

American Humane's The Front Porch Project®

We each have a role in protecting children and supporting families.

It happens all the time. We see a stressed parent or caregiver struggle with a child in a public place. We feel uncomfortable and want to do something to help, but we do not know what to do.

Or, we suspect a child we know may be experiencing abuse or neglect, but we don't know how to intervene appropriately.

We want to help, but we just don't know the right action to take.

The American Humane Association believes that each of us can – and should – become more aware of and involved in helping protect children and support families in our own communities. That's why in 1997 we created The Front Porch Project®.

Through participation in The Front Porch Project's two-day Community Training, everyday community members learn new information, tools, and methods to more safely, confidently, appropriately, and frequently intervene when encountering a situation in which the treatment of a child makes them concerned or uncomfortable.

Why The Front Porch Project?

There is widespread agreement among child welfare professionals and concerned citizens across the United States that children deserve to grow up and develop free from abuse and neglect. And yet, for many children – those who go to your neighborhood school, play on your child's sports team, and live on your street – experiences of abuse and neglect are an everyday reality.

According to 2008 national statistics, an estimated 772,000 children were determined to be victims of abuse or neglect in the United States. And those are just the children who came to the attention of our child protection systems.

Child welfare professionals are working at full capacity to protect our nation's children. But, it is clear that the problem is too great and too important to be delegated entirely to these valiant workers.

Research conducted by Prevent Child Abuse America shows that a majority of Americans – more than one-half of the general public and two-thirds of all parents – are willing to become involved in helping prevent child abuse and neglect. However, these respondents feel uncomfortable because they lack the knowledge and skills to intervene safely and effectively. They also recognize the size of the problem and believe that without community support they are powerless to make a difference.

Building Front Porch Project Communities Across the Country

The Front Porch Project is a national, research-based, community-based initiative built upon the belief that all people who are concerned about the safety and well-being of the children in their

communities need to be encouraged and taught to make a difference to prevent child abuse and neglect.

This concept is much the same as a good neighbor sitting on the front porch who, in years past, would have been aware of and involved in solving problems affecting families they knew. The American front porches served as networking centers where concerned and caring friends could share information and devise support systems to help each other through difficult times.

This American Humane initiative builds on this concept, by bringing The Front Porch Project to communities across the country and teaching people how to bring about the return of neighborly problem-solving and community compassion and caring.

How We Do It

American Humane uses a capacity-building approach involving training, technical assistance, and evaluation to help implement and sustain The Front Porch Project in local communities. Implementation starts with a partnership between American Humane and a “sustainer” organization in a local community, which has the vision, mission, philosophy, infrastructure, and connections to initiate and maintain the program. This role includes convening an initial meeting of community leaders to act in a support capacity to The Front Porch Project.

Once community leaders are familiarized with the project, they help identify training group participants. American Humane then provides training and technical assistance to the original project team. In addition, American Humane provides technical assistance to the sustainer organization as it works to grow and maintain this initiative through outreach and training to community residents. The community partner organization coordinates all local community trainings and logistics, provides technical assistance and support to its team of trainers, maintains communication with key community representatives, and works in consultation with American Humane and other Front Porch Project sites to strategically grow and develop the initiative locally.

Results of The Front Porch Project are systematically documented and analyzed to determine the extent to which the project is making a difference for participants, as well as for the children and families who are impacted by the actions of participants. To this end, the local team and American Humane collect and analyze data measuring change in the knowledge, beliefs, attitude, and behavior of participants from each community, and also across all Front Porch Project communities.

With this approach, we build The Front Porch Project to last, impacting the lives of thousands of children and families and becoming an avenue for lasting change in how community members interact with one another.

What People Are Saying About The Front Porch Project

Since its inception, The Front Porch Project has been implemented in dozens of urban, rural, and culturally diverse communities across the United States, and currently has active sites in Florida, Oklahoma, and Illinois.

Participants' reviews are outstanding:

- "I feel more responsible and more comfortable about taking action."
- "It is a ray of light in the middle of violence, and the hope to reduce the percent of abused children, physical and emotional. Thank you." (translated from Spanish)
- "The most valuable thing I realized is the need and ability to communicate with other people in the community around common issues, such as safety of children. People can put aside their individual differences on behalf of children."
- "I feel good and inspired to be a part of something positive."
- "You learn how to be a better parent, better citizen, and to help children in your community."
- "I learned that intervention can mean support and connection."

Evaluation data from 2009-2010 from all active sites revealed that after completing The Front Porch Project Community Training:

- 96% of participants strongly agreed or agreed that they learned more strategies for intervening;
- 96% of participants strongly agreed or agreed that they feel more comfortable intervening; and
- 95% of participants strongly agreed or agreed that they are more likely to intervene than before training.

In addition, at six weeks following The Front Porch Project Community Training, 95.6% of participants self-reported that they agreed their awareness of children in their community had been heightened since completing the training. Six months following training, 50% of participants self-reported they were "always" or "often" using the information and skills they acquired, while the other 50% said they were "sometimes" using the information and skills they acquired. No participants reported that they were "rarely" or "never" using the information and skills they acquired.

Working Toward a More Humane and Compassionate Future

American Humane believes it is time to bring citizens back into the arena of child protection and abuse and neglect prevention. Responding to at-risk children, youth, and families must blend government child welfare services with leadership and intervention from the broader community. By growing The Front Porch Project nationally, we can better prevent child abuse and neglect. We can return Americans to their "front porches," where they can look out for the children in their communities and truly help us create a more humane and compassionate world.