

Connections

Glimpsing the inner life

Robert Coles investigates morals of youth

The recipient of the Make a Difference Foundation's final grant is devoted to children. He's spent his life inching toward a better understanding of children's inner lives. He hopes his work will help us all understand each other a little better.

BY SUSAN GRAY

Durham

In a chair at center-stage, he sits slumped over like a sagging academic who has lost his spirit. But when he speaks, lifting his head from his buckled body and looking out at the packed auditorium, people shift forward in their seats and hold their breath to hear his every word.

Dr. Robert Coles is that kind of person. He commands attention with his quiet sincerity and passion.

In February, he spoke at the premier of a film documentary about his work with children, presented at the Carolina Theater in Durham.

Cole's vocation is helping children. And the Pulitzer Prize-winning pediatrician's dream is to help adults and children "get to know each other better, and then maybe figure out

CHILDREN

how to help each other."

Toward that end, Coles has participated in a dizzying number of projects, including writing more than 50 books.

When the Make a Difference Foundation in Raleigh decided to spend itself out this year, Coles was the first choice for its final grant.

"We wanted a sincere and serious impact on the fundamental issues that lead to drug and alcohol abuse," says John Crumpler, the foundation's former president. "We wanted to get beneath the issues which led us to Robert Coles."

Coles has worked with children for more than 35 years, toiling to get a glimpse of their inner lives.

The tenured Harvard professor has spent hundreds of hours, hunkered over low tables, watching children draw. What does a black sun or a red eye mean?

He's spent days observing children in homes, on playgrounds, in schools, on farms, in streets. Why do some grow up to embrace strong moral values, while others self-destruct and lash out at society?

Coles has documented his find-

ings in two series of books - the Pulitzer Prize-winning "Children of Crisis" collection, and the "Inner Lives of Children" trilogy.

His published work has been well-known among child psychologists and teachers. And his recent book on voluntarism, "Call of Service," has been popular with community-service advocates.

However, officials of the Make a Difference Foundation believed Coles' work with children was too important - too urgent - to be shelved in academic offices. They wanted average American families to hear Coles' message about the need to teach children moral values. They were prepared to spend out their endowment. So, what better way to get an idea into the mainstream than on film?

The foundation invested more than \$700,000 in the creation of "The Moral Life of Children with Dr. Coles," a two-hour film documentary. The money, along with funding from the Ford Foundation, paid for a film crew, led by Buddy Squires and the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University.

Squires is known for his collaborations with filmmaker Ken Burns, creator of the PBS series "The Civil War" and "Baseball." Coles co-found-



Coles works with Adam in a scene from the film 'The Moral Life of Children with Robert Coles.'

Photo by Stephen McCarthy

ed the Center for Documentary Studies in January 1990.

The film captures intimate moments between Coles and children in communities ranging from the slums of Louisiana to the suburbs of Connecticut.

In the film, Coles listens intently to the children talk about their families and their fragile ideas of good and evil. Intermittently, he speaks to the camera about the need for fami-

lies to instill moral values in their children.

He describes kids as open vessels, hungry for teaching. And he characterizes Americans - whether they're ideologically conservative or liberal - as people who often neglect morality.

But mostly, Coles asks poignant questions.

"The culture has changed and with it the challenge to parents as to how they respond to that," he says. "How do they protect their children from influences they find undesirable? How do they respond as citizens to a world they feel is sometimes threatening to 'family values?' These are important problems for all of us."

The film also documents Coles' early source of inspiration. About 1962, he met Ruby Bridges, 6, in New Orleans. Coles was working with school programs. And Ruby, an African American, was integrating a New Orleans elementary school.

Coles was taken aback by the tiny girl's profound moral courage as she daily passed by an angry mob of white parents who refused to send their children to school with a black child. Ruby told Coles that she

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Endowing the future

High Point school receives surprise gift

Westchester Academy in High Point has received an unexpected boost to its endowment from the estate of a supporter who for many years had been anonymous.

George W. Schemm, who died last August at the age of 83, created a \$600,000 bequest in his will for the endowment fund for the private, independent school for children in kindergarten through 12th grade.

Schemm retired in 1964 from a 25-year career as a printing officer for the U.S. Public Health Service. He and his wife, Eunice Schemm, moved to High Point in 1978 from the Washington, D.C., area.

"We had no knowledge of this gentle-

EDUCATION

man," says Lillian E. Lyndrup, director of development at Westchester Academy. "It was a complete surprise to us...We are thrilled."

After learning of the bequest, academy officials discovered that Schemm previously had made several anonymous gifts to the school for scholarships.

"Mr. Schemm's interest was in children," says High Point attorney James E. Gill Jr., who is handling the Schemm estate. "He was pleased with Westchester for allowing him the opportunity to help children get

an education."

Schemm's only stipulation for the gift was that the principal be placed in the school's endowment fund, which now stands at \$1.5 million. The school's board of trustees may decide how to use the interest from the gift.

The first year's interest - about \$30,000 - will go toward the academy's \$1.6 million capital campaign, "Building Excellence in Education II: Here We Grow Again!" Money raised during the campaign will support construction of nine additional classrooms and a cafeteria/auditorium at the school.

Ealena Callender



Westchester Academy in High Point received a \$600,000 bequest from a former Washington resident who wanted to help young people.

Photo courtesy of Westchester Academy

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Regional strategy

Triangle United Ways eye merger

United Way affiliates in Durham, Orange and Wake counties are considering merging their staffs while the volunteer boards in each county retain control over their annual campaigns.

BY TODD COHEN

Research Triangle Park

After months of study, a team of United Way volunteer leaders representing Durham, Orange and Wake counties has recommended merging the staffs of the three United Way affiliates.

The affiliates would continue to operate as separate volunteer organizations serving their respective counties and would be responsible for raising and distributing funds. A

new entity, Triangle United Ways, would be created from the merger.

Its 12-member board would consist of representatives of the three local boards. Its staff would combine the staffs of the local affiliates, which no longer would have independent staffs.

Triangle United Ways would provide services to the three affiliates, and would coordinate communications, the annual campaign and the assessment of regional needs.

The merger proposal, which will

be presented to the three local boards later this spring, would create both opportunities and concerns for the three affiliates, United Way leaders say.

The United Way raised more than \$15 million last fall in Durham, Orange and Wake. The goal of consolidating the three would be to reduce overhead as a percentage of the total raised.

That reduction could come either by reducing the administrative staff, which now totals 34 positions for the three affiliates, or by shifting existing resources and raising more dollars.

"We believe if this is put together, there will be significant efficiencies obtained," says Richard Furr, a member of the regional team that proposed the merger and executive vice president and chief operating



Richard Furr

officer for Central Carolina Bank in Durham.

While it's not clear yet whether staff cuts would be made or, if they are, how many positions will be cut, current staff members are aware they could lose their jobs.

"No person is guaranteed a job," says Anita Daniels, executive director of Orange's United Way.

A consolidated United Way operation also could bring about regional programs and services not currently available in the Triangle. While the three affiliates have joined forces for a number of years to wage a joint fundraising campaign in Research Triangle Park, collaboration on other issues has been more difficult.

For example, the three affiliates have been unable to create a regional information and referral service - a

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