



Post Adoption Resource Center Newsletter

AFSN Has Its First Event in U.P.!

Thanks to Jim Edwards and the Upper Peninsula Children's Museum in Marquette, the Adoptive Family Support Network held its first event for adoptive families in the U.P. this past September. Adoptive families had the opportunity to have the museum to themselves, enjoy dinner there, and network with each other as well as with U.P. KIDS' PARC staff and AFSN staff. That's Katie Page Sander, Adoptive Parent and AFSN staff, Brooke VanProoyen, AFSN Program Manager, Mr. Jim from the U.P. Children's Museum, and Sharon Matulewicz, U.P. KIDS PARC Specialist in the photo taken just before the event.

For more news on support, training, and events, see page four.



Youth, Technology, and Violent Media...by Sharon Matulewicz, PARC Specialist, North Central U.P. Region (Marquette office)

I recently attended the Parenting Awareness Michigan annual conference in Marquette County in which I participated in a sub lecture with speaker, Kristine Paulsen, on the topic of protecting youth from today's violent media overload. While no one in my home is a "gamer", I am often turned away from the idea of video games due to their overly graphic and violent content nature. Aside from video games, all of us can likely agree that we often witness a violence overload daily simply by turning on a television or going to a movie. It is easy to tell ourselves "it's just a game" or "it's just a fictional show", but this lecture greatly opened my eyes to the research regarding violent media and its effects on our overall health and wellbeing. There is research, of which I was not previously aware, and there are findings that simply do not get enough spotlight. Why are these findings not being shouted from the mountain tops? Well, it is quite likely because we get our information from media, and that same media is greatly benefitting by cultivating a culture that buys into violent content mentally, physically, and most importantly, financially.

Today's society relies on our ever-advancing technology. Cellphones were once a luxury. If a youth had one it was to make and receive emergency phone calls. Now, the cellphone is almost a rite of passage (at increasingly younger ages) that grants us entry into a world of knowledge and never-ending media. Logically, it would seem probable that if an individual spends enough time immersed in a world of graphic violence that said individual might find themselves feeling more comfortable with said violence. That fictional world of gaming and/or programming may then create desensitization to real world violence. This is problem enough for an adult who may have the luxury of being less swayed by media suggestion, but what does this breed for today's youth? According to recent research, it breeds an increase in aggression and bullying and a decrease in social and emotional health, learning, academic achievement, and overall physical health. (article continued on next page)

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- Houghton 906 487-9832
- Iron Mt. 906 281-3440
- Marquette 906 281-3420
- Sault 906 281-3276

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Youth, Technology, and Violent Media *(continued from page one)*

A Kaiser Foundation 2010 Survey of Media use conducted on youth ages 8 to 18 found that youth spent an average of 4.5 hours per day in front of a TV, and 3 hours per day in front of computers, video games, and movies (for recreational use, and not including time spent for educational and work purposes). That is a total of 7.5 hours per day spent in front of some type of screen taking in some type of media. This study also surveyed the amount of time youth spent reading in a day. The result? 28 minutes. That is 7.5 hours of technology use versus 28 minutes of reading. In our lives today, this is not unusual. But is it healthy? According to research, it is not. Youth spending long hours in front of screens (be it watching TV, gaming, or surfing the Internet) are at a higher risk for depression. A 2009 Youth Risk Behavior Survey was published in the journal, *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, and reported that teens spending 5 or more hours a day engrossed in gaming or internet use presented a significantly higher risk for sadness, suicidal ideation, and suicide plans. Physically, we may be suffering as well. The University of Buffalo, New York, conducted a study called Couch Potato Kids in which they spent three weeks collecting data on exercise, eating, and TV. This study concluded that TV use increases our intake of high-density food (binge eating while watching TV? Well I know I am sure guilty!). Further, watching TV for an average of 6 hours per day could shorten life expectancy by almost 5 years, and excessive TV can increase the risk of Type 2 Diabetes, Cardiovascular Disease, and All-Cause Mortality.

Alarming results, right? But, I don't want to get too far off the topic of the violent media. Add this factor to the above findings: many adoptive families are caring for children who experienced early childhood trauma. Sadly, with that trauma have often come mental and behavioral diagnoses such as Reactive Attachment Disorder, ADHD, and Oppositional Defiant Disorder. These youth already struggle mentally and emotionally with finding their balanced and healthy normalcy, and in addition to that they are growing up in a culture that may be guilty of force-feeding us violence and aggression. The average American child will have seen 200,000 acts of violence on TV by the age of 18. The American Medical Association, The American Psychological Association, and the American Academy of Pediatrics have all looked extensively at 30 years of research and have all agreed that media violence is a causal factor in the violent behavior exhibited by children today due to the fact that it increases aggressive attitude and behavior. Increased and repeated exposure to media violence has been found to be a stronger influence on aggressive behavior than living in poverty, substance abuse, or coming from an abusive family/background. The American Psychological Association made a statement regarding violent video games in August of 2015 in which they stated scientific research has demonstrated an association between violent video game use and an increase in aggressive behavior, aggressive affect, and aggressive cognitions, and that violent video game use decreases prosocial behavior, empathy, and moral engagement.

So what can we as adults and as parents do to protect today's youth from becoming victims of these findings? First, we need to educate ourselves on the nature of popular media. You may have found yourself at one point in time saying "It's just a game", and assumed that you or your child could differentiate the nature of the game and what is appropriate in real life. But, these youth are often immersing themselves in a fictional world that they find to be a better alternative than navigating their real world. You may have witnessed your child coming home and immediately shutting off real-world mode and entering into fictional world mode, and possibly even staying there for the rest of the evening - be it in front of video games, the computer, or a TV. We as adults are guilty too. We have demanding lives, and sometimes we just need to come home and watch TV, and take in a world we do not have to deal with first hand. In the fictional world, no one bullies us. There are no chores to be done. Schoolwork? Not in this world of Grand Theft Auto. This fictional dimension can almost become a more favorable reality in which the real world then can seem quite dull without the extremes experienced in the media world. Therein lays a vast problem and the potential for youth to start creating the normalcy they have grown accustomed to in their games. Speaking of Grand Theft Auto and educating ourselves on the nature of media, if your child is playing this game, are you aware that your child is playing the role of a drug dealer and the object is to score money for deals? Are you also aware that one of the ways your child can gain money is by soliciting a prostitute, engaging in sexual acts, and then brutally torturing and killing her so that there is no money lost in the transaction? *(Honestly, I could enter into an entirely separate but related issue at this point of violent media and the role that women often play (disposable objects) and the belief and opinion of women that is created as a result. We will have to save that topic for a rainy day, but you can check the resources below for more information.)* In lieu of the most recent school shooting in Oregon, can you even fathom that there is a popular game called School Shooter in which the gamer plays the role of the shooter with the goal of "taking out" their school peers and staff. If the shooter is not successful in evading law enforcement, the game encourages the player to end their own life. How do these games

Youth, Technology, and Violent Media *(continued from page two)*

even exist? They exist, because people keep buying them, and because we keep telling ourselves “it’s just a game”. Or, perhaps because we just do not know what we are buying into, and to what content we are allowing ourselves and our youth to be exposed. So, what do we do about it?

On a larger scale, there are strategies for change being tried and tested. Studies are finding the benefits to decreasing media use. The Harvard Research Center for Media and Child Health has found that with decreased media entertainment there is an increase in youth interaction with parents, and increase in completion of schoolwork, an increase in attention and focus in school, and a decrease in disrespectful and aggressive behaviors. The Stanford University Prevention Research Center has also developed what they call the S.M.A.R.T. curriculum to reduce the negative effects of excessive TV, video, and video game use. The curriculum has been found to reduce children’s TV, video, and video game use, reduce obesity and weight gain, reduce aggression in class and in social settings, and reduce children’s requests for toys advertised on TV. Here in the State of Michigan (Northern Michigan, to be exact), teachers and consultants, inspired by the S.M.A.R.T. curriculum, have developed the Take the Challenge Program that also includes reading, writing, math, and technology activities (this curriculum is aligned with the new Common Core Standards – see link below to learn more, and ask your child’s school if they could utilize it). But, on a smaller scale, what can we do in the interest of our own habits and those of our children? Parents and individuals can follow four steps in addressing media exposure: (1.) Set rules and create a media budget. What media is allowed? Where can it be utilized? How long can it be utilized? (2.) Establish media use areas in family/public areas of the home. If your child is watching a TV program or playing a game in the family room where others are also present, it is less likely someone will not fully know the content of the game. (3.) Talk about media content and eliminate violent programming. (See the G.R.A.M.S. model below). (4.) Teach your children Media Literacy. Talk with your children about the violence and aggression they may be seeing in media and determine their view and feelings about what they see. In determining whether or not a game or program is appropriate for your family, the Iowa University Media Research Center suggests that you cannot rely on the industry ratings to evaluate content. This is especially true for video games. Instead, utilize Kristine Paulsen’s G.R.A.M.S. rule: **G** – Does it **GLORIFY** violence? Are the “good guys” the ones exhibiting the violence? **R** – Does it **REINFORCE** violence? Is there a reward for violence such as points for killing or hurting someone? **A** – **ADD** up total entertainment media. Is it excessive? Should it be limited? Studies show issues from media increasing at 3+ hours of use daily. **M** – Does it **MODEL** violence? Children will often imitate what they have seen in movies, TV, and/or games. This includes cartoon characters. **S** – Does it include **SOCIAL** or **relational** violence? Social bullying involves hurting someone’s reputation or relationships; examples might be spreading rumors, embarrassing someone in public, or cyberbullying.

There is hope! Proponents of the Take the Challenge program have noted that parents are a powerful tool in minimizing the negative effects of violent media on children by monitoring to what and how often children are exposed. What happens at home does matter! Children whose parents are more involved in setting rules and limitations on media use in the home are overall less aggressive and have increased social emotional health. As a parent, you are working dutifully on a daily basis to foster the health and development of your children. Now, we can continue to become more aware of the potential threats of violent media that could be stonewalling those efforts and the overall success of a child’s social and emotional wellbeing. Below are additional links and resources to assist in addressing this trend.

- <http://www.TakeTheChallengeNow.net>
- <https://www.aap.org/en-us/about-the-aap/aap-press-room/Pages/Children-And-Media-Tips-For-Parents.aspx> - Tips for Parents on Youth and Media
- <https://www.aap.org/en-us/about-the-aap/aap-press-room/aap-press-room-media-center/Pages/Media-Kit-Children-and-Media.aspx> - Research and Studies regarding Youth and media.
- <http://feministfrequency.com/2014/06/16/women-as-background-decoration-tropes-vs-women/> - Information regarding the role of Women in violent media
- http://web.stanford.edu/~kcarmel/CC_BehavChange_Course/readings/Robinson_TV_2006.pdf - Effects of the S.M.A.R.T. curriculum

Post Adoption Resource Center Newsletter

News from South Central U.P....by *Nikisha LaPine, PARC Specialist, Iron Mountain office*

Hello Everyone! As a new face to U.P. KIDS, I would like to take a moment to introduce myself. My name is Nikisha LaPine, and I am coming on board as the Post Adoption Specialist and the Visitation Couch (Parenting for Success) for Dickinson, Delta, Menominee, and Iron counties. I hold a Bachelor of Social Work and a minor in Human Behavior from Northern Michigan University. I recently graduated college in May of this year. Upon graduation, I returned to my home town, Vulcan, MI (Dickinson County) to begin my search for a career. I was not exactly sure what field I was interested in, but I know that I love working with children and strongly believe in reunification of families. After several months of searching, I was hired on with U.P. KIDS. I am exceptionally excited to begin my career with U.P. KIDS and help children and families. I feel as though this is a great starting point as a new college graduate, and I am excited to gain all the experience and knowledge I can.



In my spare time, I enjoy spending time with my family, friends and my fiancé. I also enjoy taking photographs of nature, being outdoors, staying active, and going on road trips. I was born and raised in the U.P. and truly love the beauty of the U.P. I enjoy spending time with my pets and taking them along for nature walks. During the summer months, I spend almost all of my time exploring the outdoors, and enjoying the few warm months that we have in the U.P. In the fall, I enjoy going for hikes, taking photos of the beautiful leaves and going hunting. In the winter months, I also enjoy being outside to appreciate the beauty of our exceptional winters. I enjoy snowboarding, snowmobiling, and taking brisk winter walks through the woods. I truly love spending time in the stillness of the

woods. Did I mention, I also love to go fishing? Further, I am actively involved in my church and love volunteering for a variety of activities. I enjoy spending time with my "church family" and all the wonderful children! Lastly, I am passionate to help people in need. Again, I am thoroughly excited to be welcomed aboard with U.P. KIDS and to become part of the U.P. KIDS team. I look forward to beginning my new career and meeting and working with many of you, as well as meeting the many new faces to come!

ASFN (continued from page one)

ASFN services are now available to adoptive parents statewide; this includes free support 24/7 just by calling 855-MICH-P2P or emailing Parent2Parent@afsn.org. U.P. KIDS will be partnering with ASFN to bring you more training and fun events in 2016 than we could do alone. For more info on ASFN, see <http://afsn.org/> For more info on the museum, see <http://www.upchildrensmuseum.com/>

Michigan Heart Gallery did the Lake Superior Circle Tour July through September 2015.

Thank you to all who came out to promote fostering and adopting. Here's Jeannie O'Brien, PARC Specialist in the EUP (Sault office) with her son at the Chippewa County Fair in Kinross. -> ->



November is National Adoption Month!

All of us at U.P. KIDS hope you find the time to celebrate your family this November. We thank you so very much for your commitment to being a safe, permanent, and nurturing/healing family.