

‘CLEAN’ from cover

diapering age were living at or below 200% of the federal poverty level.

Children of color are the largest group among families living in poverty. Among children under 18 living at or below 100% the federal poverty level, this includes 31% of Black children and 23% of Hispanic children, as compared to 10% of white children in the United States.

Adding to the cost of diapers is the additional 4.225% tax on top of the regular sales tax as diapers are considered a luxury item in Missouri. By eliminating sales tax, families would be able to save \$100 or more annually when they have to purchase these items. Diaper banks in Missouri are working to exempt diapers from sales tax.

While the St. Louis area Diaper Bank was established in 2014 to help those who need diapers, the period supply

program began in 2019 to help address the ongoing need associated with poverty and the ability to afford adequate supplies.

According to National Organization for Women, as of January 2021, the average cost of menstrual products was \$20 per cycle, before inflation hit decade-highs. The total cost added up to an estimated \$200 to \$300 per year and thousands of dollars over the course of a lifetime.

St. Louis Diaper Bank distributes period kits through schools and partner organizations including six St. Louis County Library branches (Florissant Valley, Grand Glaize, Indian Trails, Lewis and Clark, Natural Bridge and Weber Road) and two St. Louis Public Library branches (Central Library and Julia Davis).

The St. Louis Diaper Bank is the only organization attacking diaper need and period poverty on a large scale in the St. Louis region.

The organization is hosting its second annual benefit concert Sept. 21, and hopes to raise \$32,500 for

its programs. The concert will feature JAM: Jackson & MARS, a high-energy live band and production that showcases music by Michael Jackson and Bruno Mars. The band includes a Michael Jackson impersonator plus Bruno Mars’ look-alike who will perform 40 songs spanning 40 years. The evening includes drinks, hors d’oeuvres, a silent auction and raffle.

General admission tickets are \$65 per person, and the VIP experience, which begins at 6 p.m. and includes a pre-show open bar and hors d’oeuvres, is \$115 per person.

This year the St. Louis Area Diaper Bank, through a network of 70 community organizations, educational and health partners serving low-income families will distribute 4.1 million diapers to more than 70,000 families in the St. Louis region.

For more information about the fundraiser and sponsorship opportunities, call 314-624-0888 or visit <https://stldiaperbank.org/>.

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COMMUNITY VOICES:

By Art McCoy

Bold actions to bolster better wellbeing

Our region’s well-publicized challenges can be overshadowing at times. Since 2017, firearm-related injuries have been the most common cause of death from injury among youth in America. Sadly, St. Louis still leads the nation for firearm injuries of children.

Mental illness is on the rise, and suicide has been the second leading cause of death for people aged 10 to 34, according to the Centers for Disease Control. Numerous St. Louis student incidents and suicides have broken our hearts and fractured our faith in some social systems. On the heels of the COVID-19 pandemic and with our first mass school shooting in St. Louis this 2022-23 school year, we understand the intersectionality of these epidemics and our wellbeing.

Health equity and mental health are at the heart of issues of ill-being. After years of impactful work with experts Pediatricians Jason Newland, M.D., and Sarah Garwood, M.D., Psychiatrist Joan Luby, M.D., and Economist Carol Graham, Ph.D., among others, there are bold actions that can help individuals through any challenge and help our region flourish and thrive even more. Partnering with Washington University and Dr. Luby, we took new actions, proving that rapid, impactful improvement in emotion development, wellbeing, parenting, and human flourishing is possible, and presented scholarly work on “Early Emotion Development Intervention Improves Mental Health Outcomes in Low-income High-Risk Community Children.”

We can reduce ill-being and bolster greater wellbeing. Vital takeaways from my sessions with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Johns Hopkins University ALACRITY, and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services summarize substantive insights and actions we must

expand in the St. Louis region and beyond. Five bold actions can help us grow beyond the way things are into a future where wellbeing is commonplace.

Belonging reduces isolation and callousness. F.I.T. or fundamental insights into teams and tensions matter. Every family, home, office, class, or group has a culture, roles, and hidden rules of teaming or teamwork for harmony, happiness, and success or the lack thereof. Make the rules clearly known and inclusively owned. Allow each person a place in the space.

Boundaries reduce carelessness and harmfulness. Adults and children need boundaries. Generally, individuals, especially children, seek to understand and be understood. When you know your boundaries and roles, you become empowered by your power, purpose, and limits.

Set social, physical, and emotional boundaries early and refine them often. The lack of limits, boundaries, oversight, and supervision allows some of the most harmful thoughts, actions, habits, vices, and tragedies to take root and occur. List your harmful habits and start eliminating them through boundaries.

Balance! We need good books and relationships for our brain and mind; rest and exercise for our body; meaningful songs, gratitude, praises, prayer, and meditation for our spirit; and purposeful work, which is more than just another job, to increase our healthy habits.

Establish a life mission statement that encapsulates your core purpose and value for your time. Review your mission and purpose. Revise regularly in scope and scale. Remember, to everything, there is a season and a time to every purpose.

Behavior modification: Boldly aim to be-

have better than before! Especially during unhealthy times, we must start something supportive of others and ourselves. Strive to stop something cruel, invalidating and sorrowful to others and ourselves. It is essential to develop the stomach to unearth our most personal profound truths (especially with-in despair), the skillsets to know better and do better with support, and the strength to sustain the right actions for continuous improvement.

Healthy Touch: Touch is a love language for some and a source of trauma (i.e., A.C.E.) for others. Know if it is a massage, hug, high-five, gardening, washing dishes for the sake of touching water and soap and a thoughtless activity, or the absence of touch. Clearly set boundaries with others to experience what is healthiest for you.

Finally, your belief system matters! Never underestimate the power of hope. Choose a belief system that cancels hopelessness and anchors you in something significantly bigger than yourself. Hope is an action as much as a thing. If hope fails, find the spiritual strength to hold on, believing brighter days are ahead.

Consistent, expansive application of these bold actions will bring better wellbeing, bolstering you and those around you to flourish.

Art McCoy, Ph.D., is a Saint Louis University Distinguished Fellow and Superintendent-in-Residence, Mental Health America Board Director, and Saint Louis Children’s Hospital Chair of the Community Benefit and Health Improvement Committee.



The opinions expressed in this column are the columnist’s alone and do not reflect the opinion of the owners or staff of Community News.