONMENT, *supra* note 58, at x–xv.

⁶² See Eve Ensler, *Using the Power of Imagination to Heal a Violent World*, CARDOZO LIFE, Fall 2004, at 40, 40. In her article, Kimberly King recounts various instances where storytellers responded to the 9/11 attacks and other international acts of violence and shared their reflections, such as the following by Madafo Lloyd Wilson:

More than ever, our collective voices must be heard all around the world. When we have the ears of the listeners, let us, with our stories seize this opportunity to instill and encourage the principles of love, hope and respect, as well as, all the other positive values and concepts that advocate for Peace among the peoples of the earth. The nation, yea, the world is in pain . . . with our stories, we can effect the attitudes of our listeners and contribute greatly to the healing process. Such is the power of story.

Kimberly King, *Seeds of Hope: Storytellers Respond to Terror*, STORYTELLING MAGAZINE, Jan.-Feb. 2002, at 36, 36.

⁶³ See Sunwolf, *Grief Tales: The Therapeutic Power of Folktales to Heal Bereavement and Loss*, 4 DIVING IN THE MOON: HONORING STORY, FACILITATING HEALING 36, 37 (2003).

⁶⁴ Brian W. Sturm & William A. Sturm, *Transformation Through Story: Growing Through Enchantment*, 4 DIVING IN THE MOON: HONORING STORY, FACILITATING HEALING 43, 43

Second, personal storytelling has the ability to empower individuals who believe their circumstances have rendered them powerless and invisible. Having the opportunity to tell your story, to share your view of the world, gives the storyteller a voice in a society that seems not to care about those experiences.⁶⁵ Moreover, telling your story to the world is therapeutic because it helps unpack and unload those negative burdens of poverty that are carried close to the soul.⁶⁶

Finally, storytelling has the ability to access the imagination.⁶⁷ When a person listens to a story, he or she has the ability to experience a different reality while still being in the present moment. Storyteller Laura Simms explained that storytelling allows listeners to “dream

(2003). Stories can help people come to new understandings about themselves and offer a medium through which they can positively transform their lives.

Stories are marvelous vehicles for modeling this transformative process within the safety of a controlled world, from the safe distance of another person or character, and with a finite and condensed time frame. Within these boundaries, we feel safe enough to explore the potential similarities between the character and ourselves, between the story and our lives, and to learn how the triumphs and tragedies of the story can empower us.

Id.

⁶⁵ See Danny Gamble, *Introduction* to *VOICES FROM THE CONCRETE BOX*, at iii–viii (Danny Gamble ed., 2000). One example of children who tell their own stories as a way to transform their lives is the “Writing Our Stories” Project sponsored by the Alabama Department of Youth Service and the Alabama Writers’ Forum. This project places writers and writing teachers in secure juvenile corrections facilities to offer writing opportunities to youth who had have trouble with the law. *Id.*

⁶⁶ See generally JAY C. STAILEY, *THINK RATHER OF ZEBRA: DEALING WITH ASPECTS OF POVERTY THROUGH STORY* (1998).

⁶⁷ LEVENTHAL & GREEN, *supra* note 61, at xi. The authors noted,

[s]tories capture us inside a bubble of time and place, transporting us on the breezes of our imagination and the currents of our experience. We each hear the same words, but the meanings we attach to them differ from listener to listener, and from teller to teller. As such, storytelling is a powerful tool for people to process emotions, viewpoints, events, and facts. As in a journey, we return from hearing a story with thoughts and questions and a desire to share those with others.

But the role stories play in developing the imagination is even more important, since without imagination, intellectual growth is limited. To be able to create our own images is essential to development and learning. . . . To make changes in the world—whether social, technological, or ideological—we need to be able to imagine something that doesn’t exist: a life of freedom, a new kind of computer software, a new scientific model. But first children have to know that they have permission to have their own images, and become aware of them. The result is students who are engaged in their learning.

Id.

awake.”⁶⁸ When a person dreams awake, he or she can envision how the heroes of a story solved problems and worked with the other characters who usually provided assistance and advice throughout the story.⁶⁹ A person is able to receive the wisdom and teaching of the story in a more receptive frame of mind.⁷⁰ This is in sharp contrast to being told what to do and how to be by persons in authority and control.

B. *Where Girls Grow Strong*⁷¹

Girl Scouts of the United States is a movement dedicated to helping “girls grow strong” and become resourceful and responsible citizens.⁷² The heart of the program is the values that are conveyed and the emphasis on character development.⁷³ In Girl Scouts, this primarily

⁶⁸ Laura Simms, *Crossing into the Invisible*, 25 PARABOLA 62 (2000), available at <http://www.laurasimms.com/CrossingIntoInvisible.html>.

⁶⁹ See *id.*

⁷⁰ ERICA HELM MEADE, *THE MOON IN THE WELL: WISDOM TALES TO TRANSFORM YOUR LIFE, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY* 9 (2001). Meade explained,

[l]earning to think metaphorically, thematically, and mythologically about one’s own life, and to share this through *talking story* with others is a healing revelation for individuals and groups. . . . Storytelling helps reduce isolation. It strengthens compassion, mirrors self-worth, boosts resiliency, and encourages personal integrity. Ultimately, story helps us toward a loving participation in the human drama. We cannot escape or fully redeem this passion play, for life is dark and light, beautiful and cruel, and we humans are fallible. But a well-storied imagination beholds the richness of the world, cultivates a perspective that is at once sagely and humble, and opts to embrace life.

Id.

⁷¹ “Where Girls Grow Strong” is the theme of the Girls Scouts of the USA. See Girl Scouts of Mile Hi, <http://www.girlscoutsmilehi.org> (last visited Nov. 17, 2005).

⁷² In Alabama, the Tombigbee Girl Scout Council has adopted the following mission statement: “We do dedicate ourselves to the purpose of inspiring girls with the highest ideals of character, conduct, patriotism and service that they shall become happy and resourceful citizens.” Tombigbee Girl Scout Council, *The Girl Scout Mission 1* (on file with author). Certainly other youth movements such as Four-H, Boy Scouts, and the Boys and Girls Club play a prominent role in building resilient youth. In their study of resiliency, Vance and Sanchez found, “[r]ecent evaluations of the big Brother/Big Sister program of mentoring high risk youth show significant improvements in school attendance, decreased entry into substance abuse, and improvements in family relationships, with decreased behavioral problems overall.” VANCE & SANCHEZ, *supra* note 40, at 3 (citation omitted). This article focuses only on the Girl Scouts to explain why these programs are successful.

⁷³ Girl Scouting is a valuable asset to the community because of the promotion of core values and programming that “help girls grow strong.” See Girl Scouts of Mile Hi, *supra* note 71. The Girl Scout program helps girls develop self-potential, learn to relate positively with other people, develop values that aid in positive decision-making, and encourages girls to contribute to the larger society. See GIRL SCOUTS OF THE USA, *SPOTLIGHT ON SUCCESS: A GUIDE FOR COMMUNITY CULTIVATION* 68 (1995).

means teaching the concepts of the Girl Scout Promise and the Girl Scout Law.⁷⁴ These concepts fit neatly into the protective factors of resiliency theory by highlighting a sense of service to God, country and others, and a sense of internal development that promotes self esteem, confidence, and personal honor.

Many of the principles in Girl Scouting are experienced in a myriad of activities that teach life skills, cooperation, cognitive development, teamwork, and exposure to new experiences. The activities are designed to meet the needs of girls, while demonstrating a world of possibilities.⁷⁵ All of this is done while having fun and experiencing a

⁷⁴ See Girl Scouts of the USA, Girl Scout Promise and Law, http://www.girlscouts.org/program/gs_central/promise_law/.

The Girl Scout Promise
On my honor, I will try:
To serve God* and my country
To help people at all times,
And to live by the Girl Scout Law.

The Girl Scout Law
I will do my best to be
honest and fair,
friendly and helpful,
considerate and caring,
courageous and strong, and
responsible for what I say and do,
and to
respect myself and others,
respect authority,
use resources wisely, make the world a better place, and
be a sister to every Girl Scout.

*The word "God" can be interpreted in a number of ways, depending on one's spiritual beliefs. When reciting the Girl Scout Promise, it is okay to replace the word "God" with whatever word your spiritual beliefs dictate.

Id.

⁷⁵ See Girl Scouts of the USA, Who We Are, http://www.girlscouts.org/who_we_are/ (last visited Nov. 17, 2005). The Girl Scouts of the USA are very aware of the current needs of girls as they face a challenging array of issues in an ever more complex society. Valuable research is being conducted on these matters by such organizations as The National Council for Research on Women. See LYNN PHILLIPS, THE NAT'L COUNCIL FOR RESEARCH ON WOMEN, THE GIRLS REPORT: WHAT WE KNOW & NEED TO KNOW ABOUT GROWING UP FEMALE, vii-x (1998). The report noted that organizations designed to meet the needs of girls can help develop resilient young women.

Whether through national organizations . . . or through informal community or personal contacts, individual adults can help girls to feel good about themselves through coaching, mentoring, role modeling, engaging in meaningful conversations with girls, or providing them space and opportunities to explore their experiences with one another. By showing an interest in

feeling of accomplishment. Moreover, decision-making and leadership skills are emphasized with a goal of developing the leaders of tomorrow.⁷⁶

As with any organization, there is need to stay current and contemporary with the ever-changing needs of the clientele, especially in the information age where everything is fast-paced and technologies are changing the way society interacts. This is particularly true for teenage girls because these girls are often computer savvy and have a myriad of options by which to spend their time.⁷⁷ Accordingly, the Girl Scouts of the United States of America, with significant input from girls in this age cohort, developed the Studio2B program. This is an on-line program that allows girls to connect with each other, adult advisors, and the local and national Girl Scout organization.⁷⁸ The program is grounded in the fundamental goals of Girl Scouting and is designed to address the changing times of society.⁷⁹ A visit to the web-

girls, adults can help girls to confront negative stereotypes, expand their senses of possibility, and develop healthy self-concepts.

Id. at 14.

⁷⁶ That such organizations like the Girl Scouts tend to the spirit of girls and help develop protective factors is borne out by research.

With regard to the influence of the Girl Scouts, it is heartening that a majority of Girl Scout alumnae have very favorable ratings regarding their memories of participation in Girl Scouting and its impact on their adult lives, including their ability to work with others and to make friends, moral values, self-confidence, leadership skills, and volunteering. It is important to underscore that participation in organizations such as Girl Scouts nurtures many of the elements that the women identify as key contributors to their success. The Girl Scouts contributes to success among girls and women by offering for personal and leadership development, exposure to role models, and community involvement.

GIRL SCOUTS OF THE USA, *DEFINING SUCCESS: AMERICAN WOMEN, ACHIEVEMENT, AND THE GIRL SCOUTS* 106 (1999).

⁷⁷ See GIRL SCOUTS OF THE USA, *STUDIO 2B GUIDE FOR COUNCILS: PHASE ONE 3* (2003) [hereinafter *STUDIO 2B GUIDE FOR COUNCILS*].

In 2005, there will be 14.8 million girls in the United States between the ages of 11 and 17. These "Echo Boomers" are more diverse than any prior generation. They have more options than ever before for their free time, the ability to connect with anyone in the world at the touch of a keyboard, and a dizzying pace of life that will only become faster.

Id. at 3.

⁷⁸ *Id.*; see also Studio 2B Profile, <http://www.studio2b.org/profile.asp> (last visited Nov. 17, 2005).

⁷⁹ See Studio 2B Profile, *supra* note 78. The stated goals of the Studio2B program are grounded in the fundamental values of Girl Scouting and align with the theories of resiliency. The goals are

site of Studio2B shows a wide variety of activities, interactive features (blogs, chat rooms, e-mails, etc.), and information that speaks to the contemporary interests of girls in this age range.⁸⁰ Moreover, the program is designed to tend to the resilient spirit of girls by providing a place for them to "Become, Belong, Believe, and Build."⁸¹

One local example of the Girl Scouts' power to foster resiliency is the Tombigbee Girl Scout Council in Alabama, which tends to the spirit of girls who live in economically challenged locations. This Girl Scout program is offered to girls who live in public housing complexes in Tuscaloosa, Alabama.⁸² The program is presented at the public housing complexes and offers an activity that would not otherwise be available. A significant portion of the Tombigbee Girl Scout Council's territory also includes parts of the Alabama Black Belt. This rural region, which cuts across the central part of Alabama, has one of the highest levels of poverty in the nation.⁸³ Through a federal grant, the Council is able to offer Girl Scouting to girls who would otherwise be unable to

[to] change the way girls see the world and their place in it. Girls learn the importance of personal responsibility, the value of goal-setting, the spirit of teamwork, and the thrill of accomplishment. The Girl Scout program is based on the Girl Scout Promise and Law and four fundamental goals that encourage girls to: Develop to their full potential. Relate to others with increasing understanding, skill, and respect. Develop a meaningful set of values to guide their actions and to provide for sound decision-making. Contribute to the improvement of society.

Girl Scouts of the USA, Program Goals, <http://www.girlscouts.org/program/> (last visited Nov. 17, 2005).

⁸⁰ See Studio 2B Homepage, <http://www.studio2b.org/> (last visited Nov. 17, 2005). The program offers distinct areas for girls in three different age groups: 11–13, 13–15, and 15–17. STUDIO 2B GUIDE FOR COUNCILS, *supra* note 77, at 9.

⁸¹ See Studio 2B Homepage, *supra* note 80. These concepts are reflective of the resiliency character of the program and are called the Studio2B Mantra.

Become. Celebrate yourself today, and become your best self in the future.

Belong. Be part of a group where you have fun, relate to others with respect, and develop lasting friendships.

Believe. Develop your ideas, and voice what's important to you.

Build. Take action for what you care about, and make a difference.

Studio 2B Profile, <http://www.studio2b.org/profile.asp> (last visited Nov. 17, 2005).

⁸² "[The] Girls Scouts Tombigbee Council has served 75–100 girls for [each of] the last 7 plus years at 3–6 Tuscaloosa Housing Authority sites through grants funded by HUD." Letter from Sheila Perry, Membership Services Dir., Girl Scouts Tombigbee Council to Steven Hobbs, Professor, Univ. of Ala. Sch. of Law (Oct. 28, 2005) (on file with author).

⁸³ See BLACK BELT ACTION COMMISSION, BLACK BELT ACTION COMMISSION OVERVIEW 45 (2004), available at http://www.blackbeltaction.org/BBAC_Overview.pdf (providing an overview of the Black Belt region).

obtain transportation to a scouting program that may be some distance away.⁸⁴ Making Girls Scouting available to these populations has made a significant difference in the lives of the participants.⁸⁵

*C. Hey, Hey, the Blues Is Alright*⁸⁶

The Alabama Blues Project (ABP) was founded in 1995 to promote and preserve Alabama blues music by studying the historical and cultural roots of Alabama blues, by educating the public about the continuing influence of blues music in contemporary culture, and by teaching young people how to appreciate and perform the blues.⁸⁷ The ABP sponsors musical showcases where contemporary blues artists such as Willie King, Debbie Bond, Little Jimmy Reed, Elinor Spencer and many others, perform this uniquely American form of music.⁸⁸ The ABP offers opportunities for children to learn to play the blues through blues artists residency programs at local schools and through a blues camp program offered after school and during the summers.⁸⁹ The blues camps are described as follows:

The center point of the ABP blues camp is the hands-on musical instruction. Students select to study blues guitar, bass guitar, percussion, harmonica or voice with teachers who are also professional musicians. The extended time allows them a more intense musical experience, and increases the learning that takes place. In addition to demonstrations and instruc-

⁸⁴ The grant is entitled *Statewide Initiative to Bring the Girl Scout Program to Girls Living in Alabama's Rural Counties* and is funded by the United States Department of Agriculture. Girl Scout Councils of Alabama Strategic Alliance, *Statewide Initiative to Bring the Girl Scout Program to Girls Living in Alabama's Rural Counties* 1, 12 (June 30, 2005) (on file with the author). The grant application describes the six county area in west Alabama as having a poverty rate between twenty-nine and forty-eight percent and according to the 2000 census, sixty-eight percent of the girls between five and seventeen are African-American (approximately 9,898). *Id.* at 3, 6. In 2004, 982 girls participated in Girl Scouting through this program. *Id.* at 9.

⁸⁵ The Council also offers financial assistance to girls who cannot afford Girl Scouting, covering such expenses as "membership dues, uniforms, books, badges, events, etc." Letter from Sheila Perry, *supra* note 82.

⁸⁶ LITTLE MILTON, *The Blues is Alright*, on *THE BLUES IS ALRIGHT* (Malaco Records 1982).

⁸⁷ See Alabama Blues Project, About Alabama, <http://www.alabamablues.org/state.htm> (last visited Nov. 17, 2005).

⁸⁸ See Alabama Blues Project, About the Project, <http://www.alabamablues.org/abp.htm> (last visited Nov. 17, 2005).

⁸⁹ Alabama Blues Project, About the Alabama Blues Project's Educational Programs, <http://www.alabamablues.org/bluesed.htm> (last visited Nov. 19, 2005).

tion, the after-school blues camp will follow a life-skills curriculum. This part of the program is designed to improve students' social skills and self-esteem.

The after-school camp also provides for in-depth exploration of blues culture and history. During the camp, Alabama blues guest artists such as Willie King, Little Lee, or Jimmy Reed, will work with camp participants. The musician tells his life story as a blues artist and conducts a question and answer session. The day ends with a musical jam session involving musician and students.⁹⁰

Over the course of the summer or the after school blues camp, the students attain the ability to perform as a group and hold public performances at local community centers in and around Tuscaloosa, Alabama. Students who have been with the program for a number of years are organized into an advanced band and perform as a unit. One observes that, over time, the students' level of maturity and confidence increases exponentially. The students are able to use their musical skills in high school band programs and as hired church musicians.

The blues camp program recently received the Coming Up Taller Award, the nation's highest recognition for programs that offer after school programs to children. The award symbolizes the concepts of resiliency theory as witnessed by one of the past recipients of the award. "There is no way to fast forward and know how the kids will look back on this, but I have seen the joy in their eyes and have heard it in their voices, and I have watched them take a bow and Come Up Taller."⁹¹ This resiliency sentiment is observable in the students who participate in the ABP blues camp.⁹² Students come from diverse sec-

⁹⁰ Alabama Blues Project, Inc., Organizational Grant Application, Activity Narrative, 29 (Aug. 30, 2004) (on file with author).

⁹¹ President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, Coming Up Taller, <http://www.cominguptaller.org> (last visited Nov. 18, 2005) (quoting Willie Reale of The 52nd Street Project). The Coming Up Taller Award is sponsored by the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities and three national cultural agencies, the National Endowment for the Arts, National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Institute for Museum and Library Services. First Lady Laura Bush, the Honorary Chair of the President's Committee, presented the award to Alabama Blues Project in a special Washington, D.C. ceremony in December 2004. *Id.*

⁹² The Alabama Blues Project is non-profit organization that is funded by a series of grants, including a grant from the Children's Trust Fund of Alabama that is organized to prevent child abuse and neglect. *See* Children's Trust Fund, The History of the Children's Trust Fund, <http://ctf.state.al.us/history.htm> (last visited Nov. 18, 2005). In the 2005 grant request, the section on problems and needs assessment was described as follows.

tions of the community and many come from low-income neighborhoods, public housing or foster care settings.⁹³ As part of the grant funding process, the Alabama Blues Project is required to document the positive outcomes of the music program and life skills curriculum. The students are assessed before entering the Blues Camp and again at the conclusion of the program. Marked differences in self-esteem, confidence in public settings, and positive behavior have been noted.⁹⁴ Receiving the Coming Up Taller Award reflects the assessment of independent program reviewers that the Blues Camp achieves its stated goals of improving the lives of children, especially those who live in poverty. The validation by the National Endowment of the Arts and the National Endowment of the Humanities is testimony of how a program represents the latest research on the value of arts and music programs in the lives of children.⁹⁵

There is increasing concern about the tendency of children from low income families to become involved in drug/gang related activities, become teen parents, or high school drop outs. These and other activities place them at a high risk of long term welfare dependency. 88% of the blues camp participants are from low income families, many from households headed by a single female.

Research also finds that high risk children have a less than effective vocabulary and an inability to provide appropriate personal examples of the experience of basic feelings. They also believe they can hide, manage or change their feelings and have little understanding of cues for recognizing feelings in others. The Blues Camp is specifically concerned with using music, musical instruction and performance to help participants improve their communication skills as well as their anger management and conflict resolution techniques. Group based musical instruction requires the ability to manage anger and to resolve conflicts with others. Effective social skills are essential for group activities such as playing in a 30-piece blues band, as well as for learning to play an instrument or to sing.

The Alabama Blues Project, Children's Trust Fund of Alabama Grant Application 6 (May 25, 2005) (on file with the author).

⁹³ See *id.* The participants come from varied backgrounds. "Around 80% are racial minorities (mostly African American). The program targets at-risk youth from the Tuscaloosa Housing Authority, the United Methodist Children's Home, the Boys and Girls Club of Tuscaloosa, the Tuscaloosa YMCA, and Brewer Porch Children's Center." *Id.* at 8.

⁹⁴ See *id.* at 17.

⁹⁵ The Arts Education Partnership provides substantial references for information on the value of arts and music in children's lives. Arts Education Partnership, AEP Publications, <http://www.aep-arts.org/Publications.htm> (last visited Dec. 17, 2005); see also President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, *supra* note 91.

CONCLUSION—SOCIETY MUST DO THE WORK TO
SAVE OUR CHILDREN

Black children who live in poverty struggle to find ways to participate in the American Dream and to contribute their own rich gifts to America and the world. In this country of liberty and equality, it is easy to assume that all children have the same opportunity to succeed. The great American Dream has been described as a society where one's success is limited only by the extent of one's imagination and effort. As the statistics in Part I suggest, however, this Dream is one too often deferred, if not dried up.⁹⁶ The challenge for all of us who believe in the Dream of America as a land of opportunity is to diligently work to remove the barriers facing our children who live in poverty.

Certainly we must advocate for necessary structural changes in the way basic services are provided to those whose incomes fall around or below the poverty line. First, much needs to be done to ensure the basics of survival. Many children lack sufficient food, safe and decent housing, and access to adequate health care. Second, greater assistance should be provided for the working poor. Our society should commit to providing employment opportunities that pay a living wage and offer such benefits as pensions and health care. Good jobs must be accessible to where workers live or near functioning public transportation systems. Third, our children must have access to strong educational systems that meet the children's specific educational needs and prepare them for a future where jobs will increasingly be grounded in technology.

While we are addressing these basic needs, we also must tend to the spirits of our children. As this article has suggested, resiliency can arm children with the strength of protective factors needed to overcome situations of poverty. Therefore, we are challenged to develop the internal traits that enable children to believe in their own inherent goodness and talents. Furthermore, we want to inspire children to strive toward a future they believe will be better than today's reality, and to exercise their native creativity so that they might envision the bright potential of their own success. The idea of resiliency also calls for us to build stronger community systems that pro-

⁹⁶ LANGSTON HUGHES, DREAM DEFERRED, in *THE COLLECTED POEMS OF LANGSTON HUGHES* 426, 426 (Arnold Rampersand & David Roessel eds., 1994).

vide positive role models and engage children with a sense of civic belonging and responsibility.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ The task of tending to the spirit of black children often seems insurmountable. Fortunately, we have the living example of Professor Ruth-Arlene Howe. She has dedicated her career to improving the quality of children's lives. Professor Howe teaches and demonstrates an ethic of care that focuses on communities with extraordinary social needs. Moreover, by her example, she inspires others, especially her students and those who have been fortunate to be mentored by her, to commit ourselves to the service of children. We are indeed graced to have shared a small portion of her journey and to witness the positive impact on the lives of children who have been entrusted to her care.

