

## IT'S ABOUT THE BABIES, STUPID... ALL ROADS LEAD TO THE FIRST 1000 DAYS

Charles Bruner, September 2016

- What can we do to eliminate poverty?
- What can we do to reduce school drop-outs and adolescent pregnancies?
- What can we do to ensure the next generation is the workforce for our future?
- What can we do to reduce health care costs and chronic disease?
- What can we do to rebuild disinvested neighborhoods and communities?
- What can we do to address delinquency, violence, and incarceration?

There are many talented and committed individuals who have improved the systems designed to respond to each of these essential societal questions, as they manifest themselves in American society. They have produced advances and exemplary responses to these presenting conditions, if not always leading to routine or mainstream practice or policies that promote them.

Yet if we are to do more than make incremental gains – one response to all these questions must be that “we better start with young children.”

A large share of the solution to the challenges our society faces is in what happens to children over the first three years of life. Further, the greatest contributing factor to a strong start in life and a trajectory for success is a safe, stable, and nurturing home environment. Yet far too many of our youngest American children are vulnerable because of their home and neighborhood environments.

Society cannot be a substitute for families, but it can and should create the conditions where parents of those infants and toddlers can become the best parents they can be. Democrats like to talk about preschool and paid family leave, but it is much more than that. Republicans like to talk about family values and personal responsibility, but wishing it doesn't make it so.

In fact, there are necessary new investments in public services and professional responses in the early years, but these also require at least commensurate new investments in community ones that are predicated on growth from within – community-building through personal responsibility, reciprocity, mutual assistance, and fostering new neighborhood “points of light.” The latter are ones that Republicans speak to as being critically important – often as they critique many professional approaches precisely because they contend they devalue personal initiative.

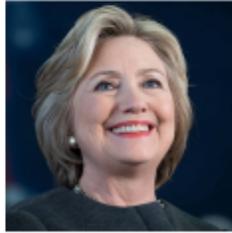
This is not a question of “either-or” but rather of “both-and.” When all one wields is a professional hammer, children and families become service nails. This does not provide them the opportunity to select their own pathways to growth and contribution to others. There is very little in current public financing of early childhood services that focuses upon “affinity-based networking” and strengthening families, particularly in the protective factors related to resiliency and social ties.

We also know that one critical point of connection is in the child health practitioner's office, and we cannot afford to let that point of connection slip by. More than any other professionals, primary care child health practitioners have the opportunity to initiate responses that strengthen safety, stability, and nurturing – provided they see that as their role. We have innovative practitioners and exemplary and evidenced-based programs that do that – we now need to move these efforts to more routine practice and to build the supports within communities to make them most effective.

Let's take our Presidential candidates at their word about the imperative of creating equal opportunity for all kids – and flesh out the policy agenda, starting with young children and their families, needed to do just that.



## Presidential Candidates Agree



*America needs every one of us to lend our energy, our talents, our ambition to making our nation better and stronger -- where you can get a good job and send your kids to a good school, no matter what zip code you live in, where all our children can dream, and those dreams are within reach.*

*When I am President, I will work to ensure that all of our kids are treated equally and protected equally. Every action I take, I will ask myself: Does this make life better for young Americans in Baltimore, in Chicago, in Detroit, in Ferguson who have in every way the same right to live out their dreams as any other child in America?*



*Text from Acceptance Speeches at National Party Conventions*