Child Advocacy Program  

Professor Elizabeth Bartholet  
Lecturer on Law Jessica Budnitz

ASSIGNMENT PACKET for Session #9  
November 7, 2013

The Serious Subject of Play:  
Creative Ways to Combine Philanthropy, Community, and Corporate Power

Steve Gross  
Chief Playmaker  
The Life is good Kids Foundation  
br Life is good Playmakers

John Jacobs  
Co-founder and Chief Creative Optimist  
The Life is good Company
Session #9  
November 7, 2013  

Assignment  

Speaker Biographies  

Session Description  

Readings:  

Life is Good  

John Jacobs  

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- Smucker, *Life is good Co. to introduce new coffee brand this summer*, Crain’s Cleveland Business, May 1, 2013  
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- *Life is good and Hallmark Announce Strategic Partnership*, Life is good Press Room, Oct. 23, 2012  
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Jessica Budnitz  

The below pieces place Life is good’s philanthropic efforts and relationship with Playmakers into a broader context of corporate philanthropy and social responsibility.  

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• Ken Stern, *Why Don’t Corporations Give to Charity?*, Slate, Aug. 8, 2013 28-30

• Senay Ataselim-Yilmaz, *Is Corporate Philanthropy Dead as We Know It, or Should It Be?*, Huffington Post, Oct. 25, 2013 31-32

**Playmakers**

**Steve Gross**

• *Redefining Playfulness: How it can revolutionize the health, education and well-being of children*, Playmakers.org 33-40

• *Life is Good Playmakers on the Gulf Coast*, Playmakers.org 41-50

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• Nathan A. Fox and Jack P. Shonkoff, *How persistent fear and anxiety can affect young children’s learning, behavior and health*, Bernard van Leer Foundation Early Childhood Matters, June 2011 51-56

Steve Gross, M.S.W., is the Founder and Chief Playmaker of The Life is good Playmakers, a 501(c)(3) public charity. He has devoted his career to the service of our most vulnerable children. A pioneer in utilizing exuberant, joyful play to promote resiliency in children and their caregivers, and a leader in the field of psychological trauma response, Gross is committed to the healthy development of children facing the most challenging circumstances.

The vision of the nonprofit he founded is a world where all children grow up feeling safe, loved and joyful. In order to make this vision a reality, the Life is good Playmakers partners with frontline professionals – such as teachers, social workers and child life specialists – who dedicate their lives to helping children overcome poverty, violence and illness. These Playmakers use the power of play to build healing, life-changing relationships with the children in their care. This foundation of playfulness allows children to engage the world with passion and joy while giving them the courage and creativity to see possibilities and solutions in the face of adversity. To date over 3,500 certified Playmakers have cared for more than 210,000 children throughout the United States and Haiti.

Steve's talents have been called upon to respond to some of the greatest catastrophes of our time, including the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina, earthquakes in Haiti and Japan, and the 2012 Newtown school shooting. At the heart of his work, Steve helps others access their own playfulness so that they can build resilience and bring greater joy, connection, courage and creativity to their work and their lives.

John Jacobs is Co-Founder and Chief Creative Optimist, The Life is good Company. The Boston, MA based lifestyle brand spreads the power of optimism and helps kids in need by donating 10% of its net profits to The Life is good Kids Foundation. Jake, Life is good’s iconic hero with the contagious smile, teaches men, women and kids that optimism is fun, healthy, and empowering.

John created his first poorly spelled and crudely drawn book at the age of five. He’s been writing and drawing ever since, graduating from the University of Massachusetts in 1990 with dual degrees in English and Art. He immediately began designing and selling tee shirts after college and worked as a substitute teacher to supplement his income during Life is good’s infancy.

In 1994, with a combined sum of just $78 in the bank, John and his brother Bert officially launched Life is good. Today, Life is good products are sold by over 3,500
retailers nationwide and on Lifeisgood.com. Bert, John, and The Life is good Company are living proof that “Optimism can take you anywhere.”

Life is good focuses on forging meaningful, emotional connections, and relies heavily on its community of optimists to build its brand. Because Life is good considers kids its ultimate source for inspiration, the company is committed to helping kids in need through its products and through its support of The Life is good Kids Foundation. The company with a positive purpose has raised over $9.5 million for kids in need to date, principally through the annual Life is good Festival, Life is good products and other fundraising efforts.

Bert and John are the youngest of six siblings from Needham, MA. They credit their mother with teaching them to face the bumps in the road with a smile. The Jacobs brothers see simplicity, humility and a sense of humor as the three keys to Life is good’s continued success.

When John is not evolving the brand for future seasons, he enjoys any game under the sun, film, music, and diving into the water to catch things. He lives in his favorite sports town, Boston, with his wife Jessica, their two sons, Oskar and Oliver, and daughter Lucy.
John Jacobs and his brother co-founded the Life is good Company over 20 years ago, selling t-shirts to college students from the back of their van. The business started taking off when Jacobs designed the now iconic “Jake” figure, quickly selling out the Jake t-shirts at a street fair here in Harvard Square. Now, the company is reportedly worth millions.

What makes Life is good unique is its serious commitment to advancing the interests of children. Jacobs and his brother have built the Life is good brand, leveraged that brand for their work on behalf of children, and effectively integrated their business and charitable work. Supporting children is not an after-thought but rather central to the business’s mission. 10% of all Life is good profits go to children’s causes.

Jacobs will share not only his company’s successes but also the challenges involved in creating a business that reflects his values and prioritizes children’s causes. He will further explain his vision for the future and how he hopes Life is good will improve the lives of the next generation of children.

Steve Gross runs Playmakers, the grassroots non-profit organization affiliated with Life is good. The organization works with children impacted by severe poverty, violence, and life threatening illnesses, using play and trauma-informed care to heal and build children’s strength and resilience. Playmakers has supported children domestically and abroad, including children post-Katrina and following the earthquake in Haiti. Playmakers accomplishes its goals by partnering with frontline workers serving children. Steve will provide his insights into the advantages and limitations of running an organization which relies on financial and other support from a company to do its work.
The Responsibility Project web site focuses on stories that explore “what it means to do the right thing”. This article focuses on the journey taken by Life is good including its commitment to help children overcome poverty, violence and illness through the Life is good Kids Foundation.

The Responsibility Project

Article written by: Paul Keegan

In the fall of 1994, Bert Jacobs and his brother John were driving a van up and down the East Coast, selling T-shirts, when they started wondering why bad news is so prevalent in the media – is life really so awful? John pulled out some markers and crayons and drew a cartoon face with a huge smile, sunglasses and beret. When they got home to Boston, they tacked the smiling hipster on the wall of their apartment, along with other artwork they’d created, and invited friends to a party. The Jacobs brothers always threw a big bash when they returned from a road trip, and their guests were always encouraged to express themselves by scribbling on the walls.

The next morning, Bert and John noticed more comments scrawled around the cartoon face than any other drawing – by a large margin. So they decided to call smiley face Jake, the nickname they’d both had since childhood, and put him on a T-shirt. They added the words “Life is good” because that seemed to sum up Jake’s outlook as well as their own. They printed the image on forty-eight shirts and brought them to a street fair in nearby Cambridge. Expectations were not high. Bert was 29, John was 26, and they’d spent the last five and a half years hawking shirts much like this one, sleeping in their van, eating peanut-butter sandwiches and showering when opportunity allowed. Though they always felt a strong responsibility to
convey positive messages on their shirts, they were also trying to run a business. If Jake didn’t sell, he’d be out.

But Jake did sell. By noon, all forty-eight shirts were gone. What startled the Jacobs brothers most was the wide diversity of people who loved the cartoon – punks and preppies, teenagers and grandparents, older married couples and young hipsters. “We’d never seen anything like it,” Bert says.

Today the Jacobs’ company, Life is good, has annual sales of $80 million, all earned without spending a dime on advertising; Jake’s face has become a ubiquitous presence on clothes, coffee mugs and tote bags sold by more than 4,500 retailers nationwide, including over a hundred Genuine Neighborhood Shoppes dedicated solely to the Life is good brand. As the company grew, its founders realized they were creating more than a successful business; they began to see their company as a powerful instrument to counteract the negativity they had talked about in the van during those itinerant days. As Bert puts it, “Our mission is to spread the power of optimism.”

Their first inkling of just how potent the brand was came in 1999, when an 11-year-old girl named Lindsey Beggan, who had been diagnosed with bone cancer, showed up in the local news media wearing a “Life is good” hat. “She said she understood that she might die within a year, but she wore the hat because she never wanted to take another day for granted,” Bert recalls. “She was really the first one to zero in on the depth of the message. After that, we heard hundreds of other stories like that.” Even more inspiring was that Beggan survived, graduated from college and today remains cancer-free.

The next turning point came after 9/11, when employees began to question the company’s entire outlook; maybe life in America wasn’t so good, at least not right then. But a woman in the firm’s shipping department suggested holding fundraisers for families who had lost loved ones in the attack. So they created an American flag T-shirt emblazoned with the words “Life is good” and raised $207,000 in just two months, a significant sum for a company with only $3 million in sales at the time.

Thus began the company’s commitment to charitable causes, which has generated $6.5 million over the last decade. In 2006, the company established its own foundation to help kids overcome life-threatening challenges such as violence, illness and extreme poverty. When Haiti was devastated by an earthquake in 2010, the firm made a long-term commitment to raise money for victims using images like Jake holding a Haitian flag, and later created a play-based program for the country’s affected children. “Optimism has no borders,” Bert says.

The company’s fundraising events reflect its quirky culture. The Life is good Pumpkin Festival was held on Boston Common in 2006 broke the Guinness World Record for the most carved, lit pumpkins in one place at one time. In September, the company hosted an art, music and games
festival on a farm in Canton, Massachusetts, geared toward families and offering an “Instrument Petting Zoo” (which lets kids play with musical instruments) and a display of extreme bicycle stunts. All proceeds will go to the Life is good Kids Foundation.

“The social mission to help kids overcome life-challenging situations is a subcategory of the company’s mission to spread optimism,” says Bert, whose official title is Chief Executive Optimist. “With play therapy for kids facing violence, you’re teaching them the importance of engaging in the world and seeing the glass half-full. I think of it as one organization with both for-profit and non-profit arms.”

The Jacobs brothers have big plans to expand far beyond clothing. They recently signed a deal to market traditional backyard games such as bocce, badminton and croquet (a portion of sales will go to its foundation) and are now eyeing markets for stationery, pet supplies, food and drink, footwear, and entertainment. Both brothers are in demand as motivational speakers and donate their fees.

“We’d like to become a hub of optimism, a place where people can go, in both digital and physical space, to share stories about the power of optimism – how important that change of disposition is,” says Bert. “That’s what this is really about. We’d like to draw all kinds of entertainers and artists and athletes and thinkers, any exceptional people with a voice. Because business by itself is not a turn-on for us. Building community and improving education is.”

The Jacobs brothers grew up as the two youngest of six children in Needham, Massachusetts; they credit their mother with instilling in them sense of responsibility to make a positive social contribution. “Everybody wants to be proud of their life,” Bert says. “At some point, we’ll get old and gray and we’ll want to believe we made a difference, that we did everything we could. Fortunately for us, it’s woven into our career.”

The arc of that remarkable career, going back to the day 17 years ago when they were riding around in a van, looking for inspiration, is proof enough of the power of positive thinking, says Bert. “Optimism can take you anywhere.”
Bert Jacobs, the founder of Life Is Good, explains how he stumbled on a winning business strategy. (No, he wasn't playing Ultimate Frisbee.)

How has Bert Jacobs managed to build his apparel company, Life Is Good, into a $100 million business and raise more than $9 million for children's charities? It's all about optimism, said Jacobs, to an audience of like-minded entrepreneurs at the Inc.500|5000 conference today.

In college, Jacobs began designing t-shirts with his brother, John. The two made a meager living selling shirts as they traveled up and down the East coast in a van. Then, after a road trip in 1994, John drew the image that would wind up displayed ubiquitously on their shirts: a smiling face named Jake. Jake symbolized an optimistic antidote to the steady stream of negative messages in the media, Jacobs said—just what the brothers sought to bake into the company. They sold their first 48 Jake shirts in 45 minutes in downtown Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Early on, the brothers welcomed submissions for designs that illustrated an optimistic approach to life. Jake was shown eating ice cream or going on a bike ride. "Our customers took ownership from the very beginning," Jacobs said.

But the Life Is Good message soon went beyond t-shirts. After learning that a young cancer patient, Lindsey Beggan, was a fan of the company's designs, Jacobs was inspired by her refusal to adopt a negative outlook. So in 2000, he and his brother organized a pumpkin festival to raise money for children's charities. The festival became an annual event, and in 2006, attendees set a Guinness world record for the most lit jack o' lanterns at one time. At that event, Life Is Good raised more than $500,000.

Today, 10% of Life Is Good's profits go to charity, and the company has begun facilitating small fundraising events, by encouraging others to incorporate charity into, for instance, birthday parties. Such efforts have raised more than $5,000 so far.

The social mission at Life Is Good's core doesn't take away from its efforts to make money. The company recently signed a deal to license its designs to the world's largest greeting card company. Jacobs didn't name it, but presumably he means Hallmark. He's even talking about a Life Is Good car, to spread the optimism message beyond apparel.

"I believe that capitalism is the most powerful tool in the world for positive social change," Jacobs said.

April Joyner is a reporter for Inc., Handbook of the American Entrepreneur
Smucker, Life is good Co. to introduce new coffee brand this summer

CRAIN’S CLEVELAND BUSINESS, May 1, 2013

J.M. Smucker Co. (NYSE: SJM) and Life is good Co., a clothing brand that donates 10% of its net profits to The Life is good Kids Foundation, are collaborating to bring a new line of Life is good coffee to retailers in North America.

Smucker said Life is good coffee will be available beginning in late summer. The product line will include Light Hearted, a light roast ground coffee; Happy Medium, a medium roast ground coffee; Dark & Daring, a dark roast ground coffee; S'more to Love, a s'more flavored ground coffee; and Banana Bread Bliss, a banana bread flavored ground coffee.

Smucker said all the products are UTZ Certified, a program promoting sustainable farming.

“Through our new line of coffee with Smucker's, we'll be able to spread the power of optimism and help kids in need,” said Bert Jacobs, chief executive optimist at Life is good.

Mark Smucker, president of U.S. Retail Coffee at the food producer, said the new brand will “undoubtedly resonate with our consumers as it supports our sustainability initiatives as our first line of 100% certified coffee.”
Life is good® and Hallmark Announce Strategic Partnership

10/23/2012

The iconic brands will join forces to spread the power of optimism and help kids in need

Boston, MA and Kansas City, MO October 23, 2012 — Life is good®, the Boston–based lifestyle brand committed to spreading the power of optimism and helping kids in need, today announced the formation of a strategic partnership with Hallmark Cards, Inc., the world's leading greeting card brand. The collaboration between Hallmark and Life is good will produce exclusive co–branded products that will be available throughout the US, Canada and the Caribbean.

The collaboration will bring exclusive Life is good products to various Hallmark and Life is good distribution channels at retail and online. These initial distribution channels include Hallmark Gold Crown stores, Hallmark.com, Lifeisgood.com, Life is good company–owned stores and Life is good Genuine Neighborhood Shoppes®, with the potential to broaden distribution channels and expand product offerings in the future. Select Hallmark Gold Crown stores will also carry a collection of Life is good apparel and accessories.

This new partnership is an important part of Life is good’s strategic licensing vision for its Best–In–Class (BIC) business unit. Life is good’s new Best–In–Class business unit is designed to extend the Life is good brand through partners who are the leaders in their existing product categories. The goal is to build healthy new business with smart, well–established leaders who can elevate the Life is good brand in new industries. Life is good intends to be very selective with signing additional best in class partnerships as part of its ongoing strategic plan.

“We are excited to announce our new relationship with Hallmark, which is the first in our Best–In–Class partnership strategy,” said Bert Jacobs, Chief Executive Optimist at Life is good. “We’ve spent 18 years developing valuable intellectual property that is applicable to many different industries. Life is good is dedicated to developing relationships with like–minded companies that will share in our commitment to helping kids in need and spreading the power of optimism. Through this partnership, we will reach millions of new optimists and greatly expand our community.”

“I am excited about the partnership with the Life is good brand,” said Cindy Mahoney, Vice President–Hallmark Licensing. “We have a shared commitment to life affirming consumer products and believe this will inspire new ways to help people make meaningful connections.”
The groups will continue to collaborate in the future on new products with the ultimate goal of spreading the power of optimism, all while helping kids in need through the Life is good Playmakers.

About The Life is good Company

The Life is good Company spreads the power of optimism and helps kids in need through its products and its nonprofit, The Life is good Playmakers. The Life is good Playmakers provide education, resources, and support to frontline childcare providers who dedicate their lives to helping kids in need. Life is good has raised over $9 million for kids in need to date, principally through the annual Life is good Festival, Life is good products and other fundraising efforts. Please visit Lifeisgood.com for more details. Life is good® is a registered trademark of The Life is good Company.

About The Life is good Playmakers

The Life is good Playmakers is The Life is good Company’s accredited 501(c)(3) public charity, whose mission is to help kids overcome poverty, violence and illness by partnering with frontline professionals – such as teachers, social workers and Child Life Specialists – who dedicate their lives to caring for them. The Life is good Playmakers use the power of play to build healing, life-changing relationships with the children in their care and have partnered with over 3,500 frontline professionals who care for over 209,000 children each year. To date, over $9 million has been raised to help kids in need, principally through the annual Life is good Festival, Life is good products and other fundraising efforts. For more information please visit Lifeisgood.com/Playmakers.

About Hallmark

Hallmark makes the world a more caring place by helping people express what’s in their hearts and spend time together – a privilege few other companies in the world enjoy. Hallmark greeting cards and other products are found in more than 38,000 retail outlets in the United States, including the network of flagship Hallmark Gold Crown® stores. The brand also reaches people online at Hallmark.com and on television through Hallmark Hall of Fame original movies and cable’s top-rated Hallmark Channel. Worldwide, Hallmark offers products in more than 30 languages available in 100 countries. This privately held company is based in Kansas City, Mo., and is led by the third generation of the founding Hall family. Visit http://corporate.hallmark.com for more details.
CORPORATE PHILANTHROPY: TAKING THE HIGH GROUND

By Professor Michael E. Porter
Harvard Business School
Professor Michael E. Porter, Bishop William Lawrence University Professor, Harvard Business School, is a leading international authority on competitiveness and strategy. He has taught generations of business and government leaders in his 30 year teaching career at Harvard Business School, where he established and leads the Institute for Strategy and Competitiveness. Recently, Professor Porter was appointed a University Professor, one of only four in the 100 year history of Harvard Business School.

Professor Porter has authored 16 books and more than 100 articles on business strategy, competitiveness and economic development, including “Competitive Advantage: Techniques for Analyzing Industries and Competitors”, which is now in its 53rd printing and has been translated into 17 languages, “Competitive Advantage: Creating and Sustaining Superior Performance” and “The Competitive Advantage of Nations.” His writings have guided corporate and economic policy throughout the world.

Professor Porter also leads Harvard’s program for newly appointed chief executive officers of billion-dollar corporations, and speaks widely on strategy to business and government audiences around the world. Among other organizations, he is the founder of the nonprofit Initiative for a Competitive Inner City, the Foundation Strategy Group and the Center for Effective Philanthropy.

Professor Porter has received over 30 awards and honors, including ten honorary doctorates, and Harvard’s David A. Wells Prize in Economics. His book “Competitive Advantage” won the George R. Terry Book Award of the Academy of Management as the outstanding contribution to management thought. He was elected a Fellow of the Academy of Management in 1988 and he was recently named by the Strategic Management Society as “the most influential strategic thinker alive today.”

It is a great pleasure to be here today among so many leaders of corporate philanthropy, and I am particularly pleased to be the bearer of good news. As you know, in the grand pecking order of the philanthropic world, the prestige has always rested with the private foundations, the Rockefellers, the Fords, and the like. Corporations have been seen as, at best, playing a secondary role. However, I believe that this traditional view is mistaken. In many cases, corporations have an opportunity to achieve an even greater impact on social problems than do private foundations – but only if they can bring their full expertise and resources to bear on those problems, in a well-thought-out and strategic way.

Achieving that potential will involve major changes in attitude as well as practice. It will require, in particular, a new level of energy and confidence – a new clarity of purpose in corporate philanthropy. In many companies today, there is considerable ambiguity and ambivalence about philanthropy. I am sure you have all heard the questions: What exactly are we trying to accomplish? How does it relate to our business? How can we justify our programs and investments? Before corporate philanthropy can make a leap forward – before it can realize its potential – those questions need to be answered.

The first challenge, then, is defining what corporate philanthropy is – and what it is not. Without clarity of purpose, corporate philanthropy’s legitimacy will always be in doubt.

Corporate Philanthropy vs. Corporate Social Responsibility

We have been hearing a great deal recently about “corporate social responsibility.” This concept often overshadows corporate philanthropy, but the two are very different. Corporate social responsibility can be a confusing term, but to me it has three facets. The first is obeying the letter and the spirit of the law – being ethical, transparent, fair, and having integrity. Certainly that is critically important for all companies, but it is not philanthropy. It is just fulfilling the basic conditions of operating as a business within
As practiced today, much of corporate social responsibility is defensive – it is about preventing abuses or mitigating harm. Corporate philanthropy, in contrast, is essentially affirmative. It is about using corporate money and other resources to create social value.

As practiced today, much of corporate social responsibility is defensive – it is about preventing abuses or mitigating harm. Corporate philanthropy, in contrast, is essentially affirmative. It is about using corporate money and other resources to create social value. As a result, it requires a different approach from corporate social responsibility initiatives.

**Distinguishing Corporate Social Responsibility from Philanthropy**

Businesses often confuse corporate social responsibility and corporate philanthropy

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<th>Corporate Social Responsibility</th>
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There is also considerable confusion about the motivation behind corporate philanthropy. Companies have a tendency to focus on philanthropy’s effect on their image and reputation – to see reputation-building as the core goal of their charitable efforts. (See the exhibit “How Reputation Drives Corporate Philanthropy Today.”) Certainly, an enhanced reputation can be an important benefit of corporate philanthropy, however, it should be viewed as a secondary benefit or by-product.

The real goal of corporate philanthropy is to maximize the social value created. It is the accomplishments that matter. The accomplishments are what builds a company’s reputation. If you pursue philanthropy simply to burnish your image, you are going to open yourself to cynicism and, even more important, you are going to end up producing far less social value than you could.

If philanthropy is really for marketing purposes, be honest and call it marketing.

It is easy to see why so much emphasis has been placed on reputation. When management says, “Why are we doing this?” to corporate philanthropic initiatives, the easiest answer is, “We are doing it to build the image and reputation of the company.” And so corporate philanthropy makes it become public relations. My view is, if corporate philanthropy is just public relations, call it public relations. Hire a PR firm and spend the money in that budget. After all, there is no tax reason for a corporation to call its spending philanthropy. A marketing expense is every bit as deductible as a charitable gift. So if philanthropy is really for marketing purposes, be honest and call it marketing.

If the goal is not to build a company’s reputation, what is the purpose of corporate philanthropy? Many companies would say that giving is just “the right thing to do” – that doing good is its own reward. Indeed,

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<td>Programs favored by important legislators and officials</td>
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<td>Customers</td>
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<td>Activists</td>
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But the long-term effectiveness of these programs in enhancing corporate reputation has never been clearly established.
some managers would reject any attempt to link philanthropy to the business, believing that such a connection would undermine the purity of the charitable gift and call into question a company’s motives. The problem with this view is that it inevitably reduces the social impact of a company’s giving. Since every cause is a good cause, companies cut a lot of checks to a lot of charities. Giving becomes fragmented, piecemeal, and arbitrary. Companies do not impose discipline on their giving. They do not ask the hard questions: What problems should we be addressing? How do we pick the right grantees? How do we make sure we create value? The “do the right thing” approach is simply not an effective philanthropic strategy.

**Enhancing Competitive Context**

We need to go back to first principles. If enhancing a company’s reputation and doing the right thing are insufficient goals for corporate philanthropy, what is the fundamental rationale? Why should corporations be involved in social issues in the first place? Why shouldn’t they just focus on maximizing their profits and leave philanthropy to individuals, as Milton Friedman argued decades ago in a famous article? [Milton Friedman, New York Times Magazine, 1970.]

We can find the answer to that question – and the real justification for corporate philanthropy – by exposing the two assumptions implicit in Freidman’s critique. First, Friedman assumes that if the corporation is spending money on philanthropic activity, that expenditure diminishes the corporation’s economic results. In other words, the social and the economic are unrelated. Second, Friedman assumes that a corporation can be no more effective than an individual in tackling social problems.

Both of these assumptions, I would argue, are incorrect. First, the economic and the social are not separate. Social conditions often have a direct influence on a company’s strategy, and efforts to change those conditions can help a company be more successful. Second, corporations can be vastly more effective than individuals in addressing social issues, because corporations have relevant expertise and resources far beyond those of individuals. If philanthropy is reduced to just writing checks, then Friedman would be right – there is no difference between individuals and corporations. But if philanthropy encompasses the application of distinctive capabilities in a systematic way, then there is a world of difference.

Here, then, are the two core principles of a new and much more productive approach to corporate philanthropy: Focus on the areas where social and economic interests intersect, and apply your distinctive corporate resources, not just your money, to solving social challenges. Let’s look now at how this thinking changes the way companies decide where to direct their philanthropic giving and how they go about doing it.
Where and How to Give

One of the traditional assumptions in management thinking is that a company’s own decisions determine its success – that a company controls its fate. But what we have learned over the last decade or so is that the traditional view is too simple. A company’s success comes not only from what it does but also from the environment in which it operates. Unless the environment is right, the company will have a hard time being competitive. Location and context matter. The social conditions at the company’s locations matter.

Social and economic objectives are not separate and distinct. The more we study companies and competition, the more we see an overlap between the two. Education and training, for example, were historically seen primarily as social issues. Now, almost every major company in America understands that if the communities in which it operates lack good education and training, it will be at a competitive disadvantage. Education and training are economic issues as well as social issues. The same is true of safety, environmental impact, health and nutrition, and good government. Many social issues can directly affect a company’s ability to compete. (See the exhibit “The Overlap of Social and Economic Benefits.”)

Philanthropic initiatives can have a direct and important effect on what I call the competitive context of a firm. One key part of that context is the nature of the inputs available in a particular region – for example the human resources, the natural resources, the available capital, and the research infrastructure. The rules and incentives that govern competition are another part of context – whether companies compete openly and fairly, whether there is transparency and honesty, and whether there are safeguards against corruption. A third aspect of context is the nature of local demand – the size and sophistication

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**The Overlap of Social and Economic Benefits**

- Social and Economic Benefits Overlap
  - Pure Philanthropy
    - Matching gifts
  - Corporate philanthropy that influences competitive context
  - Combined Social and Economic Benefits
    - R&D
    - Sales and marketing
  - Pure Business

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of the local market. Finally, the last key element of context is the availability and robustness of supporting industries. (See the exhibit “Elements of Competitive Context.”)

A weak competitive context can be the reflection of social ills, as we regularly see in the developing world. Many developing countries do not have the right base of local suppliers. They have distorted business rules that create the wrong incentives and poor quality inputs. By undermining the competitiveness of local companies and foreign subsidiaries, weak context dooms such countries to poverty. It means that the best they can do is to compete based on their cheap labor or to sell off their natural resources. By improving the

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### Elements of Competitive Context

**The Diamond**

- A local context and rules that encourage investment and sustained upgrading
  - *e.g.*, Intellectual property protection
- Meritocratic incentive system across institutions
- Open and vigorous competition among locally based rivals

**Factor (Input) Conditions**

- Presence of high quality, specialized inputs available to firms
  - Human resources
  - Capital resources
  - Physical infrastructure
  - Administrative infrastructure
  - Information infrastructure
  - Scientific and technological infrastructure
  - Natural resources

**Context for Firm Strategy and Rivalry**

**Demand Conditions**

- Sophisticated and demanding local customer
- Local customer needs that anticipate those elsewhere
- Unusual local demand in specialized segments that can be served nationally or globally

**Related and Supporting Industries**

- Access to capable, locally based suppliers and firms in related fields
- Presence of clusters instead of isolated industries

competitive context in the locations at which it operates, a company can have an enormous beneficial effect on the well being of the populace, even as the company improves its own chances for success.

Merck is an example of a company that has created a social benefit by building a better context for the company. It spearheaded, for example, the nonprofit Gulf Centre for Excellence in Ethics to help reduce corruption and create a fairer, more transparent environment for local business in the Persian Gulf region. This initiative can have an enormous impact on improving the competitive environment and helping the region build a stronger, sounder economic base. And in the long run, that will help Merck operate more effectively as well. Another example is Advanced Micro Devices (AMD), which has invested in a regional training and apprenticeship program for low-income minority students near its plant in Austin, Texas. The effort helps participants find good jobs, and improve the general skill level of local citizens, while helping AMD remedy a shortage of skilled labor in the area.

Now, some people might say, “But these are not really social investments. This is too self-serving. Shouldn’t we instead be giving money to feed children and clothe the poor?” Such a reaction, while certainly understandable, overlooks a fundamental fact: The most powerful thing a corporation can do for any society, or any location in which it operates, is to help that location create a prosperous economy. If a region can create a prosperous economy, then it can improve the standard of living and quality of life of its citizens for the long term. Temporary relief, as worthy, noble, and necessary as it is, delivers a lower level of sustained benefits.

And who knows more about creating strong economies than the corporate world? Companies understand how to compete, and have the ability to help build healthy economies. We, in business, should not be bashful or defensive about that. We should not think that efforts to improve business context and foster economic development are somehow less worthy than donating money for a temporary relief effort. We are on the high ground here. If business can apply its resources, its expertise, and its insight to build strong economies in the developing world, or in any less advantaged regions, it will have made the greatest impact on promoting social good of any philanthropic organization. It will make a lasting difference in people’s lives, not just a temporary one.

This is why it is so important for companies to carefully target their philanthropic efforts, and not just make piecemeal donations to many different social causes. Businesses cannot solve all the world’s problems — no single group of donors can. Each company has to figure out which specific societal problems it is best equipped to help address. Thinking in terms of competitive context provides a way of doing that, of pinpointing the intersection between corporate resources and social needs, where tremendous value can be created.

More broadly, a context-focused approach to corporate philanthropy enables a move toward a more effective division of labor in the philanthropic world. We have to ask the question of how each type of donor can have the greatest impact. What should private foundations be doing? What should corporate foundations be doing? What should community foundations be doing? What should individual donors...
Creating Value in Corporate Philanthropy

1. Selecting the best grantees
   - Companies are well positioned to identify the most effective grantees in a given field because of their
     - Field-specific expertise
     - General expertise in management, finance and technology
     - Capacity for research
     - Geographic coverage
     - Access to the expertise of suppliers and customers
   - Individual donors lack the knowledge and the resources for such serious research
   - Private foundations may have expertise but often have very limited staff and a single location

2. Signaling other funders
   - Companies are well positioned to signal other funders and bring additional resources to their own grantees because of their
     - Reputation and credibility
     - Financial clout
     - Influence on other companies within their cluster
     - Access to consumers, whether corporate or individual
     - Ongoing communication channels and expertise
   - The ability of companies to signal other donors helps to mitigate the free rider problem by sharing the cost

3. Improving grantee performance
   - Companies have a unique ability to improve the effectiveness of nonprofits
     - Assets and expertise to provide a wide range of nonmonetary assistance that is less costly and more sophisticated than nonprofits could purchase themselves
     - Long-term commitments to their locations that allow them to work with nonprofits over the extended periods of time needed for meaningful organizational improvements
     - Presence in multiple geographic areas enables companies to facilitate the global transfer of knowledge and operational best practices among nonprofits

4. Advancing knowledge and best practice
   - Companies bring expertise and research capacity to nonprofits allowing them to create new solutions that they could never afford to develop on their own
   - Nonprofits benefit from companies’ recognized brand profile and strong communications capabilities to disseminate lessons learned
   - Companies’ presence in multiple geographic areas enables them to facilitate the global transfer of knowledge and operational best practices among nonprofits

Corporations bring a unique and powerful set of advantages that enable them to create value

be doing? When each donor’s resources are applied where they will do the greatest good, the collective benefit of all philanthropy will be greatly increased.

Once a company has decided where to target its giving, the question becomes, “How do we go about giving in those areas?” Mark Kramer and I have articulated four basic mechanisms through which a donor can amplify the impact of its philanthropic giving beyond the money itself. First is through choosing the most effective grantee – the one that will produce the greatest social return on investment. Second is getting other funders involved in supporting that grantee, which increases the social return on the donor’s own investment. Third is helping improve the grantee’s performance, which allows all the resources expended by the grantee to create more value. Fourth, and most powerful of all, is to advance the knowledge and practices in a given field, discovering more effective ways to solve a particular social problem. (See the exhibit “Creating Value in Corporate Philanthropy.”)

Here again we find that, of all donor groups, corporations have the greatest potential for adding value in their philanthropic giving to really turbocharge their impact. Corporations have the skill, the expertise, the relationships, the networks, the contacts, and the perspective necessary to select better, to engage other funders more effectively, to improve grantee performance, and to advance the state of knowledge and practice. These are essentially managerial challenges, after all, and experienced corporate managers are well equipped to meet them.

**The Right Portfolio**

In addition to improving competitive context, corporate philanthropy has two other, more traditional goals: communal obligation and relationship building. Communal obligation involves giving money in order to be – and to be seen as – a good corporate citizen in the community. Relationship building involves creating goodwill with key stakeholders in order to maintain a company’s “license to operate,” as it is sometimes called. In practice, a company will usually need to do all three. A company can, therefore,
think of its philanthropic investments as a portfolio of programs that spans these three categories. (See the exhibit “The Corporate Philanthropy Portfolio.”)

Value-creation principles can be applied to communal-obligation and relationship-building initiatives as well as to those that enhance context. Communal obligation giving, for instance, has more impact when done with greater focus and by utilizing corporate capabilities. Instead of giving 50 small grants, give five large grants. Not only will a company have a greater impact on social problems, but it will get more community credit, because its efforts will be more noticeable. LensCrafters, for instance, has focused much of its philanthropic effort on partnering with local Lions Clubs to recycle used eyeglass lenses for people who cannot afford to buy new glasses – both in the U.S. and in developing countries around the world. This concentrated giving has leveraged their corporate expertise to help many needy people – nearly three-quarters of a million since 1991 – and has brought the company much goodwill.

Relationship-building giving can also create much more value than it typically does. A company needs to be systematic about identifying its key constituencies and their priorities and needs. What do key stakeholders really care about? Giving must then be aligned with those needs. Oil and gas companies, mining companies, and pharmaceutical companies have a particular need to do relationship giving well, because they need good relationships with local constituencies in order to get approvals to build and operate their facilities, or license and sell their products.

Beyond maximizing the effectiveness of each type of giving, how do you create the best possible portfolio? How do you ensure the most effective mix of communal obligation, relationship building, and context enhancing? The first step is to audit existing charitable contributions to find out the current mix. The Foundation Strategy Group has helped a number of companies conduct such audits, and has found that giving tends to be concentrated in communal obligation and relationship building, with relatively little expenditure for context enhancing. (See the exhibit “A Typical Philanthropic Portfolio.”) This is a clear indicator that companies are not thinking strategically about their philanthropy, and the odds are that an audit of your own company’s philanthropy will reveal a similar pattern – and problem. The other task of

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**A Typical Philanthropic Portfolio**

Typical Philanthropic Portfolio of a Multinational Energy Company

Distribution of Corporate Philanthropy by Type of Giving

- Communal Obligation: 39%
- Relationship Building: 43%
- Context Enhancing: 18%

Source: FSG analysis
an audit is to categorize contributions according to geography or region. Often, the distribution of philanthropic contributions is driven by past legacies, but a company should make sure that there is some alignment between its current operations and its giving.

The second step in creating an optimal portfolio is to identify the key constraints in a company’s competitive context – in every major region and country in which it operates. What are the major social problems that, in the long run, are also going to limit the company’s prospects? The relevant aspects of context will be different for every business unit and for every location. So to do this analysis right, line managers must get involved. And that itself will build support for future efforts. When the corporate contributions people ask local managers, “What are the constraints to your long term competitiveness and growth?” they will find a new level of excitement and engagement about corporate philanthropy. These are the issues line managers need to solve.

Once the important areas of context for the businesses are identified, the third step is to figure out what the company can do to have the greatest impact on these areas. Which resources and capabilities can be brought to bear? Where would the company have particular leverage in creating social value? Who are the logical partners to work with?

### Developing a Corporate Philanthropic Strategy

**Step 1: Audit existing contributions**
- Segment contributions into the three giving categories (communal obligation, relationship building, context enhancing)
  - Are contributions aligned with company priorities?
  - Are decision-making, monitoring and reporting criteria clear?
  - Is maximum value being created in communal obligation and relationship building grants?
- What proportion of contributions should be allocated to the three categories in the future?
- How much can be shifted to context enhancing giving?

**Step 2: Identify key constraints in the competitive context**
- What external factors limit the growth, productivity and innovation of the company and its cluster?
- Which elements of the competitive context are particularly important to this company versus its competitors?

**Step 3: Identify programs or interventions where leveraged company assets, expertise and partnerships could have a measurable impact on one or more constraints**
- What unique skills, expertise, connections and assets does this company have available?
- What could this company do that no other company could do as well?
- How can partners from the cluster, nonprofit sector or government help?
A good example of the kind of value that can be created is a company named TPG, a major worldwide logistics company based in Holland. TPG decided to shift from making small, fragmented philanthropic gifts to concentrating their giving in an area where it could have a greater impact. They chose to partner with the World Food Program to help create a more effective supply chain for responding to famines and other emergencies. Here, their resources and expertise in global logistics could make a real difference. While the first step was to leverage their skills, TPG realized that they could do even more if they shifted their emphasis to competitive context by improving the basic logistical infrastructure in the various countries in which they were operating. They came to see that if they could do that, they would help their partner not just respond to tragedies, but actually help to prevent them. (See the exhibit “Developing a Corporate Philanthropic Strategy” for an overview of the three-step process.)

A New Model for Corporate Philanthropy

Companies will continue their communal-obligation and relationship-building giving. The real challenge is to shift the portfolio over time towards context-enhancing initiatives – the ones that are truly strategic. That will be a natural outcome of going through the audit and assessment process I have just outlined. As more attention is paid to the competitive context, and management and operating personnel get involved in the discussion, companies will gain the knowledge and the confidence to shift more of their philanthropic activity in this direction. One company that the Foundation Strategy Group has worked with, for example, decided to shift its portfolio from 20% to 65% context focused giving, while simultaneously increasing its overall contributions budget by 30% – a dramatic and, I would argue, highly beneficial change.

There is no question that this new model of corporate philanthropy involves hard work. The easy thing is to just go on writing small checks to those who come asking. Enhancing context requires really thinking about the business. It requires getting operating people engaged. It demands bigger bets on a fewer number of initiatives, rather than hedging by doing a little bit of everything. It requires tightly integrating philanthropy with the business – not separating it – as many companies do today.

But the payoff can be enormous. First, a company will be able to articulate a clear rationale for philanthropy that senior management and line management will understand and support. The philanthropy program will get real and lasting buy-in, not just lip service. Second, philanthropy will have a real impact on the company’s long-term success – it will be making an important strategic contribution. Finally, and most important of all, the company’s giving will deliver far greater benefits to society, to the people it is trying to help. Bringing business and philanthropic interests into harmony means that everybody wins.
The Foundation Strategy Group was founded by Professor Michael E. Porter and Mark R. Kramer with the vision of improving corporate and private philanthropy’s potential to impact society. With offices in Boston, San Francisco and Geneva, our international team of consultants is drawn from the world’s top strategy firms and dedicated exclusively to developing philanthropic and CSR strategies that achieve measurable results.

We are uniquely qualified to help corporations design their corporate giving, CSR, and social investment programs. Our deep knowledge of corporate strategy, guided by the internationally recognized authority of Professor Michael E. Porter, combined with our training at firms such as McKinsey, BCG, Monitor and Mercer, and our specialized expertise in non-profits and foundations, enable us to pinpoint the synergy between social needs and corporate interests.

Our operational experience enables us to assess the impact of current giving programs or design worldwide management systems that link philanthropy, CSR, and social investment. Our investment in ideas, depth of practical experience, and collaborative approach, keep us at the forefront of the field and help our clients create greater impact. And our insights into goal setting and measurement can create internal metrics that speak equally well to the community, the charitable giving team and the CEO.

FSG works collaboratively with its corporate clients in six areas:

- Philanthropy, CSR, and Social Investment Audits
- Strategy Development
- Impact Evaluation
- Philanthropic Management Systems
- Strategic Communications
- Corporate Social Responsibility Programs

Partnering for impact.

Foundation Strategy Group, LLC
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Boston San Francisco Geneva
Amway created Nutrilite Little Bits, which it donates to programs overseas to prevent anemia and stunted growth.

America’s biggest companies expect a third-straight year of modest increases in cash gifts in 2013, according to a Chronicle survey, and are increasingly seeking other ways to help charities, such as through employee volunteerism and donations of products.

Donations grew by 2.7 percent in 2012, to $5.3-billion, for 106 companies that provided two years of data. More than three-quarters of corporate leaders said their giving budgets will be about the same in 2013. About 16 percent said they will give more, and 6 percent will donate less.

Businesses awarded a median of 0.8 percent of their 2011 pretax profits to charity in 2012. That’s lower than in any of the previous six years, when the percentage of profits going to charities varied from 1 percent to 1.4 percent.

Mark Shamley, head of the Association of Corporate Contributions Professionals, in Mt. Pleasant, S.C., says he’s not surprised about the modest increases, despite a rebounding economy and the strong stock market. Companies remain wary of the recovery, he says, and are hesitant to make big investments in their business operations, much less boost philanthropic budgets.
Among other findings:

- Wells Fargo gave away the most cash in 2012, $315.8-million, increasing its giving to support a new program that provides down-payment assistance to home buyers in neighborhoods with high foreclosure rates. Walmart, which had held the top spot in the previous seven years, ranked second in 2012, at $311.6-million.

- Those two were among 14 companies that gave more than $100-million, up from 13 in 2012. The median cash amount given in 2012 was $25-million.

- Median giving in 2012 was higher than in 2008, when the effects of the Great Recession were first being felt. Median giving over the past five years rose by 11 percent for the 83 companies for which The Chronicle has data.

- Donations of products continue to grow much faster than gifts of cash. Overall corporate giving, when both cash and products are counted, rose by 20.2 percent in 2012, to $18.6-billion. Pfizer held the top spot for the fourth year in a row, giving $3.1-billion in cash and products.

The Chronicle surveyed the 300 biggest companies in the United States, as ranked by Fortune magazine according to annual revenue, and received data from 106 of them.

The study looks at the nation’s largest companies, but small and midsize corporations may be expanding their giving budgets more quickly.

According to Giving USA, an annual tally of philanthropy that was released last month, giving by corporations of all sizes jumped 9.9 percent after inflation in 2012, to $18.15 billion.

**Mutual Benefit**

Many of America’s biggest companies are increasingly candid about how their philanthropy can help achieve business goals—and vice versa.

Microsoft, which lost cachet among young people to Apple and other competitors over the past decade, launched its YouthSpark program in September, vowing to invest $500-million over three years.

Microsoft hopes to create greater opportunities for youths around the world, says Akhtar Badshah, the company’s senior director of citizenship and public affairs, even as it tries to sell them more products.

The company is providing large cash grants to a handful of charities, including Boys & Girls Clubs of America, City Year, and Junior Achievement USA. Through a new program called Innovate for Good, Microsoft is connecting its employees to young people around the world who want to use technology to better their communities.
Microsoft also oversees a fast-growing program called Teals (Technology Education and Literacy in Schools), through which about 120 volunteers, including Microsoft employees and others, teach computer science in schools that wouldn’t otherwise have such courses.

Microsoft pays for textbooks, outings, and events for the more than 2,000 students; nurtures schoolteachers to eventually take over the courses; and makes a donation to the 37 schools where it has volunteers.

But the company is also attracted by the opportunity to give its employees an outlet for using their skills to make a difference.

“That’s really what excites us,” Mr. Badshah says. “We want to give grants, and we’ll continue to do so, but if we can tie our grant making to our business interests, we’re able to unleash many more resources.”

More Engaged
Some charities, such as arts groups, have expressed concern that the trend toward more targeted corporate giving often leaves them out in the cold.

But organizations like Junior Achievement, a grantee of Microsoft and many other corporations, are benefiting by offering the deeper engagement their corporate supporters seek.

Junior Achievement raises about $140-million a year, more than 80 percent of which comes from companies. The charity has positioned itself to win grants from corporations that want to see measurable outcomes and opportunities for volunteerism, according to Gary Blanchette, the nonprofit organization’s senior vice president for development.

The charity has 119 U.S. locations, programs in 120 countries, a vast network for volunteering, and entrée to schools, thanks to its ability to tie its curricula in programs like financial literacy to state education standards.

The charity has also spent $5-million over the past seven years documenting the effectiveness of its programs—something that companies are increasingly looking for.

“We hit all their markers,” Mr. Blanchette says.

Not Just Money
Many corporate grant makers say the shotgun approach to raising money—flinging unfocused requests toward a variety of companies—is less likely than ever to raise funds, as companies look to work more closely with nonprofit groups.
Texas Instruments is one of several companies with a special focus on science and math education.

In 2012, the company pledged up to $4.8-million over four years to help an entire low-income school district near its Dallas headquarters reorient the curriculum around science and math education.

The company also contributed $5-million to start a new science and math academy in Plano, Tex., and sponsored the first ever STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) patch offered by the Girls Scouts of Northeast Texas.

“We don’t want to just give money,” says Andy Smith, the company’s director of corporate philanthropy. “We want to have partnerships and get our employees and our retirees involved in volunteering. That’s when you get the true impact.”

Lockheed Martin has revamped its grant making to focus on two issues: science and math education and assistance for military members and veterans. Local grant making for other community causes will now account for only about 10 percent of giving.

The company hopes the sharper focus will better enable it to measure what it is achieving through its giving.

“A lot of companies, including us, are doing some great things, but are we really having the impact we want to have?” says Kimberly Martinez, the manager of STEM education at Lockheed Martin.

“The critical first step in that process is focusing your efforts,” says Ms. Martinez. “If you’re doing a million things with your budget, one would presume that your impact isn’t as great as you’d like it to be.”

Time and Products

Many large companies are exploring new ways to solve societal problems or help nonprofits that don’t involve handing out more cash.

Amway, a direct-sales company, has created a new product, Nutrilite Little Bits, solely for philanthropic purposes. The product, a powder full of micronutrients that parents can sprinkle on food, reduces stunting and anemia in children who suffer from chronic malnutrition. It is currently in use in Mexico and Zambia.

Deloitte, an accounting and consulting firm, is inviting humanitarian organizations to apply for pro bono consulting assistance designed to help the groups prepare for crises.
The company, which provided $82-million of pro bono assistance in 2012 and $74-million in cash and product donations, views the new program as a way to uncover innovations that can help all nonprofits that provide relief and also as a way make the company more attractive to young people who want to use their skills to help society.

“When we put money into programs, no one really knows what happens: Was it the right amount?” says David Pearson, the company’s chief sustainability officer.

“But when we put in our time, we put in a lot more effort, we see the impact, and it just means a lot more to the organization and to ourselves,” he says.

Hilton Worldwide worked with Points of Light and the Taproot Foundation to create Hospitality + Service, a program designed to help nonprofits provide better service to clients.

Jennifer Silberman, the company’s vice president for corporate responsibility, says the free training module will help any charity that has significant interactions with clients, such as soup kitchens and community-health clinics.

The national rollout is expected this fall.

The company, which makes cash donations worth about $5-million a year, spent $150,000 to develop the program’s curriculum.

“We’re not the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation—we don’t have unlimited resources,” Ms. Silberman says. “But we have skills and great knowledge, and that can be translated to the nonprofit sector. If we do it right, that can be just as important as cash.”

*Emma Carew Grovum and Sarah Frostenson contributed to this article.*
Why Don’t Corporations Give to Charity?

Their profits soar, yet they only get stingier.

By Ken Stern, SLATE, AUG. 8 2013

A few weeks ago, I chaperoned my son’s preschool field trip to the Maryland Science Center. As we entered the lobby, the kids were drawn to the artificial geyser, which shoots fountains of hot water into the air. But I focused on the donor plaques that festooned the lobby and the many signs pointing to the museum’s corporate benefactors: the Lockheed Martin gallery, the Legg Mason Pavilion. Even the information desk has a corporate sponsor.

Go to virtually any museum—and many hospitals, universities, and civic centers—these days, and you will find a prominent example of corporate philanthropy. If you were to judge it simply by the weight of public branding, you would think that the corporate community in the United States has stepped up to support charities in a significant way.

They haven’t. Over the past 30 years, corporate contributions to charities in the U.S., as measured by percentage of pretax profits, have fallen precipitously, from a high of 2.1 percent at its peak in 1986 to just around 0.8 percent in 2012. There is some year-to-year variability to this measure, because ironically enough, contribution percentages tend to rise in periods of poor corporate earnings. But the long-term curve is consistently down. Over the past 10 years, even through the ups and downs of a violent economic cycle, contributions as measured by percentage of pretax earnings have dropped by half. Given the scale of American business, it is surprising how small a role corporations play in charitable giving in the U.S., now comprising only about 6 percent of private-sector donations and only a little more than 1 percent of the $1.5 trillion charitable economy.

Let’s be clear. Corporate donations have increased substantially over time, from $3.67 billion 30 years ago to more than $18 billion in 2012. That’s a rise that exceeds inflation by approximately 115 percent. Proponents of corporate giving such as the Committee Encouraging Corporate Philanthropy (CECP)—a very good advocate for corporate giving founded by the late Paul Newman—take reasonable pride in that growth. But those same observers tend to ignore the fact that giving as a percentage of profits—the best measure of relative generosity—has fallen far down. By comparison, the comparable measure of the generosity of individuals, as told by the percentage of disposable personal income, has remained solid over that time, changing from 2 percent in 1982 to 1.9 percent today—and barely deviating from that tight range in every year in between. For society as a whole, giving as a percentage of GDP has remained essentially unchanged. Only corporate contributions have fluctuated substantially and negatively over this time.

Some people will chalk this up to simple corporate fecklessness. But it is still surprising. In the age of instant communications and close public scrutiny of corporations, many companies have placed—at least rhetorically—an emphasis on contributing to society, both through community commitments to charity and by making their business practices more socially responsible. As Paul Polman, the CEO of Unilever, told Green Futures magazine in 2012, “CEOs don’t just get...
judged by how well their share prices are doing, but by what impact they are having on society.” In this context, the explanation of this decline in giving is hard to identify. In my conversations with experts on this subject, they expressed surprise, rejected it as a valid indicia of corporate giving (on the theory that quality of giving outweighs quantity of giving), had little plausible explanation for the trend, or some combination of the three. But even if there is no definite explanation for this trend, let’s look at three factors affecting corporate giving.

First, not everyone thinks that corporations should be giving lots of (or even any) money to charities or community organizations. In a 1970 *New York Times* article, the Chicago economist Milton Friedman famously wrote, “There is one and only one social responsibility of business—to use its resources and engage in activities designed to increase its profits.” Friedman argued that corporate social responsibility was a simple taking, without authorization or business purpose, of the money of the company, shareholders, and customers. To him, it bordered on fraud. When presented with the notion that community support could be viewed as a business imperative, Friedman dismissed it as “hypocritical window dressing.” Friedman was hardly alone in this view. FDR originally opposed legislation permitting charitable contributions to be deducted as business expenses, on grounds essentially identical to Friedman’s argument. Only a vigorous lobbying campaign by big business overcame Roosevelt’s objections. It has become less popular over the years to make these arguments—though Steve Jobs-era Apple, for example, was notorious for its almost total abstinence from philanthropy. But there’s no doubt that silent support for these views within many companies operates as an effective brake on corporate giving.

Second, the decline in corporate donations is roughly coincident with an extraordinary rise in executive pay. Not only did CEO pay skyrocket fourfold in the 1980s, but the mix of compensation changed as well. At the behest of shareholder advocates, more and more executive compensation came loaded as options and other stock-related incentives. In effect, corporate executives increasingly had huge sums of money at stake tied to stock prices. During 2001–03, for instance, the aggregate compensation paid to top-five executives of public firms amounted to $92 billion, an almost unfathomable 10.3 percent of the aggregate corporate earnings of these firms—and at least 70 percent of that compensation was tethered to share price. Much of that payment was calculated based upon short-term measures. As Curt Weeden, a leading expert on corporate philanthropy, told me, if companies are focusing on short-term results, “social investments are likely to take a hit.” There is no definitive research on this point, but it is fair to theorize that, with executives so keenly focused on share price and compensation metrics, they have left less time to focus on social and community investments.

Third, the largest companies in America set the tone for the corporate community. By dint of size if nothing else, Exxon Mobil, IBM, and Chevron are benchmarks for corporate America.* But the tone that the largest companies set is not one of generosity. In each of the eight years that the CECP has closely studied donations, the largest companies have given less than the average, and not by small amounts. On average over this time, the Fortune 100 companies have given, on a dollar-for-dollar basis, some 40 percent less than the average—a pattern that closely parallels the relative parsimony of high-income individuals.

Again, it’s not that the largest companies don’t put in the most money in absolute terms. Exxon Mobil, for instance, was one of the top-five corporate donors in 2012, with cash contributions of
$213 million. But with worldwide profits of almost $45 billion, Exxon Mobil would have to double its giving just to be average, percentage-wise. For all three companies, not only is their percentage of giving low by broader corporate standards, it is also declining: Each company contributed less in 2012 as a percentage of profits than it did 10 years before.

There are, of course, companies that give a significant percentage of profit to charities. In 2010, Kroger, the Cincinnati-based supermarket chain, gave away $64 million, or 10.9 percent of its pretax profit. Macy’s in that same year gave away 8.1 percent of profits. Some of the biggest consumer brands give away large sums as well: In 2012, Target contributed 4.7 percent of its profit and paired that sum with a commitment to donate $1 billion to public education. Also in 2012, Wal-Mart became the first company to give away more than $1 billion in a year, donating $311 million in cash and $755 million in product, amounting to 4.5 percent of its profits.

It is true, as the CECP points out, that numbers are not the sole measure of the meaningfulness of corporate contributions. Making philanthropy effective is terribly difficult work, and no doubt some companies—maybe even some of the ones that seem stingy—do it better than others. But in the corporate world, as elsewhere, nothing speaks louder than dollars. Most Americans now reasonably expect the companies they do business with to support their local communities in a meaningful way. In an age when corporations have acquired more and more basic rights of citizens—the right to own property, the right to sue and be sued, the right to be free of unreasonable search and seizures, the right to free speech, the right to engage in the political process—it is fair to look to them to accept more of the basic responsibilities of citizenship as well.

*Ken Stern is president of Palisades Media Ventures, a former CEO of National Public Radio, and the author of With Charity for All.*
Is Corporate Philanthropy Dead as We Know It, or Should It Be?

Senay Ataselim-Yilmaz, Huffington Post, 10/25/13

Chief Operating Officer, Turkish Philanthropy Funds

The value of corporate philanthropy is a topic of ongoing and vigorous discussion. That was especially the case at this year's Independent Sector conference. One of the most intriguing panels titled: "Beyond Checkbook Philanthropy" debated whether corporations should lead social progress directly by engaging their enormous capacity rather than just doing plain corporate philanthropy. The attendees of the panel agreed with my premise that shared value ventures would be a better fit for corporations rather than just writing a check as it encompasses core strengths such as talent and infrastructure. However, philanthropy needs to maintain its role in development as it's a response to social problems that cannot be always addressed within markets.

From the early on at the panel, it was noted that shared value initiative is not philanthropy. Yet, philanthropy can be an incubator in the process. Through shared value initiatives corporations do not only socially invest towards societal needs but they also make profit out of it. Harvard Business Review of Jan/Feb 2011 cover story, "How to Fix Capitalism," which made the term, creating shared value, popular, defines it as a wave of innovation and growth to fix capitalism. As I listened to the panelists, I struggled with the question of, "What if the market cannot provide a solution to the social problem?" Then, the question that was obviously in the minds of many others in the room was asked, followed by a round table applause: "Should corporations abandon philanthropy all together and address social issues only through 'shared value' initiatives? What if the markets cannot provide a solution? Is corporate philanthropy, as we know it, dead?"

Free markets have their limitations. My view is that philanthropy at its best often solves the very problems that result from market failure. Some social issues cannot just be addressed by questioning the return on investment. Philanthropic giving has been roughly two percent of GDP for more than a generation in the U.S. It's really a drop in the bucket compared to what private capital can offer. As the real value of philanthropic giving is not increasing, social value initiatives have the potential to grow the amount of corporate funds addressing social problems. This would enlarge the pie tackling our global problems. However, philanthropy should continue to be a part of solutions offered by corporations.

Corporate capital has a huge potential that can be tapped into. The level of corporate giving has not grown in real terms over the last 20 years even though it became a part of every major corporation's budget. Corporate giving accounts for just six percent of the total giving in 2012. Businesses awarded a median of 0.8 percent of their pretax profits to charity last year. In the last six years, that percentage stayed at the same level -- varying from one to 1.4 percent. How can we be sure that corporations that haven't increased their philanthropic giving ratios in recent
years would give more to solve the world's problems? In other words, how is shared value initiative different than philanthropic corporate giving, especially in the eyes of corporations?

The initiative's difference stands out when corporations realize that they are large enough and have plenty resources and skills to address social problems in our communities. And, the catch line is they can make profit while doing that. Yet, the concept is still not well understood even by corporations. Cisco's Networking Academy program teaches hundreds of thousands of students worldwide the skills needed to build, design and maintain, networks -- improving their career prospects while filling the global demand for networking professionals. With 10,000 academies in 165 countries, Networking Academy helps individuals prepare for industry-recognized certifications and entry-level information and communication technology careers in virtually every type of industry. The initiative was cited as a "shared value" venture at the panel yet the corporation still calls it Corporate Social Responsibility on their website.

Shared value initiatives also paves way for corporations to build new relationships that can decrease the cost of getting into a new market. A recent report of FSG that studied the future roles of 50 international NGOs' finds that there are many local organizations that can do their work so they should use their assets to find more scalable and impactful solutions to societal problems, and look for ways to partner with businesses. The collaboration between Coca-Cola and Gates Foundation is a great example. While Coca-Cola wanted to find a market for its fruit juice in East Africa, Gates Foundation was looking for ways to promote sustainable agriculture in the region. The region's small farmers were not interested in growing mango and passion fruit due to high costs and lack of demand. Gates Foundation connected Coca-Cola to Techno Serve, a mid-size NGO that trains farmers for sustainable agriculture. Farmers became interested in growing the products, Gates supported sustainable agriculture in the region and Coca-Cola found a new market for its products. A win-win situation for everyone.

As the panel discussion came to an end, the moderator surveyed the room to see who believes corporations should do just shared value giving, and who believe just corporate philanthropic giving. Most in the room, like me, believe that we need both. U.S. companies are increasingly interested in quantifying the business benefits generated by being socially responsible. Measuring the return on investments through shared value initiatives can be very easily done. Yet, corporations should view their shared value initiatives as only one piece of their overall social responsibility. Philanthropy cannot just be an incubator for understanding both community and corporate needs. In an era of increasingly complex corporate relationships, it's scary to think of a world where corporations are less interested in writing unrestricted checks than in leveraging their talent, technology, and infrastructure to help those in need. Shared value giving definitely cannot substitute philanthropy, as we know it. A world with both may be "the fix to capitalism."

Senay Ataselim-Yilmaz is Chief Operating Officer, Turkish Philanthropy Funds
REDEFINING PLAYFULNESS

How it can revolutionize the health, education and well-being of children
We take play for granted and our actions (or inactions) as a society indicate that we don’t prioritize play in the lives of our children. In an effort to enhance the quality of education, schools have squeezed play off the agenda and replaced it with more worksheets, standardized test preparation and traditional teacher-driven, sedentary instruction. Our schools are becoming joyless, loveless places that are failing to leverage the inherent curiosity, passion and exuberance of our children. In a noble effort to bolster achievement and productivity, we’ve taken a tragic wrong turn in which ‘No Child Left Behind’ has left many children uninspired and unfulfilled.

Schools are not the only places suffering from a lack of playfulness. Many of the systems of care designed to support the healthy development of our most vulnerable children (foster care programs, shelters, psychiatric hospitals and other child-focused social services agencies) are suffering from their own form of “PDD” (Playfulness Deficiency Disorder), leading to increased levels of staff burnout and poor, often tragic, outcomes for children. It is time for us to take a closer look at play and the concept of playfulness and determine how best to tap into our primal drive to joyfully explore, engage and connect with the world around us.

Historically, play has often been viewed as a frivolous break from important endeavors like working and learning. In fact, a child’s ability to fully and freely engage in play is essential to their learning, health, and overall development.

A natural drive to play is universal across all young mammals. Children from every society on earth spend time playing. Why? Because play is a crucial vehicle for exploring and learning, developing new skills, and connecting with others. From an infant’s first smile to a preschooler’s careful construction of a tower, children use play to engage with and learn about their world. Play has key neurological, cognitive, socio-emotional, and physiological benefits for children’s health. Play is the way in which children form loving, trusting relationships. And the quality of a child’s life (or anyone’s life for that matter) is in direct proportion to the quality of their relationships.

As adults, we often forget how important play is in the lives of all human beings - especially children.
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People often think of play in terms of specific ‘play activities’ such as a game of tag, soccer or building in a sandbox. In contrast, they think of work in terms of ‘work activities’ such as raking leaves, cooking, cleaning, or doing homework. It is our belief that any activity, as long as it is done with a playful approach, is play. In other words, it’s not about what you do, it’s about how you do it. Further, what is play for one person may not be play for another. For example, if we see a young child on a base- ball field we often assume that he or she is “playing baseball”. But what if that child is not feeling safe, engaged, joyful or connected during this experience? Wouldn’t it be more accurate to describe this as “working baseball” or, at a minimum, “doing baseball”?

Plato is credited with stating that “Life must be lived as play.” To live life as play, we must adopt a playful approach to our engage- ment with the world around us. A playful approach, or play- fulness, is much more than fun and humor. Playfulness is the expression of our natural drive to freely and joyfully explore, engage, and connect with the surrounding world.

Building on decades of academic research, clinical experience, psychological theory, and our own personal play histories, we identified four basic elements to play: Active Engagement, Internal Control, Social Connection, and Joyfulness. When we are actively engaged, joyful, empowered and connected to others, we are playing. What we happen to be doing at the time makes no difference.

**ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT =** Enthusiastic and complete immersion in an activity.

While being immersed in an activity—whether it is playing a game, dancing to a favorite song, listening to the wind whip through the trees, or spending time with a loved one—the person is focused and engaged in the activity they are performing. When we are actively engaged, our minds are primed and ready for exploration and creation.

**INTERNAL CONTROL =** Feelings of safety, control, and inner peace that sustain them through life's challenges.

When children are thoroughly controlled, they have an “I can do it attitude,” they continue trying to meet a challenge even when they feel frustrated, they take initiative when playing with others, and they can switch to different roles comfortably (e.g., from leader to follower). Through feeling safe, competent and empowered, children develop an inner peace that sustains them through life’s challenges.

**SOCIAL CONNECTION =** The drive for cooperation and connection with others.

We know that human beings do not survive without connection to others. Feeling a sense of belonging is crucial to our overall well-being. Starting first with parents and caregivers, infants immedi- ately seek connection and develop strong bonds in order to feel loved and protected. It is these first most basic connections that give children the independence to explore the world around them, knowing that they have a safe base to which they can return. Therefore a child can be socially connected even when playing alone. Secure that they are part of a community, they can choose moments of independent play and exploration. Social connection is the foundation upon which children build loving relationships with others.

**JOYFULNESS =** Feelings of love, fulfillment, and hope that can be expressed with contentment as well as exuberance.

When we are joyful, we feel a deep sense of love and an awareness of the goodness that is all around us. Joyfulness is not the absence of sadness. Instead, it is the inner sense of fulfillment that helps us work through adversity, and even tragedy. When children are joyful, they attend to the present moment and all that is good in it. Sometimes, joy is expressed with exuberance, through wide smiles, laughter and silliness. At other times, joy is expressed more internally and is difficult to observe. Shown through quiet contentment or exuberance, joy is a celebration of the positive aspects of the moment, whether it is dancing to a favorite song, listening to the wind whip through the trees, or spending time with a loved one.

Not all play is created equal. Some play is more conducive to strengthening and healing children. Just as we need to eat a balanced diet, with many different food groups represented, we need play that has all four basic nutrients: active engagement, social connection, joyfulness, and internal control. Play that provides children with opportunities for engagement, empowerment, connection, and joy has the potential to serve as a transformational experience, changing the way a child’s brain, body and spirit develop. When children are fully and freely engaged in play, they learn new things, develop key social and emotional skills, feel part of a community and take on new challenges. Engaged in transformative play, children build healing relationships with the key people in their lives. This type of play enables children to build resilience in the face of life’s greatest challenges.
ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT = Enthusiastic and complete immersion in an activity.

Renowned psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi describes “flow” as a deep, effortless involvement in an activity in which the person loses sense of self and time. When we are actively engaged, we are in the moment, focused on the process and not the end-result. Fully in the present, we are not worried about the past or the future, and not concerned with outside rewards or expectations. When children are actively engaged, they play with passion and gusto, are curious and inquisitive, move freely and comfortably, and extend this passion and curiosity to many different kinds of activities. Active engagement is the key building block for creativity — when we are actively engaged, our minds are primed and ready for exploration and creation.

INTERNAL CONTROL = Feelings of safety, worth, and competence that support our ability to engage and challenge ourselves.

Using rats as his subjects, Jaak Panksepp found that young rats stop playing the moment a threat is introduced in their environment. Even once the threat is removed, the rats do not return to their pre-threat levels of playfulness. All young mammals, including children, cannot fully engage in play if their basic safety needs are not met. However, once children feel safe, they can develop a sense of freedom and empowerment, enabling them to gain control over their own involvement in an activity and to handle the ups and downs of their emotions. Developing a sense of control, children begin to believe that they can influence their world and meet challenges with success. When children are internally controlled, they have an “I can do it attitude,” they continue trying to meet a challenge even when they feel frustrated, play take initiative when playing with others, and they can switch to different roles comfortably (e.g., from leader to follower). Through feeling safe, competent and empowered, children develop an inner peace that sustains them through life’s challenges.

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A NEW PLAY PARADIGM

Social connection is the drive for cooperation with others founded on a sense of community and belonging.

We know that human beings do not survive without connection to others. Feeling a sense of belonging is crucial to our overall well-being. Starting first with parents and caregivers, infants immediately seek connection and develop strong bonds in order to feel loved and protected. It is these first most basic connections that give children the independence to explore the world around them, knowing that they have a safe base to which they can return. Therefore a child can be socially connected even when playing alone. Secure that they are part of a community, they can choose moments of independent play and exploration. Social connection is a pre-requisite for social competence, as it captures children’s more basic drive to connect with others and their cultural world—a drive that is reinforced by caring, trusting, and safe relationships with others. This natural drive to connect with others leads children to join other children in play, attempt to help others, and try to play harmoniously. Just as the love between infants and their parents cements a child’s ability to relate to others, social connection is the foundation upon which children build loving relationships with others.

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PLAY UNDER THREAT

If play is so essential to our overall well-being, why is it being overlooked in our schools, community centers, and neighborhoods? Due to a heavy focus on traditional academic instruction, the over-scheduling of extracurricular activities, the lack of safe, adult-supervised spaces to play, and the ubiquity of multimedia entertainment, opportunities for transformative play are continually diminishing. This issue is not unique to America. In a 2009 study, Singer, Singer, D’Agostino and Delong state that 2.400 mothers of young children across five continents reported that a decrease in free play time was whittling away their children’s experience of childhood. Deriving children access to transformative play experiences does them a great disservice. This is particularly true for children who have been exposed to trauma. Unfortunately, we know that fear destroys playfulness. According to a 1998 study conducted by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, millions of our nation’s children have experienced profound trauma, such as community violence, abuse, neglect, natural disasters, and extreme poverty. Trauma can cripple the development of young children, lead to negative long-term health consequences, and shorten life expectancy. Long-term stress such as community violence, conflict at home, and inadequate resources can undo a child’s sense of safety in the same way that natural disasters (e.g., hurricanes) and manmade disasters (e.g., war) can. And children need to feel safe to play.

Fortunately, children have an incredible ability to bounce back when they receive the support they need from the adults around them. Empowering, joyful play with sensitive, caring adults can help to restore what trauma violently strips from a child. If schools, hospitals, and social service agencies put playful engagement on the back burner, children, particularly those suffering from the impact of poverty and trauma, will miss out on essential opportunities to engage in transformative play and build the resilience they need to meet life’s challenges.

TRANSFORMING HEALTH, EDUCATION AND WELL-BEING

A new understanding of play’s essential role in the health, education and well-being of children is needed among all whose work supports children’s development. Further, this understanding must lead to new practices that integrate transformative play into child care and early education. This work is already underway through the efforts of the Life is good Playmakers, whose methods offer a model for strengthening children through play. The Playmakers work directly with the caregivers and frontline staff who are dedicated to teaching, protecting and nurturing our children. Through training, support, consultation, and partnership, the Playmakers help caregivers and educators to recognize their approach to care and education, creating more joyful, engaged, socially-connected environments and relationships that strengthen children’s healthy development. While this approach benefits all children, it has been shown to have a measurably positive impact on the psychosocial development of children who have been exposed to early childhood trauma — a population that grows by an alarming five million new children each year. (For further reading regarding childhood trauma and development, see our study, “Life is good Playmakers on the Gulf Coast”)

In addition to improving individual classrooms and centers, the Life is good Playmakers are undertaking broader initiatives and collaborations that point the way to more systemic change. One initiative involves partnering with an entire urban school district to transform classroom environments and the existing academic curriculum through integrated, cooperative play activities designed to build social and emotional competencies and foster safe, caring, learning communities. Another initiative involves helping a state agency transform its extended day treatment facilities state-wide. Through structured group play, children in these facilities experience joy, connection and opportunities to take powerful actions for themselves that help them replace feelings of fear and helplessness experienced in the wake of trauma with feelings of safety and competence. In yet another initiative, the Life is good Playmakers have collaborated with the Latino Health Institute, revamping care at facilities for unaccompanied minors across the nation to help the organization shift from a detention center model to a model that provides support, connection, and healing.

The work of the Life is good Playmakers in these larger endeavors and in hundreds of Head Starts, community centers, public schools and other organizations, provides a workable approach to transforming systems that suffer from what we have deemed a serious Playfulness Deficiency Disorder. This PDD has a profound negative impact on the health, education and well-being of our children. All involved in children’s welfare have an opportunity — and a responsibility — to create more joyful, loving, empowering and inspiring systems of care and education, especially for our most vulnerable children. As we look to the future, we envision a world where thousands of adults embody and apply a playful approach to their work with children so that all involved — adults and children — lead healthier, more joyful lives. Playfulness and play will no longer be taken for granted, and schools and other systems of care will become inspiring places where children can develop their best selves and reach their full potential.
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LIFE CAN HURT. PLAY CAN HEAL.
LIFE IS GOOD PLAYMAKERS ON THE GULF COAST

Study demonstrates powerful impact of play on children’s recovery from trauma
THE IMPACT OF TRAUMA ON CHILDREN

“Over two-thirds of American children and adolescents reported experiencing a traumatic event by the time they turned 16. The life expectancy of adults who experience six or more types of abuse or household dysfunction as children is reduced by nearly twenty years.”

Images of violence, war, and natural disasters regularly bombard us. Since news reporting typically focuses on breaking news, today’s human tragedy is too often eclipsed by tomorrow’s compelling calamity. Rarely do we consider the long-term consequences that traumatic events and circumstances have on the survivors, and especially on children—the most vulnerable of victims. The result is that the most serious health crisis for our nation’s children remains largely invisible.

In a recent epidemiological study, over two-thirds of American children and adolescents reported experiencing a traumatic event by the time they turned 16. Psychologists define trauma as an extremely threatening experience that compromises a person’s ability to cope. Often trauma is divided into two categories. The first, acute trauma, refers to individual, large-scale events such as school shootings, natural disasters, and terrorist attacks, or to single incidents such as physical assault. The second, chronic trauma, refers to long-term, repeated situations such as ongoing long-term physical/sexual abuse, community violence or extreme poverty. This second category has devastating consequences. According to a large-scale epidemiological study conducted by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the life expectancy of adults who experienced six or more types of abuse or household dysfunction as children was reduced by nearly twenty years while those who suffered fewer types of trauma lost fewer years of life.

The experience of trauma can also have a profound negative impact on a child’s healthy development. Researchers have found that children who experience trauma often remain in a constant state of alarm, even when the danger is long gone. Basic assumptions that children make about the world, such as “I am safe” and “I am in control,” are often replaced with overwhelming feelings of fear and helplessness. Very young children are particularly vulnerable. The young, developing brain is highly sensitive to stress and will not fully develop emotional, social, and cognitive capacity if the child is continuously responding to threats during the first few years of life. Consumed by fear and powerlessness, traumatized children stop playing, connecting with others, and experiencing joy in the world around them. In the absence of intervention, the impact of early childhood trauma often has devastating long-term effects on their psychological and physical health.
Images of violence, war, and natural disasters regularly bombard us. Since news reporting typically focuses on breaking news, today’s human tragedy is too often eclipsed by tomorrow’s compelling calamity. Rarely do we consider the long-term consequences that traumatic events and circumstances have on the survivors, and especially on children—the most vulnerable of victims. The result is that the most serious health crisis for our nation’s children remains largely invisible.

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POTENTIAL FOR HEALING

Here’s the good news: The sensitivity of young, developing brains also means that young children have an impressive ability to ‘bounce back’ when they receive support from adults who care about them. Interventions centered on play are especially promising in this regard. During childhood, our brain grows through play. Play is the medium through which children explore, learn, connect, and joyfully engage with the surrounding world. It is an essential activity through which children form healthy attachments, discover the world around them, and develop a foundation of competence, self-worth, and joy that can impact them for a lifetime.

Recognizing the power of play to address this childhood health crisis, the Life is Good Kids Foundation and its action arm, Life is good Playmakers, have made a long-term commitment to reach as many children as possible. By giving these child care professionals the support and resources to find their own joy, increase their sense of community and connectedness, and empower them in the healing of children through play, their own social and emotional strength is shored up. And through a constructive cyclical process, the children’s own social and emotional strength is bolstered by their caregiver’s renewed joyfulness.

The healing power of play is not limited to children. When communities experience trauma, the men and women who work with children on the front lines every day are just as vulnerable to distress as the children and families they serve. By giving these child care professionals the support and resources to find their own joy, increase their sense of community and connectedness, and empower them in the healing of children through play, their own social and emotional strength is shored up. And through a constructive cyclical process, the children’s own social and emotional strength is bolstered by their caregiver’s renewed joyfulness.

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THE GULF COAST

Along Mississippi’s Gulf Coast, rates of extreme child-hood poverty have been among the highest in the country for decades. These long-standing issues of poverty and hardship were severely compounded when Hurricane Katrina, one of the most devastating disasters in U.S. history, hit its coastal communities in August 2005. Due to the intensity of the storm and the painfully slow recovery, Katrina has caused both acute trauma and chronic complex trauma amongst children, their families, and the community at large.

The catastrophic damage caused by Katrina left towns underwater, neighborhoods destroyed, and schools closed. Families already struggling with poverty lost everything. In the five years since the storm, researchers have documented the impact that Hurricane Katrina had and continues to have on the mental health of children on the Gulf Coast. Up to 50% of young children whose homes had been destroyed met criteria for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder following the storm. Three years after Katrina, over 25% of children continued to report post-traumatic stress symptoms and/or depression. Typically, symptoms of depression and post-traumatic stress disorder dissipate 9 to 14 months following the traumatic event. However, when there is continued disruption in the child’s family or community, the symptoms often persist and can even increase.

In the years following Katrina, many parents have struggled to find work, pay bills, replace what was lost, and hold on to what little they have left. Preschool teachers in hard hit areas of the Gulf Coast often face similar concerns in their own homes. Unfortunately, children are not immune to their parents and their caregivers’ feelings of anxiety, depression, and despair.

Despite the high rates of early childhood trauma in areas affected by the storm, there were few resources available to address the mental health needs of these young children. Following Katrina, staff at the Early Childhood Institute at Mississippi State University (MSU) realized that their own efforts needed to focus on the social and emotional healing of the Gulf Coast’s young children. Searching for an intervention that could make a difference, Pam Motley, a children’s social and emotional development specialist, discovered Project Joy. She contacted its founder, Steve Gross, to learn more about the organization’s capabilities. Their discussions led to a major intervention that has had a profound impact on all involved.
Recognizing the power of play to address this childhood health crisis, the Life is good Kids Foundation and its action arm, Life is good Playmakers, have made a long-term commitment to help children overcome life-threatening challenges. In order to reach as many children as possible, Life is good Playmakers (formerly known as Project Joy) work with adults who are on the front lines of early childhood care: preschool teachers and childcare providers. By providing training, resources and ongoing support for these teachers, Life is good Playmakers aim to help teachers heal their children by infusing their classrooms with joyful play, a sense of belonging, and opportunities for self-expression and empowerment.

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Additional post-traumatic stress symptoms and/or depression.

Yet even three years after Katrina, 25% of children continued to report post-traumatic stress symptoms and/or depression.
In the two years following Katrina, Project Joy trained hundreds of preschool teachers to use a play-based, group intervention named Powerplay. These teachers were then able to implement the program with thousands of children in the Mississippi Gulf Coast region. During a fifteen-week curriculum, teachers engaged their students each week. Powerplay session are divided into four parts:

- **THE WARM-UP:** These activities allow children to become grounded in the play experience and build a sense of community.

- **THE STORY:** Children are read and shown a picture book with stories that emphasize such themes as diversity, altruism, empowerment, belonging, and cooperation.

- **THE BIG GAME:** Children engage in a cooperative game that allows them to actively take part in that story while exercising critical gross motor skills such as balancing, jumping and catching.

- **THE COOL DOWN:** During these activities, children self-regulate through slow, deep breaths, celebrate accomplishments, and prepare for the transition to a different activity.

Each Powerplay session is designed to build self-esteem, promote a sense of belonging and connectedness, develop self-regulation skills, and provide feelings of joy. Through structured group play, children have the opportunity to take effective, powerful action and in doing so, replace the feelings of fear and helplessness experienced in the wake of trauma with feelings of safety and competence.

The Early Childhood Institute at MSU decided to collect data on the Powerplay program in order to assess its efficacy in helping to heal preschool children exposed to trauma. For the research study, ten teachers from ten different classrooms along the Gulf Coast participated in the curriculum and ten teachers from another ten classrooms served as a ‘control group.’ Control group teachers were placed on a waitlist and participated in the trainings after the study had ended. Participating teachers attended a two-day training, received play kit equipment for the classroom (e.g., a parachute, balls, discs, scarves), led their six-student groups through the fifteen-week curriculum, and received regular support from the Early Childhood Institute. To measure the impact of the curriculum on the children’s social-emotional well-being, all the teachers in the study completed assessments of the children’s social and emotional health before the training and approximately one week after the curriculum was finished.

Before the training began, children in the Powerplay classrooms demonstrated slightly lower levels of ‘general adaptation’ (social-emotional health) than the children in the control classrooms. Over the fifteen week period, children in the control classroom improved slightly. In contrast, children participating in Powerplay improved significantly. In fact, participating children not only showed significantly greater improvement than the control classrooms, they ended the fifteen week period with better social-emotional well-being overall.
A JOYFUL SOLUTION

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RESEARCH STUDY AT A GLANCE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># OF TEACHERS:</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTERVENTION GROUP (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONTROL GROUP (10)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># OF CHILDREN:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTERVENTION GROUP (55)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONTROL GROUP (56)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

THE MEASURE: SOCIAL COMPETENCE / BEHAVIOR EVALUATION - PRESCHOOL EDITION (SCBE-80)

THE RESEARCH AND ITS FINDINGS

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CHANGES IN SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLNESS

![Graph showing changes in social and emotional wellness between pre-curriculum and post-curriculum for Powerplay classrooms and control classrooms.](image)
The research and its findings cont.

Researchers often use effect sizes to determine whether a difference between two groups is ‘statistically significant.’ As a standard rule of thumb, effect sizes of 0.20 are considered small, 0.50 are considered medium, and 0.80 and above are considered large. All of the social-emotional scales showed the same pattern: both groups improved, but the children in the Powerplay classrooms improved significantly more than the control classrooms with effect sizes ranging from 0.61 (medium) to 0.98 (large). Children participating in Powerplay became significantly less depressive, anxious, angry, isolated, aggressive, and oppositional. And they became significantly more joyful, pro-social, and independent. Below are the effect sizes for each scale:

**Effect Sizes for Each Scale**

- **Depressive**
  - Small: 0.50
  - Medium: 0.80
  - Large: 1.00

- **Anxious**
  - Small: 0.50
  - Medium: 0.80
  - Large: 1.00

- **Angry**
  - Small: 0.50
  - Medium: 0.80
  - Large: 1.00

- **Isolated**
  - Small: 0.50
  - Medium: 0.80
  - Large: 1.00

- **Aggressive**
  - Small: 0.50
  - Medium: 0.80
  - Large: 1.00

- **Egotistical**
  - Small: 0.50
  - Medium: 0.80
  - Large: 1.00

- **Oppositional**
  - Small: 0.50
  - Medium: 0.80
  - Large: 1.00

- **Dependent**
  - Small: 0.50
  - Medium: 0.80
  - Large: 1.00

**Implications and Future Research**

These preliminary findings tell us that the approach used by Life is good Playmakers can provide teachers with powerful tools for healing in the preschool classroom. Following trauma, children need a safe space in which they can rediscover their own natural ability to successfully explore, connect with those around them, and find joy. Through joyful play, children experience greater connection with their teachers and their peers, they develop a sense of confidence and mastery, and they learn to express their feelings in a healthy, productive way. Life is good Playmakers support teachers by providing them with the tools to restore their own playfulness and bring that playfulness to the classroom. Exuding their own joy, teachers are then able to nurture each child’s innate resilience and undo the destructive impact of trauma. Using play, teachers can put children whose development has been sidelined by trauma back on track.

Bolstered by these promising findings, the Life is good Kids Foundation is committed to greater levels of funding and expansion of its action arm. Life is good Playmakers. In addition, the organization will pursue further research to understand the impact that such interventions have on the teachers and children they serve. Through practice and research, the Life is good Kids Foundation is optimistic that its play-based approach and tools can be more widely shared and used by child care professionals, leading to progress on the most significant health crisis facing America’s children.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Effect Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Depressive</td>
<td>0.60 (small)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxious</td>
<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angry</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isolated</td>
<td>0.50 (medium)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egotistical</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppositional</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependent</td>
<td>0.80 (large)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joyful</td>
<td>0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secure</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tolerant</td>
<td>0.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrated</td>
<td>0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calm</td>
<td>0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prosocial</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomous</td>
<td>0.50</td>
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</table>

### IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

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LIFE CAN HURT. PLAY CAN HEAL.

REFERENCES


9 Kronenberg et al. (2010)


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Email: info@ligplaymakers.org       Phone: 617.266.4569       Web: www.ligplaymakers.org       All photos courtesy of Aimee Corrigan
How persistent fear and anxiety can affect young children’s learning, behaviour and health

Evidence from neuroscience is increasingly helping us to understand exactly how fear and anxiety in childhood — such as that occasioned by exposure to violence in the family — shape the young child’s developing brain, with lasting effects on learning and development. In this article Professors Nathan A. Fox and Jack P. Shonkoff review the evidence and its implications for public policy.

Ensuring that young children have safe, secure environments in which to grow, learn, and develop healthy brains and bodies is not only good for the children themselves but also builds a strong foundation for a prosperous, just, and sustainable society. That said, science shows that early exposure to violence and other circumstances that produce persistent fear and chronic anxiety can have lifelong consequences by disrupting the developing architecture of the brain. While some of these experiences are one-time events and others may reoccur or persist over time, all of them have the potential to affect how children learn, solve problems, relate to others, and contribute to their community.

All children experience fears during childhood, including fear of the dark, monsters and strangers. These fears are normal aspects of development and are temporary in nature. In contrast, threatening circumstances that persistently elicit fear and anxiety predict significant risk for adverse long-term outcomes from which children do not recover easily. Physical, sexual or emotional abuse; significant maltreatment of one parent by the other; and the persistent threat of violence in the community are examples of such threatening circumstances.

Unfortunately, many children are exposed to these kinds of experiences. Child maltreatment has been shown to occur most often in families that face excessive levels of stress, such as that associated with community violence, parental drug abuse, or significant social isolation (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009). Research also tells us that nearly half of children living in poverty in the United States witness violence, or are indirectly victims of violence (Finkelhor et al., 2005). Globally, despite more limited data, the risks are as bad or worse. In 2006, the United Nations Secretary-General’s Study on Violence against Children reported that more than 130 million children have witnessed intimate partner violence in the home, and over 200 million have suffered some form of sexual abuse. For children living in such circumstances, frequent and repetitive threats create the potential for heightened fear and chronic anxiety.

Behavioural neuroscience research in animals tells us that serious, fear-triggering experiences elicit physiological responses that affect the architecture of the developing brain.
Chronic activation of the body’s stress response systems has been shown to disrupt the efficiency of brain circuitry and lead to both immediate and long-term problems in learning, behaviour, and both physical and mental health. This is especially true when stress-system overload occurs during sensitive periods of early brain development. Despite this rapidly increasing knowledge base, however, significant gaps continue to exist in how societies respond to the developmental needs of children who regularly experience serious, fear-inducing events.

The science of fear and anxiety

Some types of fear are normal aspects of development. Infants begin to experience feelings of fear and differentiate them from other emotions between 6 and 12 months of age (Lewis and Michelson, 1983; Nelson and De Haan, 1996). Over the course of the early childhood period, toddlers and pre-schoolers typically express fear of a wide variety of events or individuals. Generally speaking, normal pre-school fears do not disrupt a child’s life, and they dissipate by age 7 or 8. That is, while children may express these fears at certain times (such as bedtime) or in response to certain events (for example, when confronted by a stranger), their overall behaviour does not otherwise suggest that they are generally fearful or distressed.

The emergence and course of typical childhood fears are different from the fears and anxiety elicited by traumatic situations such as physical or sexual abuse or exposure to family violence. While typical fears disappear with age, the fear and anxiety elicited by maltreatment and other threatening circumstances do not. Scientific research provides an explanation for why children outgrow normative fears. Many result from the difficulty young children have in distinguishing between the real and the imaginary. As they get older, children get better at understanding what is real and what it means for something to be ‘make believe’. They also develop the cognitive and social skills needed to better understand predictability in their environment and, therefore, gain a greater sense of control.

Early exposure to extremely fearful events affects the developing brain, particularly in those areas involved in emotions and learning. A large and growing body of research, including animal studies as well as recent neuroimaging studies of human adults, has revealed groundbreaking insights into the brain circuitry that underlies how we learn to be afraid (Phelps and LeDoux, 2005; Delgado et al., 2006) and how we come to associate a specific event or experience with negative outcomes. Two extensively studied structures located deep in the brain – the amygdala and the hippocampus – are involved in fear conditioning. The amygdala detects whether a stimulus, person or event is threatening and the
hippocampus links the fear response to the context in which the aversive stimulus or threatening event occurred (LeDoux, 2000; LeDoux and Phelps, 2008; Kim and Fanselow, 1992). Studies also show that both the amygdala and the hippocampus play an important role in how the body then responds to this threat. Elevated stress hormones such as cortisol have been shown to affect the growth and performance of the hippocampus and the activity of the amygdala in rodents and non-human primates, and early and persistent activation of the stress response system adversely affects brain architecture in these critical regions.

Beyond its impact on these two brain structures, heightened stress has also been shown in animals to impair the development of the prefrontal cortex, the brain region that, in humans, is critical for the emergence of executive functions – a cluster of abilities such as making, following and altering plans; controlling and focusing attention; inhibiting impulsive behaviours; and developing the ability to remember and incorporate new information in decision making. These skills continue to develop and become increasingly important throughout the school years and into adulthood. Behavioural neuroscience research in animals tells us that the prefrontal cortex is highly sensitive to the detrimental effects of excessive stress exposure and that its developing architecture is vulnerable to the negative effects of chronic fear (Arnsten, 2009).

When young children experience serious fear-triggering events, they learn to associate that fear with the context and conditions that accompanied it. Very young children can actually learn to be fearful through a process called ‘fear conditioning,’ which is strongly connected to the development of later anxiety disorders (Grillon and Morgan, 1999; Pine, 1999). In the typical circumstances of early childhood, fear responses are activated quickly and then dissipate. However, when young children are chronically exposed to perceived or real threat, such as ongoing violence in the family environment, fear-system activation can be prolonged. Conditioned fear is apparent when individuals come to experience and express fear within the context in which the learning occurred. For example, a child who is physically abused by an adult may become anxious in response to both the person and the place where the fear learning occurred. Over time, the fear elicited and the consequent anxiety can become generalised, and subsequent fear responses may be elicited by other people and places that bear sometimes only small resemblances to the original conditions of trauma. Consequently, for young children who perceive the world as a threatening place, a wide range of conditions can trigger anxious behaviours that then impair their ability to learn and to interact socially with others. The extent to which these problems affect physical and mental health is influenced by the frequency
of the stressful exposure and/or the emotional intensity of the fear-eliciting event.

**Unlearning fear is a fundamentally different process from fear learning.**

The process of unlearning conditioned fear is called ‘extinction’ and actually involves physically separate and distinct areas of the brain's architecture from those into which fear responses are first incorporated. Generally speaking, the unlearning process involves activity in the prefrontal cortex, which decreases the fear response by regulating the activity of the amygdala (Quirk et al., 2006; Phelps et al., 2004). Research tells us that fears are not just passively forgotten over time, they must be actively unlearned. Studies show that fear learning can occur relatively early in life (Sullivan et al., 2000), whereas fear unlearning is only achieved later, when certain structures in the brain have matured (Carew and Rudy, 1991; Kim and Richardson, 2008). Consequently, the effects of family violence in early childhood can have a significant impact on physical and mental health that can take years to remediate – something that is extremely important to understand in designing interventions for children and families who are experiencing violence.

**Chronic and intense fear early in life affects the development of the stress response system and influences the processing of emotional memories** (Sanchez et al., 2001; Nemeroff, 2004). When an individual is confronted with a threat, stress systems are activated and elevate the levels of several different stress chemicals that are circulating throughout the body (McEwen, 2007). An increase in one of those chemicals, cortisol, can have a dramatic impact on how memories are processed and stored (de Kloet et al., 2008). The production of cortisol and adrenalin (as well as noradrenaline in the brain) in a normal stress response leads to memory formation for events and places that signify danger. More specifically, elevated cortisol levels can strengthen the formation of memories of emotional events (McGaugh et al., 2006), block the ability to unlearn fear memories (Yang et al., 2007), and enhance the formation of memories of the surrounding context in which the fearful event occurred (Brinks et al., 2008). Interestingly, too much cortisol can also have the opposite effect and actually impair memory and learning in non-threatening contexts (Roozendaal et al., 2009). Thus, the biological response to stress is intimately involved in both fear learning and unlearning.

**Persistent fear can distort how a child perceives and responds to threat.**

Fear learning typically takes place in specific contexts and results in those fears becoming associated with the places where the learning occurred. Children may also express fear in response to situations that are similar (not identical) to those initially learned or to situations that are similar to the contexts in which the original learning occurred. These are called ‘generalised’ fear responses, and they are thought to underlie the expression of later anxiety disorders, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Grillon and Morgan, 1999; Grillon, 2002; Davis, 2006). Indeed, children who have had chronic and intense fearful experiences often lose the capacity to differentiate between threat and safety. This impairs their ability to learn and interact with others, because they frequently perceive threat in familiar social circumstances, such as in their home or neighbourhood. These responses inhibit their ability to learn and often lead to serious anxiety disorders (Grillon et al., 1998; Reeb-Sutherland et al., 2009).

Young children who have been exposed to traumatic circumstances
How persistent fear and anxiety can affect young children’s learning, behaviour and health

While typical fears disappear with age (for example, when confronted by a stranger), the fear and anxiety elicited by maltreatment and other threatening circumstances do not.

Photo: Peter de Ruiter/Bernard van Leer Foundation

also have difficulty identifying and responding to different expressions of emotions and, therefore, have trouble forming healthy relationships (Wismer Fries et al., 2005). These deficits lead to general problems with social interaction, such as understanding others’ facial expressions and emotions. For example, children raised in physically abusive households show heightened sensitivity (compared with non-abused children) to angry faces, which negatively affects their brain function and behaviour (Pollak and Kistler, 2002; Pollak et al., 2000). Learning to identify anger – quickly and successfully – in order to avoid being harmed is a highly adaptive and appropriate response to an abusive environment. However, an increased tendency to assume someone is angry when his or her facial expression is ambiguous can be inappropriate and maladaptive in a typical, non-threatening social setting and even dangerous in unfamiliar social settings (Pollak, 2008). Thus, the extent to which children view the world as a hostile and threatening place can be viewed as both a logical adaptation to an abusive or violent environment and a potent risk factor for behaviour problems in later childhood, adolescence and adult life.

Early exposure to intense or persistent fear-triggering events affects children’s ability to learn. There is extensive and growing scientific evidence that prolonged and/or excessive exposure to
fear and states of anxiety can cause levels of stress that can impair early learning and adversely affect later performance in school, the workplace and the community. Multiple studies in humans have documented problems in cognitive control and learning as a result of toxic stress (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2005; Shonkoff et al., 2009). These findings have been strengthened by research evidence from non-human primates and rodents that is expanding our understanding of the brain mechanisms underlying these difficulties.

The brain region in animals that appears highly vulnerable to adversity in this regard is the prefrontal cortex, which is the critical area for regulating thought, emotions, and actions as well as for keeping information readily accessible during the process of active learning. For example, researchers have found that elevations in brain chemicals like noradrenaline, an important neurotransmitter, can impair functions that are controlled by the prefrontal region by altering the activity of neurons in that area of the brain. In a related fashion, humans experiencing chronic stress have been shown to perform poorly on tasks related to prefrontal cortex functioning (such as working memory or shifting attention) and their ability to control their emotions is typically impaired (Arnsten, 2009).

**Implications for policy and practice**

Many policymakers, educators, and even medical professionals are unaware of the potentially significant, long-term risks to children of exposure to fear-provoking circumstances – including family violence – and lack information about the prevalence of these situations in their communities. This can lead to widespread misconceptions of how children experience and respond to fear.

The scientific knowledge around fear and anxiety points to three important implications:

- **Youth** can perceive threat in their environment but, unlike adults, they do not have the cognitive or physical capacities to regulate their psychological response, reduce the threat, or remove themselves from the threatening situation. As a result, serious fear-triggering events such as family violence can have significant and long-lasting impacts on the developing child, beginning in infancy.

- **Children do not naturally outgrow early learned fear responses over time.** If young children are exposed to persistent fear and excessive threat during particularly sensitive periods in the developmental process, they may not develop healthy patterns of threat/stress regulation. When they occur, these disruptions do not naturally disappear.

- **Simply removing a child from a dangerous environment will not by itself undo the serious consequences or reverse the negative impacts of early fear learning.** Children who have been traumatised need to be in responsive and secure environments that restore their sense of safety, control, and predictability – and supportive interventions are needed to assure the provision of these environments.

As a result, it is important for policies and programmes to take into account children’s developmental needs, beginning in early infancy, particularly focusing more attention on preventing persistent fear and anxiety.

Children who live in violent homes or communities have been shown to have more behaviour problems, greater evidence of post-traumatic stress disorder, and increased physical symptoms such as headaches and stomach aches, as well as lower capacity for empathy and diminished self-esteem (Huth-Bocks et al., 2001). Programmes focused on the reduction of domestic violence, substance abuse, neighbourhood violence and poverty are examples of the kinds of community-based services whose impacts could be enhanced by incorporating targeted interventions to explicitly address the emotional needs of young children living under these conditions. When delivered effectively, such interventions could have a multiplier effect into the next generation by reducing both the individual and societal costs of the negative developmental effects of persistent fear, including mental health impairments, antisocial behaviour, physical disease and violent crime.
Treating traumatized children

Five years after Katrina, new data are illuminating the best ways to help children after natural disasters.

By Rebecca A. Clay, American Psychological Association, July/August 2010, Vol 41, No. 7

When Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans, psychologist Joy D. Osofsky, PhD, lost her office and had to provide her services aboard a cruise ship that had been pressed into duty to house first responders. Despite Osofsky’s own losses, what haunts her are the children she encountered aboard the boat.

One family was more upset about the closing of the daughter’s school than the loss of their home and a job. A set of grandparents was alarmed by the sudden hyperactivity of their grandson, a boy who had been separated from his family and landed in three homes in as many weeks. A teenager revealed he had spent weeks convinced his parents were dead. “It gives me chills every time I think about that story,” says Osofsky, a professor of pediatrics and psychiatry at Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center.

But in addition to these memories, the experience gave Osofsky a new understanding of how to meet the needs of children and adolescents after a disaster. Now she and other psychologists are using lessons learned during Katrina’s aftermath to inform the response to future disasters. They’re collecting data on Katrina’s youngest victims that suggest how children in disasters elsewhere will fare. And they’re exploring how lessons learned after Katrina may contribute to the global understanding of disaster response.

A growing sophistication

Psychologists’ understanding of disasters’ impact on children has become more sophisticated in recent years, says Annette M. La Greca, PhD, a University of Miami psychology and pediatrics professor and co-editor of “Helping Children Cope with Disasters and Terrorism” (APA, 2002). Until relatively recently, she says, psychologists in the United States assumed children’s post-disaster distress was fleeting.

“When we started work after Hurricane Andrew in 1992, it wasn’t clear whether children had any significant reaction,” says La Greca, who chaired APA’s 2008 Presidential Task Force on PTSD and Trauma in Children and Adolescents. Because of storm-related disruptions, it took three months before La Greca and her colleagues could conduct their first assessment. “Even we thought that was probably too late, that children would already be settling back into their routines and be fine.”
That assumption turned out to be false. La Greca’s research after Hurricanes Andrew and Charley and more recent findings by psychologists tracking children post-Katrina have shown that while most children are resilient, many do have significant reactions. And it can take a long time to recover.

In a study of 7,258 Katrina-affected children published in 2009 in the *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* (Vol. 79, No. 2), for example, Osofsky found that half the children surveyed in the 2005–06 school year had symptoms of post-traumatic stress and depression severe enough to meet the cut-off for referral to mental health services. The following year, the number was still high, with 41 percent meeting the criteria.

Four years out, says Osofsky, the number is still a little high but dropping.

“According to the disaster literature, after three years, the percentage should be pretty much back at the normal level,” she says. “We’re still a little above normal.”

That’s to be expected, she says, given the magnitude of disaster Katrina brought. And Osofsky attributes the drop in part to the lack of subsequent serious hurricanes. Children in earthquake-wracked Chile, Haiti and China may not be so lucky because aftershocks can stir up feelings of trauma again, warns Osofsky, who is working with Chilean psychologists and other members of the country’s disaster response field.

Certain factors put children at greater risk. In a study published in 2009 in the *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* (Vol. 48, No. 11), researchers found that death of a loved one had the strongest association with serious emotional disturbances in children who had lived in New Orleans before Katrina. For the rest of the sample, exposure to physical adversity, such as the destruction of homes and schools or the loss of possessions or pets, was the biggest predictor of problems. Poverty and parents with mental health problems also increased children’s risk.

Those findings may have implications for children in low-income countries, says co-author John A. Fairbank, PhD, co-director of the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration-sponsored National Center for Child Traumatic Stress at Duke University Medical Center.

“If you think about children who have a high level of exposure to a disaster, live in an economically challenged situation and have parents who are struggling with the ability to provide and function, it’s logical these children would be at high risk of developing serious emotional disturbances,” he says. “We should be paying very close attention to how they’re doing and mobilizing resources to provide assistance.”
Lessons learned

When asked what advice they would give to psychologists and other responders in other recent disaster sites, disaster-response researchers offer several suggestions:

- **Acknowledge children’s distress.** Even today, says La Greca, “parents underestimate children’s levels of distress.” Since parental support can mitigate that distress, she says, lack of awareness can have serious consequences. To help parents understand what their children are going through and help them work through issues together, La Greca has created free guides, including *After the Storm: A Guide to Help Children Cope with the Psychological Effects of a Hurricane*. The manual has been translated into Spanish. Another widely disseminated, school-based manual is an earthquake-oriented version that has been translated into Japanese and Taiwanese. La Greca is working with the Australian government to create a version about bush fires.

- **Keep developmental stages in mind.** While all children need support, consistency and routine to get back on track, says Osofsky, different age groups have different reactions and needs. Adolescents’ needs are often neglected, she says, adding that Chile’s disaster response community is worried about substance abuse and other forms of risk-taking among teens. To forestall problems, Osofsky recommends focusing on strengths and putting adolescents to work helping others and rebuilding their communities.

- **Use schools as resources.** “Post-disaster, schools can be a means of helping children reclaim normalcy, routine and structure,” says Ryan P. Kilmer, PhD, a psychology professor at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte and co-editor of “Helping Families and Communities Recover from Disaster: Lessons Learned from Hurricane Katrina and its Aftermath” (APA, 2010). Kilmer offers the example of an East Baton Rouge Parish elementary school that reopened in Katrina’s immediate aftermath and focused on meeting students’ emotional needs and families’ practical needs. The principal also sought to develop a sense of community with parents and have the school serve as a central source of information and resources. To that end, the school hired a full-time parent liaison, for example, who helped communicate with parents, held events for them and worked to increase their awareness of supports and services in the area. The school also capitalized on partnerships in the community to host informational and resource fairs to help families learn about academic and social services, as well as help available from federal agencies and others. The approach worked, says Kilmer. Although many students entered the school a grade or two behind, he says, they demonstrated significant gains. Many reached grade level academic functioning or better. “We have to make sure we don’t just attend to the three Rs,” he says. “Even in this time of high-stakes tests, the principal recognized the need to focus on kids’ psychological needs first.”

- **Be aware of ancillary consequences.** Disasters can often set into motion a cascade of problems for children. One area that La Greca is exploring is how disasters affect children’s physical health. “We’re finding that children have much more sedentary behavior if they’ve
been affected by a hurricane,” she says. “Neighborhoods may be unsafe because they’re full of debris, and children may have lost possessions like bikes and rollerskates that keep them active.” Stress related to a disaster and recovery can also cause conflict or tensions in parents’ relationships that can eventually lead to separation or divorce and interfere with children’s support systems, adds La Greca.

- **Be sensitive to cultural differences.** Adapting interventions to specific cultural contexts is crucial, emphasizes Melissa J. Brymer, PhD, PsyD, director of terrorism and disaster programs at the National Center for Child Traumatic Stress at UCLA. Take American Samoa, where Brymer has been helping communities cope after the 2009 tsunami.

“Kids are struggling. Some of them lost a parent, some lost siblings, some lost homes,” says Brymer. Normally, psychologists and other mental health professionals would talk directly with the children, but that approach doesn’t work in American Samoa, where children aren’t supposed to speak in the presence of elders. Because of that cultural prohibition, says Brymer, counselors hoping to help kids must first introduce themselves to the village high chief, explain why their program is important and ask permission to meet with children separately. “That’s the only way the kids have the opportunity to talk,” says Brymer.

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