

## Impact Helps Parents Cope With Down's Syndrome Children



### Help For Down's Syndrome Children

Ms. Charmaine Garner (left), a teacher's aide in the Howard University IMPACT program, and Mrs. Terrie Shorter, a parent who works in the program, instruct youngsters in a musical exercise. IMPACT is designed to stimulate early learning in Down's Syndrome children as well as help parents work with them.

By Bonnie R. Keys

Two years ago 24-year-old Terri Shorter of Washington, D.C., was able to go out socially a couple of times a week. But after the birth of her son, David, she's lucky now if she gets to go out once a month. David was born with Down's Syndrome. Because he also has a heart defect, David needs constant attention and medication daily.

Down's Syndrome, a genetic disorder, is characterized by mental retardation which ranges from mild to severe and may be accompanied by heart disorders, poor vision and respiratory problems. It is caused by an abnormality in the number of chromosomes — 47 instead of the normal 46. Most persons with the condition have physical features that include upward-slanting eyes, flat noses, protruding tongues and short stature.

Down's Syndrome occurs in approximately one out of every 600 live births. Women under 35 years of age who already have a child with Down's Syndrome as well as women who are over 35 have the greatest chance of having a child with Down's Syndrome. The father's age also adds to the risk of producing a child with Down's Syndrome.

Parents of children with the condition quickly learn that bringing up such a child is not an easy task. There is help, however. Project IMPACT (Interdisciplinary Model for Parent and Child Training), established at Howard University in Washington, D.C., also helps the parents cope by teaching them how to care for their Down's Syndrome children.

Children from birth to age three are accepted into the innovative program which IMPACT offers free of charge. The curriculum includes field visits by counselors who train parents to stimulate their children

in their home environments. There are also forums with information about handicapped children, parents' needs and health issues. Dr. Rosa Trapp-Dukes, the program's director, says IMPACT is different from many other programs designed for the handicapped because of the intensity of its parent training and participation and because it is specifically for Down's Syndrome children. "Few programs go into the home to train parents as we do, or require parents to participate at the center." Also, she says, few programs accept babies at birth.

Without IMPACT, Ms. Shorter says she would be at a loss. Recently she became "scared" when the program's funding was cut by the federal government. However, new funding was secured from the District of Columbia government.

The only other alternatives for Ms. Shorter are organizations that have waiting lists and take children with the most severe handicaps first. David would regress without the everyday training, she says.

"IMPACT is the only place I've found where they really care about the kids as people and believe that they will achieve if we (parents) do all that we can do," says Ms. Gwenith Holcomb, 26, the mother of 18-month-old Ryan, who was born with Down's Syndrome. "They really educated us," she adds. "We had genetic counseling; we learned about the rights of the handicapped; and about tax deductions for families with handicapped children."

"Not only does Ryan get what she needs," Ms. Holcomb stresses, "I also get the support I need so that I can be all I can for Ryan. It's really working. Ryan is crawling, sitting up and doing

all kinds of things. At one time all she wanted to do was lie on her stomach."

Ms. Joyce Williams, 38, the mother of 2½-year-old Joshua, says IMPACT gave her confidence. "It helped me to put things into perspective. At first I really didn't know what to do. It takes a weight off my mind to know that you can expect some of the same things from him that you expect from other kids. He will be expected to behave. He will have successes and make progress. At IMPACT they don't just hold your hands and let you cry on their shoulders. They let you know that it's not hopeless," Ms. Williams emphasizes.

Ms. Williams, who is a single parent, says she does not have a social life. "I put a lot of energy into Joshua. I really don't have time for myself."

Dr. Eugene Beard, IMPACT's research coordinator, says that when parents come into the program one of the first things he does is to test them for stress. "After we find out where the stress is, we structure a parent forum. We bring in persons with various backgrounds to give lectures. We have individual counseling as well," Beard notes.

Having a handicapped child can either strengthen the parents' relationship or break it up. The divorce rate among people who have handicapped children is three times higher than those without handicapped children.

For example, Terri Shorter says her son's father could not accept the fact that their child was born with Down's Syndrome. "He will not admit it but he does not like to be around David," she says.

Conversely, Holcomb says the relationship between her and her husband has been strengthened. "Ryan," she says, "has brought a sense of joy and unity to our family that no normal child could have brought."

"Ninety per cent of our mothers really accept their children and are doing a heck of a lot to see that their children are stimulated at a very early age. We also have a high percentage of fathers coming to meetings and participating," Beard notes.

Brian Forsyth, 36, who often accompanies his son, Brian Jr., to the IMPACT center, says that although coping with problems comes naturally to him, the program is great. "It gave me a few more ideas on how to deal with the problem. It taught me ways to help the baby." Forsyth says the only problem he has now is that he may be overly protective with his son. "I take him everywhere with me. Everybody spends more time with

the baby — my stepson, my wife, even the dog." John Langdon Down, a British physician who first described the condition in 1866, called it mongolism. However, Beard says the term is no longer used because "it denotes a racial slur." Down's Syndrome can occur in people of every nationality and all social and economic backgrounds.

There is a social stigma attached to having Down's Syndrome, Beard notes. "Because it is a syndrome that most people recognize, Down's Syndrome children will experience ridicule because of their facial features." For expectant mothers who want to know whether they are carrying a child with Down's Syndrome, there is a diagnostic test called amniocentesis which can be administered in the fourth month of pregnancy.

Ms. Edna Simmons knew that she was taking a risk when she became pregnant at age 41, but she decided she was not going to have the test. "I was going to have the baby no matter what, so why go through the agony of knowing," she says. Now Ms. Simmons, the mother of 2½-year-old Jon, who had Down's Syndrome, says "I have accepted it. I'm going to take it one step at a time."

### Black High School Juniors Should Plan To Take The PSAT

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### Coping

(Continued From Page 15) victimized and emotionally hurt spouse survives and engages in another relationship. The normal period of unhappiness or depression that results from a broken relationship is a few weeks to several months. As terrible as it may seem, people have the inner resource needed to adjust and move ahead in their lives. Friendly advice, a show of concern — and reassurance are valuable weapons against the depressions of a breakup.

## OAU Summit Is Postponed

[AN] The 19th annual summit of the Organization of African Unity, scheduled to convene in Tripoli August 5, has been postponed for lack of a quorum.

Despite two weeks of behind the scenes negotiations the organization's members remained split last week on the question of seating the Saharan Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) as the group's 51st member.

Morocco has been battling the POLISARIO Front for control of the phosphate-rich Western Sahara since Spain withdrew from the territory in 1976. For years Morocco has walked out and threatened boycotts of OAU meetings over the issue of OAU recognition of POLISARIO's SADR.

A spokesman for the OAU in New York said Thursday's postponement was a "temporary setback" for the organization and explained, "We have so many other important interests that unite us that one issue will not create the situation which some of our detractors are hoping for, the disbandment of the organization."

Some 28 delegations, six short of a quorum, were present in Tripoli August 5. Many met privately to discuss ways to break the deadlock over the contentious Western Sahara. One possibility under consideration is the convening of an extraordinary summit on the question now dividing the group.

The guarded optimism of many of these African leaders stands in sharp contrast to the pessimism expressed by a number of Western journalists in Tripoli.

But most leaders agree that as long as the division over the seating of the SADR delegation continues, the pan-African organization will



LOS ANGELES—Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi with Los Angeles Mayor Tom Bradley as her side talks to reporters upon her arrival to Los Angeles. UPI Photo

be unable to project as powerful an influence in the international arena, even over the issues on which it is united: independence for Namibia, an end to the white-ruled apartheid state in South Africa, and economic and social developmental concerns.

Libyan leader Col. Muammar Qaddafi, who is scheduled to become the next chairman of the OAU, in a statement last week blamed "the forces of imperialism and foreign monopoly" for trying to undermine the summit and distract Africans from the problem of "putting an end to foreign subordination." They accomplished this, Qaddafi claimed, by promoting what he called the "secondary political problem" of the

Western Sahara. Qaddafi also said he had documented proof that the U.S. actively pursued certain African leaders to gain support for the Moroccan-led boycott.

A State Department spokesman denied these allegations and challenged Qaddafi to produce an African leader who could support the Libyan claims. The U.S. official went on to charge that the "past and present" activities of the Libyan government were a major reason for the collapse of the Tripoli summit.

In its 19-year history the OAU has met with similar difficulties which, according to Tanzanian Foreign Minister Salim Salim, helped "strengthen and not

break the OAU."

During the first-ever extraordinary summit of the OAU held in January 1976, African leaders failed to "break a deadlock over recognition of either the MPLA or the rival FNLA-UNITA parties during the Angolan civil war."

One month later the organization recognized the MPLA following a number of military successes by the group.

African diplomats assert the organization survived and grew in importance following this difficult period.

At the time of the 1976 summit failure Daniel Arap Moi, then vice president of Kenya said, "This is a sad day. We have failed Africa and the Angolan people."

### Kenyan Coup

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aggressive in lashing out at what he calls "divisive elements trying to destroy the peace of the country." On Madaraka Day (Kenya's anniversary of self-government), for example, Moi issued a lengthy attack on "disgruntled elements." Subsequently, at a rally in late July at Eldoret, he was reported to have said, "Some of the [dissident] elements went around like rats poisoning the minds of the people and I had no choice but to detain them." According to Kenya's *Weekly Review*, Moi went on to reaffirm his intention to continue detaining critics of all sorts, whether they be public figures or not.

• George Githii, editor-in-chief of *The Standard*, a major Nairobi-

based newspaper, was sacked after publishing a scathing attack on the government's increasing use of the Detention Act. In a special edition, the management of *The Standard* apologized profusely to the Kenyan government, and whereas Githii was not detained, his passport was withdrawn.

Political observers in Nairobi believe the failed coup will almost surely have the immediate effect of creating an atmosphere of heightened repression. Government critics of all sorts, it is thought, will be afraid to speak out for fear of a harsh response from the authorities. President Moi, meanwhile, will likely take this opportunity to exert his political muscle and will probably go unquestioned in doing so.