

DETROIT FREE PRESS CONFERENCE ON  
PREVENTING VIOLENCE AGAINST OUR  
CHILDREN

BY THE HONORABLE JANET RENO ATTORNEY GENERAL  
OF THE UNITED STATES

SOUTHFIELD CIVIL CENTER IN SOUTHFIELD, MICHIGAN  
MAY 28, 1993

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SPEECH BY JANET RENO,  
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES

taken at the Southfield Civic Center, Southfield,  
Michigan on May 28, 1993.

JANET RENO: Judge, thank you so much  
for that welcome and for 20 years of friendship  
and caring about children as much as anyone I  
know. Thank you all for a day that I won't  
forget. I have been to an elementary school. I  
have watched the faces of your children. I have  
met some wonderful people in this limited time I  
have been here, and I hope to come back.

In talking about violence, I start 15  
years ago when I became the State Attorney for  
Dade County. I wanted to focus on the violence  
of the career criminal and I wanted to still do  
anything I could to put those people away and  
keep them away so our communities can be safer.  
But I also wanted to start with our juvenile  
division and make it one of the best divisions in  
the office and focus attention on juvenile  
delinquents, and I did so.

But I came to realize that if we waited

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1 until a child was delinquent at 16 and 17, we  
2 would never have enough dollars to change that  
3 child's life and all of the children's similarly  
4 situated, and that we had to start early.

5 Working with our Dade County Grand  
6 Jury, we did a study on dropouts in the middle  
7 school and it quickly became apparent to me and  
8 the Grand Jury, as it reported, that it is too  
9 late, that a child in middle school two grades  
10 behind has already lost the self-esteem and  
11 regard that can enable them to catch up, and that  
12 we've got to start earlier. And so we started  
13 focusing on elementary schools and kindergarten  
14 and head starts. And I obviously began to  
15 realize that that was too late.

16 For doctors, as it was in Miami in  
17 1985, took me to our large public hospital to the  
18 neonatal unit as we discussed what should be done  
19 about crack involved moms and their babies. This  
20 was before we learned how to handle cracks babies  
21 and where to take them and what to do with them  
22 in terms of good instructive homes or at least  
23 what we can struggle to find. And so I saw crack  
24 involved babies in bassinets who had been there  
25 for six weeks, not held or talked to except when

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1 changed and fed; and they were beginning, there  
2 were no signs of real human responses where as a  
3 child in another part of the unit, severely  
4 deformed, crippled from birth with tubes coming  
5 out of everywhere was beginning to respond like a  
6 small human because the parents were there around  
7 the clock, loving and caring for that child.

8           And I started talking about the child  
9 with the experts and pediatricians, and I  
10 realized that we have got to look at the  
11 continuum of life as a whole. It became clear to  
12 me that violence, youth violence, drugs, teen  
13 pregnancy, youth gangs, all of this, was a  
14 symptom of a deeper problem in the society.

15           I think we face the greatest single  
16 crisis in American history since World War II;  
17 that is that too often in the last 30 to 40 years  
18 America has forgotten and neglected its  
19 children.

20           Each of us has tried to respond, the  
21 prosecutor in the juvenile division, the judge  
22 trying to set up new programs, the pediatrician  
23 trying to do something, but for too long we  
24 haven't talked together to understand the  
25 continuum of life as a whole, and to understand

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1 that no matter what a juvenile court judge does,  
2 there's got to be an investment upfront.

3 How do we get people to understand  
4 this? How do we get people to spend dollars  
5 upfront for our children? For a life, a  
6 continuum of life that involves both the child  
7 and the family with the look at the whole where  
8 discipline looks beyond their narrow field to the  
9 child and the family as a whole.

10 All of us have got to leave this  
11 auditorium today, and I'm sure that some of you  
12 have been doing it long before, and go beyond  
13 your now concentration to every business person  
14 you know explaining to them that unless we make  
15 investments in children from zero to three and  
16 five to thirteen and thirteen to twenty-one, we  
17 are not going to have a work force with the  
18 skills that can fill the jobs that can maintain  
19 America as a first rate nation.

20 And that business man may respond in  
21 terms of common humanity, but if he says he  
22 doesn't give a ham about children, tell him he  
23 better care because of his profits, but make him  
24 understand he has got to care.

25 And for the doctor who tells you he's.

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1 too busy to be worried about children because  
2 he's the wealthy physician in some community that  
3 doesn't have poor children, tell him that the  
4 health care system upon which he is dependent is  
5 going to be brought to its knees unless we make  
6 an early investment.

7 I as a prosecutor know that unless we  
8 make investment in children zero to three, we'll  
9 never ever be able to build enough prisons for  
10 them eighteen years from now.

11 And what about senior citizens, they  
12 used to tell me, Janet, I sent my son to college,  
13 I sent my granddaughter to college, I even helped  
14 to send my great grandson to college, I've done  
15 my duty. They have still got to talk to that  
16 legislature or that congressman, that public  
17 official when they come out to see them saying,  
18 look, I've done my duty but I've got to continue  
19 to do so or otherwise my pen won't be worth the  
20 paper it's written on if we don't have a work  
21 force that can maintain the economy.

22 And then if you still can't persuade  
23 them all, just explain to them that if we don't  
24 make the investment upfront, we're not going to  
25 have any money left because we will have wasted

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1 it in a wasteful reaction to prices that is not  
2 nearly as effective as a careful, thoughtful  
3 investment in the most important resource of this  
4 nation, its children.

5 If they tell you they still don't care,  
6 then tell them that they're going to be held up  
7 in their driveways when they come home from the  
8 grocery store.

9 How do we finance it, how do we  
10 understand that in a time of inordinately limited  
11 dollars at every level of government? First of  
12 all, we've got to figure out how we spend our  
13 dollars more wisely.

14 I will never forget the head of our  
15 largest public hospital in Miami standing before  
16 a task force I chaired testifying that the  
17 legislature and the governor had cut 20 million  
18 dollars from its budget, more than any other  
19 institution in Florida, but that he would gladly  
20 give all of those 20 million dollars if he could  
21 be assured that it would go upfront to prenatal  
22 care because for every dollar invested in  
23 prenatal care he would save three dollars within  
24 three years for health care costs related to low  
25 birth weights and other defects caused by lack of

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1 prenatal care.

2 We have got to develop community plans  
3 where all the community is linked together. Not  
4 just social workers link amongst themselves, not  
5 just educators linked amongst themselves, but  
6 everybody working together to put a stitch, a  
7 piece, a thread, back in the fabric of society  
8 that has got to surround these children if  
9 they're to grow as strong, instructive human  
10 beings.

11 The communities throughout America have  
12 got to take the incredible energy that abounds in  
13 every community and in every neighborhood and use  
14 it for good.

15 It's been exciting and fascinating to  
16 be in Washington these last three months. I  
17 never dreamed I would be in this position, and  
18 it's been like a little girl coming to town  
19 looking at the Capitol and you can't believe that  
20 you're there. And you think back in the  
21 depression and the war. Washington must have  
22 been one of the most exciting places in the world  
23 because it's incredibly exciting now.

24 But in the 70's, in the 60's and the  
25 70's the State Capitols were the incubators of

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1 good ideas. In the decade of the 90's,  
2 communities are the incubators because the  
3 Federal Government has pushed it down to the  
4 states; the states have pushed it down in the  
5 counties; the counties have pushed it to the  
6 communities, and the buck has stopped there; and  
7 the communities are responding showing America  
8 what you can do with the limited dollars that we  
9 have. We've got to do it better and weave the  
10 pieces together. The Federal Government has got  
11 to do better.

12 In Miami I went to meetings once a week  
13 at the neighborhood team office that we had  
14 developed. It was composed of a community of a  
15 friendly, highly respective police officer, a  
16 public health nurse and a social worker, and  
17 federal agencies would come, sit around the  
18 table. I used to sit there and think, gee, I  
19 wish I could do something about it, I wish I were  
20 somebody in Washington, because here would be  
21 somebody who would improve, here would be  
22 somebody from HUD, here would be somebody from  
23 the XYZ and somebody from the DBD, and they  
24 didn't know each other's programs or how they  
25 interrelated or how you could waiver from one to

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1 the other or what to do.

2 I come to Washington and the most  
3 heartening thing that I see happening is that the  
4 secretaries, the cabinet level secretaries are  
5 all talking together trying to develop a cohesion  
6 in which we can go out to the communities of  
7 America and respond to community needs. And I  
8 think the Federal Government has got to  
9 understand that the strengths come from the  
10 communities. The time is over where the Federal  
11 Government says we know best and we're going to  
12 tell you how to use this grant money and you've  
13 got -- if you're going to use our dollars, you  
14 got to use it the way we say because we know more  
15 about your community than you do. The time has  
16 come when the communities will come up and say  
17 these are our needs, work together because of the  
18 limited dollars.

19 We've got to become adept at showing  
20 corporate sponsors and businesses throughout  
21 America how it will be in their best interest to  
22 let us leverage dollars from the private sector  
23 and foundations and more Federal money.

24 We've got to explain to the Federal  
25 Government that you can't run an operation if

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1 they give you money for one year and you don't  
 2 know whether there is money coming from the next  
 3 year. And we've got to let them know that you  
 4 can't solve the critical problems that exist  
 5 within our communities in one year; it's going to  
 6 take at least five so let's develop funding  
 7 streams and partnerships that can give us the  
 8 chance to show what works and get it done.

9           With these concepts in mind, I think it  
 10 is imperative that these partnerships throughout  
 11 America develop one common theme, that you're  
 12 never going to solve a total child's problem with  
 13 one intervention at one place. You're going to  
 14 have to make effective interventions every step  
 15 of the way, and to do that we need to develop in  
 16 this partnership between community and the  
 17 Federal Government, a national agenda just for  
 18 children; that first of all says that parents  
 19 should be old enough, wise enough and financially  
 20 able enough to take care of their children. We  
 21 can do something about teen pregnancies. Some  
 22 people throw up their hands but other people are  
 23 doing something about it, and for every teen  
 24 pregnancy we prevent, we give a child a stronger,  
 25 healthier future in a couple of years and we give

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1 a teenager a stronger, healthier future.

2 Let's look at the fathers, that age  
3 group of eighteen to thirty that maybe have one  
4 or two or three prior arrest records and  
5 conviction records; that at age twenty-five or  
6 twenty-six our wanting to get off on the right  
7 foot. They've been drug free for a year, they  
8 are trying like the devil but they can't get jobs  
9 because nobody will give a recovering addict a  
10 job, particularly if he has two or three prior  
11 records.

12 We have got to develop programs that  
13 give the people in this age group a chance to get  
14 off on the right foot if we're ever to solve the  
15 problem. There are remarkable programs of the  
16 young fathers coming out of prisons having had  
17 parenting skills courses in the prison. Let's  
18 start looking at who the parents are and give  
19 them in our classrooms the parenting skills  
20 necessary to raise children the right way.

21 We require all sorts of things for  
22 graduation, from probably the most important  
23 thing we could require is teaching how to take  
24 care of your children. But no matter, whether we  
25 don't have enough dollars or enough programs, the

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1 one thing we've got to do for poor children and  
2 rich children alike is free up parents' time to  
3 be with their children.

4 I remember my afternoons after school  
5 in the summertime. My mother worked in the home,  
6 my father worked downtown. My mother taught us  
7 to play baseball, to bake a cake, to appreciate  
8 Beethoven symphony, she taught us her favorite  
9 poetry, she spanked us hard, she loved us with  
10 all her heart, and there this is no child care in  
11 the world that will ever be a substitute for what  
12 that lady was in our life.

13 And when I looked at a young woman in  
14 my office at home in Miami struggled to get to  
15 work after getting pregnant, food on the table  
16 and the children off to school, the baby crying,  
17 witnesses calling at 6:30, leave the office at  
18 7:00, get home, dinner on the table, children  
19 waiting, homework done, in to bed. Saturday  
20 morning, go to temple, run errands; Sunday  
21 morning, sleep late, go to church; Sunday night,  
22 prepare for trial and start all over again.

23 Somehow or another we got to free both  
24 parents' time to be with their children, to go to  
25 their schools and put schools first in America.

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1           We have got to make sure that every  
2 single pregnant woman in America has prenatal  
3 care; that every single pregnant woman in America  
4 who is drug involved at least gets treatment  
5 during that pregnancy without punishment that's  
6 going to deter her from coming to seek the  
7 treatment.

8           We have got to make sure that all  
9 Americans understand how important, how  
10 critically important those ages of zero to three  
11 are.

12           The doctors, again and again, the child  
13 development experts, have all taught me so much,  
14 and the people in this room can teach others and  
15 me so much.

16           Everyone tells me that 50 percent of  
17 all learned human responses is learned in the  
18 first year of life; that in the ages of zero to  
19 three the child develops the concept of reward  
20 and punishment and develops a conscience.

21           If that child is neglected and  
22 unsupervised and unnurtured and there is no  
23 bonding from those ages from zero to three so  
24 that the child has not learned the concept of  
25 punishment, what good is it going to put him in

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1 prison 20 years from now?

2 We've got to make sure that every child  
3 in America has proper, at least preventative  
4 medical care.

5 Something is terribly wrong with the  
6 nation. It tells the 70 year-old person you can  
7 get an operation and extend your life expectancy  
8 by three years and then turns to the child of a  
9 working poor person and says, sorry, you make too  
10 much money to be eligible for Medicaid, and I  
11 know you don't have health benefits at your  
12 employer's; it's too bad you can't get help for  
13 your child to prevent so much damage down the  
14 road.

15 Can you imagine this nation being so  
16 many wise and bound foolish, having observed all  
17 the statistics that show a significant reduction  
18 in measles and other epidemic immunizations  
19 programs, not willing to guarantee all its  
20 children immunizations.

21 We have got to make sure that in those  
22 years, ages of zero to three as we blend in the  
23 head start, that every child in America has  
24 either proper parental supervision or educate  
25 safe, good, constructive, thoughtful educare that

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1 can blend with head start from K to 12. We've  
2 got to make sure that head start is not just  
3 something that happens in this school or maybe  
4 that school but happens in every school  
5 throughout America where it is needed.

6 And our schools are so critically  
7 important. Think about it, the burdens we have  
8 placed on our schools in the last 40 years.  
9 We've asked them to be the institution of public  
10 and private most responsible for ending the two  
11 hundred year end of slavery.

12 We've asked them to be the institution,  
13 public and private that most often steps in to  
14 comfort a child when the child comes to school  
15 racked by the domestic dissention at home.

16 My grandmother would have been about  
17 107; she lived to be 93, and I think of what she  
18 saw in her century of one, man on the moon,  
19 flight, television, atomic energy, penicillin,  
20 the automobile, electricity, an incredible burst  
21 of energy and knowledge; the most incredible  
22 burst of knowledge probably in all of human  
23 history, and the school so burdened with all the  
24 responsibilities that we've placed on them have  
25 not been able to keep up with this burst of

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1 information throughout the world.

2 We've got to free our schools' time to  
3 teach by placing in and around schools support  
4 services that do what we're asking teachers to do  
5 day in and day out so that they can concentrate  
6 on teaching.

7 We've seen some of these thoughtful  
8 programs initiated with the private sector, with  
9 the public sector, working together with schools  
10 in terms of drug education and prevention. We  
11 can do the same thing with violence. I have  
12 strongly suspected there are in some Detroit  
13 public schools conflict resolution programs that  
14 teach children how to resolve their conflicts  
15 peacefully. Certainly in the schools that I have  
16 seen, in these programs, can work, we can enhance  
17 them, and we can do so much in terms of teaching  
18 our youngsters that there are other ways to  
19 resolve disputes.

20 But we've got to understand that we  
21 need to free that teacher's time to spend time  
22 with this youngster. All the programs in the  
23 world aren't as important as teaching that child  
24 that he or she is somebody, deserving of respect,  
25 deserving of dignity, deserving of a pat on the

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1 back, deserving to be scolded when it's deserved  
2 but deserving to be loved when that is needed  
3 too. We've got to free teachers' time and to  
4 help give children a future.

5 One of the dumbest things that I've  
6 seen in my own community is what we do to  
7 truants. I'll pick up a file of a kid who is  
8 14. I've got him charged for a delinquent act.  
9 I look at his background, third grade, school says  
10 he was truant 15 days out of 45 and then he  
11 wasn't there and then they don't know where he  
12 was and he did a little bit better in the fourth  
13 grade. But you can watch and you can know that  
14 from the eight years on he was headed for  
15 trouble.

16 And I make inquiry; the police very  
17 religiously try to pick up the kids they say  
18 because it's a great way of reducing daytime  
19 burglaries. And they take them to the school,  
20 and the school says oh, yes, we called home.  
21 Well, what happens when you call home and mother  
22 doesn't come down? Well, we send him home on the  
23 bus. Do you do anything else? No.

24 Let's take our resources up front and  
25 send police officers, community friendly,

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1 sensitive police officers home with a public  
2 health or home with a social worker and a team  
3 concept to find out what is behind that door.

4 When they knock on that door, they may  
5 get an angry who is it; if they care, if they can  
6 reach out as public health nurses used to 30  
7 years ago when they would go sit in the kitchen  
8 and have a cup of coffee and talk to people about  
9 current problems.

10 If we can reach out and get those  
11 people from behind the door and get them to  
12 trust, we're going to make a difference.

13 There are some people behind the doors  
14 of our communities that want to come out but are  
15 suspicious, afraid, alone and suffering from the  
16 sense that there is no light at the end of the  
17 tunnel and nobody cares.

18 Police linked with others so that  
19 everybody feels secure but nobody feels  
20 threatened can become one of the great forces for  
21 opening the doors in a kind and general way, to  
22 bring families out so that they can get help to  
23 become stronger and better families because there  
24 is nothing, no social service, no police work,  
25 nothing so important to the delivery of social

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1 services in education as a strong family.

2 Let's look at what we do afternoons,  
3 after school and in the evenings. The Carnegie  
4 Foundation has done a marvelous report called the  
5 Risk and Opportunities of After School Hours. If  
6 we took all that we do in jails and everything  
7 else and got organized up front and afternoon  
8 programs and evening programs, not just sports  
9 but community programs and artistic programs and  
10 other programs that pursue the interest of our  
11 kids, we can make such a difference, far better  
12 than television. And while we're at it, why  
13 don't we tell the market what we like and don't  
14 like in terms of what is shown during children's  
15 hours.

16 You social workers, you counselors have  
17 got to tell people, you've got to tell your story  
18 better than you are because some of you have  
19 helped so many kids get off on the right foot.  
20 Sometimes it's just an anecdotal story, but  
21 counseling, support can make such a difference.  
22 But we think of all these programs and you know  
23 what we miss in terms of community planning?  
24 I've got this great account 15 miles across town  
25 that would love to work with Tommy, three buses

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1 across town to the counselor.

2 If we do anything in terms of dealing  
3 with children, we're going to have to figure out  
4 how to safely transport our children in  
5 convenient manners to the services that are  
6 available throughout our communities or we are  
7 never going to stitch this fabric back.

8 Let's start looking at how we educate  
9 our children and in high school. Have you ever  
10 composited how we do it? We get them a summer  
11 job in the private industry counsel at 15 or  
12 something, that may be scraping a sidewalk. It  
13 won't have any relationship to what their  
14 aptitude or skills or interests are, and we send  
15 them back to school in the fall and there is no  
16 connection between the summer job program and the  
17 school program, and sometimes there is no  
18 connection between the school education program  
19 and the job that managed to help them after  
20 school.

21 Why don't we analyze their aptitude and  
22 their interests in the seventh grade and then  
23 blend a program and develop a track that that kid  
24 goes through summer job programs, work experience  
25 programs through the school and school

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1 educational programs; that if they follow that  
2 track, they will graduate from the skills that  
3 can enable them to earn a living wage.

4 Let's bring jobs programs together with  
5 the private sectors so that we get people placed,  
6 but let's look again that after the family, a  
7 good job is probably one of the best forms of  
8 social services you can have.

9 Let's start telling people they can't  
10 graduate from high school until they have skills  
11 that can enable them to earn a living wage.

12 You may say but my son is going to  
13 college. How many English lit gradutas do you  
14 know that can't find a job and are drifting  
15 around and getting into drugs if they can't find  
16 a job and they don't have a sense of purpose or a  
17 sense of future? Let's blend it together.

18 Let's get out of the notion that you  
19 have got to jump right into college and there is  
20 something magic about four years of college.  
21 Let's make college more available as we go along,  
22 as we develop new interests so we can go audit.  
23 Let's not get so caught up in degrees that we  
24 can't be more flexible in our approach to  
25 enabling people to earn a living wage while at

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1 the same time pursuing the tremendous range of  
2 interest that exists throughout the world.

3 Let's remember what the boys did, the  
4 young men did during the depression, the monument  
5 that they built across this nation through public  
6 service. Let's remember the young men who went  
7 off to war and gave their lives but with so as  
8 champions and as heroes.

9 This past Saturday I went to  
10 Sweetwater, Texas to the dedication of a statute  
11 marking the 50th anniversary of Founding the  
12 Women's Air Force Service Pilots. 50 years ago  
13 Saturday, Miami went to Sweetwater, Texas. She  
14 made her way to learn how to fly for her nation.  
15 She had a hundred hours in, and it was only years  
16 later that the United States Government  
17 recognized this veteran status, but it made no  
18 difference because here were these 70 to 80 year  
19 old ladies going out an fighting for their  
20 country and they were wonderful.

21 Let us give our young people true,  
22 wonderful, instructive opportunities to say it's  
23 not those old folks that are rebuilding America,  
24 it is the youth of America who are not going off  
25 to fight and die in another country but are going

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1 off to build and create on the streets of America  
2 a stronger, better America.

3 But no matter what we do, we always  
4 manage to get ourselves in trouble and we have  
5 got to develop a juvenile justice system that is  
6 fair and caring and intervenes in thoughtful  
7 ways, not misguided ways until somebody decides  
8 that are really going to get serious about this,  
9 but a system that does a thoughtful evaluation  
10 upfront, knows when to intervene and when not to  
11 intervene.

12 When intervening is necessary, develops  
13 a case management system that tracks the child,  
14 gives the child support and reward when necessary  
15 and sanctions when not. That says to that child,  
16 poverty and the decay around you is not an excuse  
17 for putting a gun up to somebody's head and  
18 hurting them. A system that understands you  
19 don't send somebody from the inner city to a boot  
20 camp a hundred miles away, have them succeed in a  
21 wonderful program for six weeks and then pick  
22 them up and dump them back in the city.

23 And even if we develop a program that  
24 has us doing all of that, we have got to  
25 understand that if we develop programs that will

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1 allow that child to come back into the community  
2 in an orderly way, it won't do if the child goes  
3 back home to three brothers who are the local  
4 drug dealers in the open air market and the two  
5 sisters that are hanging out with the major  
6 distributor in town and that that world is the  
7 world he's going back to.

8           We've got to be creative and find  
9 alternative housing sites and letting youths  
10 getting into programs where they can participate  
11 and having apartment buildings and living in them  
12 with a house mother and house father who provide  
13 role models and where they can work and  
14 participate in the community.

15           We can do so much if we be bold and  
16 creative, but we have got to do it for all the  
17 reasons we care about but most of all for  
18 children.

19           And it is best said by the last two  
20 versus in the old testament in the Book of  
21 Malachi. "Behold, I shall send you the profit  
22 Elijah before the coming of the great and  
23 dreadful day of the world, and he should return  
24 the heart of the father to the children and the  
25 childrens' heart to their father, lest I come

1 down and spite the others with a curse."

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