

Preparation for Parenthood: Stopping the Cycle of Neglect

By Kathy Juline
Feature Editor

An idea for benefiting humanity often emerges from the ashes of catastrophe. Children: Our Ultimate Investment (COUI) is a case in point. This organization began in 1977 to address the crisis in America in which every night 100,000 children are homeless and each year nearly 3 million are reported abused and neglected. These children roam the streets, using guns and drugs to ward off their pain and fear. Being uncared for, they are easy prey to destructive influences.

"We must stop the cycle of neglect," says COUI founder Laura Huxley, expressing deep concern over the suffering of children born unwanted, denied adequate nurturing and care, often born to young women who themselves are still children and in many cases have themselves been neglected or abused.

Italian-born, the former concert violinist, counselor, and lecturer is the author of several books, including *You Are Not the Target* and *This Timeless Moment*, which tells about her life with her late husband, Aldous Huxley, famed for his novel *Brave New World*. Laura Huxley considers his book *Island*, written in 1962, his most inspiring legacy. In it he gives creative solutions, using methods from both ancient and modern cultures, for developing a saner and more loving society. *Island* was written during Aldous and Laura Huxley's marriage and sets forth the ideals to which Children: Our Ultimate Investment is dedicated. We can create a new world through specific actions designed to eliminate violence and abuse, Laura adamantly believes.

The specific step she is taking through COUI is to prepare young people to be parents physically,

psychologically, and spiritually. Toward this end hands-on classes are taught at continuation high schools, where the population of children is most at risk. "Teenagers are having babies much too soon, with no preparation at all. We're teaching them to wait until they are capable of caring for a new human life," says Laura Huxley. For her teens, learning to parent means avoiding the tragedy of an unwanted baby, often ending a pattern that may have been repeated for generations.



Laura Huxley as counselor, author and social activist.

Based in Los Angeles, California, Children: Our Ultimate Investment is a nonprofit educational organization committed to the goal of "nurturing of the possible human." Laura Huxley conceived the idea for it after a trip to Mexico, where she visited an orphanage in Tijuana. There she saw 86 infants who had been left at the orphanage by women unable to keep them. Only six nuns, with meager resources, had the full responsibility for taking care of all 86 babies—washing diapers, preparing food, changing, and

bathing. Huxley observed that one infant boy, around four months of age, was totally silent, his enormous eyes searching for contact—contact which he could not find. This experience impressed her immensely and, along with witnessing the devastating results of childhood neglect throughout her years as a therapist, it led to the founding of COUI.

Elizabeth Crawford, Executive Director of COUI, left a high-level position in the film industry ten years ago to raise her three young sons. She joined COUI two years ago; the organization's long term positive impact, she believes, can be phenomenal.

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Society has become too fragmented, notes Crawford, for adequate parenting of children to occur. "We used to have extended families and plenty of people were available to help care for the infant and to give support to the mother," "This just isn't the case anymore," continues Laura Huxley, a vibrant woman whose soft accent renders all the more eloquent her expressions of concern about early pregnancy. "Isolation during the early months of caring for a newborn is the worst thing. A young woman with no

help alone all day long with a baby, day in, day out, is a disaster. The seeds of neglect of that child begin then. Abused and neglected children become those who carry guns, who fall prey to drug addiction and alcoholism, and who resort to crime and violence in a desperate cry for help."

These behaviors have their beginnings, according to Huxley, when an unloved infant is born into an unstable environment. The first year of life is the most vulnerable, and formative, time. "But if each child who is born is desired, prepared for, and nurtured from the moment of conception through childhood, we would see a radical improvement in society. A profound healing would begin. This is what we envision."

Helping couples give birth to "the child of their dreams" is another one of Laura Huxley's primary missions. She advocates approaching conception and birth with inner peace and reverence for life. Teenagers need to learn these attitudes, she believes, long before conception occurs. Huxley points out that in our society we are required to go through more training to get a driver's license than to become a parent. Education about what it means to be a parent is sorely needed.

To meet this need, COUI sponsors an educational program known as Teens & Toddlers. Its focus is to educate high-schoolers on the magnitude of responsibility involved in

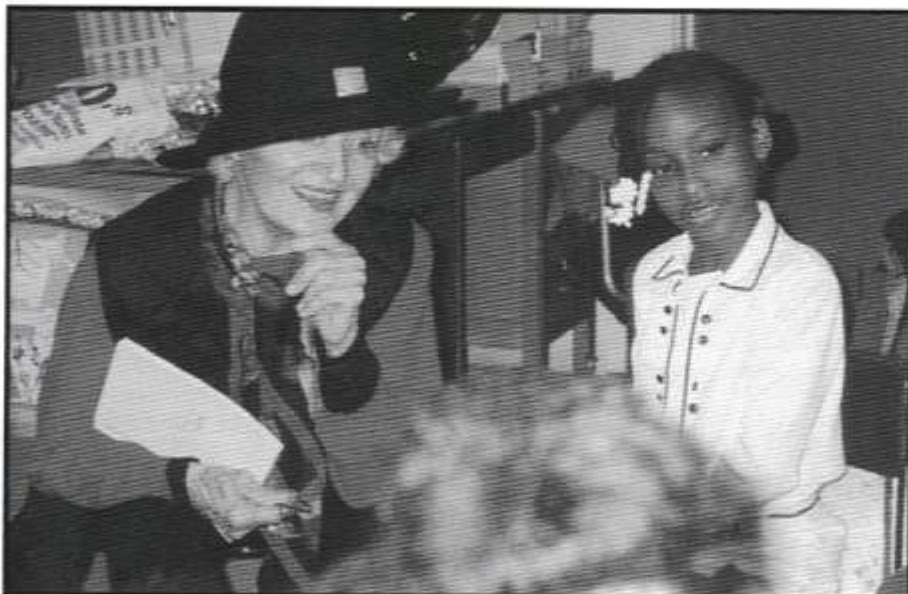


Laura Huxley awards scholarship for Make House Before Baby Project.

creating a new human being. Students discuss the concept of the possible human, explore the impact of environment on a toddler, develop ways to establish good communication with a small child, study various styles of discipline, and investigate their own beliefs and values concerning parenting. For periods of several hours, students are responsible for feeding, tending, and playing with toddlers. They are asked to keep a journal of what this experience is like for them.

One entry comes from a young man of 18, who writes: "Thanks to this program I am different. It made me

change my mind about children. First I thought they were loud. But I was wrong; these kids are the most beautiful things to play with. They change my life. By knowing them I realize they understand every single thing you tell them. They are our future, and thanks to our teachers I have learned a lot about children. Imagine in the future, if this program continues it will help a lot of teenagers. When they are parents they will understand and will be prepared. I have changed. Now I help children wherever I see them. If they need help I help them. All this is thanks to Teens & Toddlers. When I have a kid I will always play with them and never give up."



Laura Huxley with the children from 107th Street Elementary School.

Teens & Toddlers presently operates in two high schools in Los Angeles, with 60 students completing the course each year.

The program has been a tremendous success, running for four years in Northern California and graduating over 100 students with no pregnancies reported. Teens & Toddlers presently

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operates in two high schools in Los Angeles, with 60 students completing the course each year. In the summer of 1999 Laura will sponsor a summer session for one of the continuation schools.

The long-term plan of COUI is to grow by adding more schools and then to expand throughout Los Angeles County. Eventually a website will advertise the program so that school districts everywhere in the country can offer the program, for which a full curriculum consisting of seventeen units has been written. "We are now in the process of establishing a history and proving our efficiency," says Crawford. The expectation is that the Teens & Toddlers program will gain wide support.

One of its special features is its inclusion of both boys and girls in classes. "In the past boys have usually been excluded from educational opportunities that deal with parenting," she adds. "Yet they need to learn the importance of being a dad just as much as girls need training in being mothers. As many as 97% of deathrow inmates come from fatherless families. Not enough attention is being paid to the fact that the vanishing father is a major contributor to a range of problems from postpartum depression to criminal activity." Crawford reports that the program is effecting profound changes in boys, waking them up to their more sensitive self. "It's a joy," she says, "to see them on their hands and knees playing with the toddlers. With experiences like these, they are much more likely to be caring, responsible parents."

Laura Huxley notes that teenagers also need to learn the importance to a newborn's well-being of a harmonious and stable relationship between the parents. Other factors are equally vital. For example, was the birth violent or gentle? Is the atmosphere in the home a loving one? As the baby grows, is he or she allowed to watch violence on TV? During the first year after the baby's birth, does the mother have adequate support at home? Such are the issues that COUI seeks to bring to the awareness of teens. Education about these matters can prevent the tragedy of

neglect.

Teens & Toddlers puts into action the ideas that Laura Huxley has been writing about and teaching for decades. During the first year of implementation in Los Angeles, 50 students completed the program.

Another specific program sponsored by COUI is called Project Caressing. Bridging the gap between elders and infants, this program involves bringing children to retirement homes on a regular basis. By giving the older people and the youngsters a chance to interact, it benefits both groups. They are experiencing the kind of extended family relationships that used to prevail in society until recent decades, when "upward mobility" tore these connections apart. The problem of loneliness, felt most acutely at the two extremes of life, is lessened through such interaction of young and old.

Huxley envisions in every city block a serene, comfortable room furnished with rocking chairs and pillows, where adults give an hour or more a day to hold a baby, each sharing warm, human contact with the other. Busy mothers and fathers will be able to leave their babies in the Caressing Room, as she calls it, knowing that a tranquil environment will nurture the children instead of a blaring TV. This is the future Huxley, through Project Caressing, is paving the way for, in which play and love become synonymous. The retirement home program is presently in effect in the Los Angeles area and has been ongoing for almost a decade.

Children: Our Ultimate Investment held an inaugural conference in 1978. Featured speakers were Ashley Montagu, Jean Huston, Ram Dass, Frederick LeBoyer, and Virginia Satir, who addressed the five main areas emphasized by the education-for-parenting aspect of COUI: Prelude to Conception, Conscious Conception, Reverence for Life (period of pregnancy), O Nobly Born (birth itself), and The First Five Years. The Conference had as its purpose the forming of a planetary communication network between young and old as well as between present and future human beings to ensure a higher quality of life

now and in the world to come.

Project Caressing links elders and infants while Teens & Toddlers builds bridges between teenagers and young children who are the next generation.

It will be a better world, thanks to Laura Huxley and those who support her vision. For human nature has fantastic resilience. Through the inspired work of such programs as Children: Our Ultimate Investment, we can make a miraculous recovery from the psychological and emotional wounds passed along for generations, and so move forward in our society toward a more conscious experience of parenting. Thus victimhood will not be our destiny, but rather health, creativity, and love.

Kathy Juline, Feature Editor, is the former editor of Science of Mind magazine.

Prayer of the Unconceived

Men and women who are on Earth
You are our creators.
We, the unconceived, beseech you:
Let us have living bread
The builder of our new body.
Let us have pure water
The vitalizer of our blood.
Let us have clean air
So that every breath is a caress.
Let us feel the petals of jasmine & roses
Which are as tender as our skin.

Men and women who are on Earth
You are our creators.
We, the unconceived, beseech you:
Do not give us a world of rage and fear
For our minds will be rage and fear.
Do not give us violence and pollution
For our bodies will be disease and
abomination.
Let us be wherever we are
Rather than bringing us
Into a tormented self-destroying
humanity.

Men and women who are on Earth
You are our creators.
We, the unconceived, beseech you:
If you are ready to love and to be loved,
Invite us to this Earth
Of the Thousand Wonders
And we will be born
To love and to be loved.

From Children: Our Ultimate Investment