

TO: Juvenile Welfare Board Members

FROM: James E. Mills, Executive Director 
Maurice Mongkuo, Director, Quality Assurance and Evaluation 

Requested Action

The Board is requested to allocate up to \$7,500 in FY 2000-2001 and 2001-2002 for one research project identified by the University of South Florida's Collaborative for Children, Families, and Communities: "Evolving a Community Initiative to Protect Children in Cyberspace".

Options

1. Approve the request for the proposal.
2. Deny the request for the proposal.
3. Any other action as determined by the Board.

Recommended Action

Approve the request for the proposal. 1) Allocate up to \$7,500 for the one-year research project titled "Evolving a Community Initiative to Protect Children in Cyberspace."

Source of JWB Funds

FY 2000-2001 Research & Evaluation Unallocated Funds and FY 2001-2002 Budget.

Fiscal Impact

If the request is approved, the FY 2000-2001 Research & Evaluation Unallocated Fund would be reduced by \$3,750 from \$45,000 to \$41,250. The FY 2000-2001 Budget would include \$3,750 for this project.

Narrative

The Juvenile Welfare Board has been a member of the USF Collaborative for Children, Families and Communities Board of Advisors since it was formed in 1997. Last year, JWB assisted in the process of reviewing Requests for Proposals submitted to the Collaborative. During the review process this spring, staff identified one proposal that would have a direct impact on families in Pinellas County. The proposal, "Evolving a Community Initiative to Protect Children in Cyberspace", would pursue a community-wide initiative which focuses on internet safety for children in the Tampa Bay area, including Pinellas County, to be shared with Pinellas County partners, the Juvenile Welfare Board, the St. Petersburg Times, Pinellas County Schools, and the Sheriff's Office in Pinellas County.

Evolving a Community Initiative to Protect Children in Cyberspace

The recognition of threats to children in cyberspace is an important primary step in developing constructive solutions and a plan of action that will foster protective and productive learning experiences. Without Internet safety, children's vulnerability to the dark side of computer technology is exacerbated by the relative degree of on-line anonymity coupled with the lack of system-imposed restraints. As increasing numbers of young people encounter online experiences that are detrimental to their mental health and social functioning, child service agencies will have an increased need for resources and information that will help with the unique challenges of supporting children who have been victimized via cyberspace, either sexually, economically, and/or emotionally.

This research project consists of a collaboration between the Department of Child and Family Studies (University of South Florida), the College of Education (University of South Florida), the St. Petersburg Times, Hillsborough County Public Libraries, Pinellas County Schools, the Hillsborough County School District, the Sheriff's Office of Hillsborough County, the Sheriff's office of Pinellas County, the Temple Terrace Police Department, the Child protection Team of Hillsborough County, the Child Abuse Council (Tampa, Florida), and CyberAngels (Tampa, Florida) to examine three aspects regarding children in cyberspace. After analyzing the data from a survey that will be distributed to the critical stakeholders of the project, the team will:

- Create a collaborative network of community partners to identify current initiatives in Hillsborough and Pinellas Counties to promote children's awareness and safety in cyberspace.
- Develop an action plan to foster protective and productive learning experiences and foster a community-wide awareness and safety prevention campaign.
- Prepare service agencies to address the unique challenges of supporting children and families following sexual, economic, or emotional victimization online.

The primary goal of this study is to promote children's awareness and safety in cyberspace. Given this goal, project results will directly benefit children in Pinellas County by providing resources and information that will prepare children's service agencies in addressing the challenges of supporting children and families after they are sexually, economically, and/or emotionally victimized online. This information will foster community-wide awareness and elicit a safety prevention campaign. Project findings will be shared with the Juvenile Welfare Board, the St. Petersburg Times, Pinellas County Schools, the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office, and the USF Collaborative for Children Families, and Communities.

Dissemination of study findings to each of these entities will be in the form of a final written report, which also will be accessible online via the World Wide We. The Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute at the University of South Florida will act as fiscal agent for the funds.

Staff Resource Person: **Shelly Smith, Research Consultant, Research and Evaluation**