



New Crisis Nursery Answers Call for Third Safe Haven

JEFFERSON CITY — Recently, I was privileged to celebrate the opening of a third crisis nursery in St. Charles County. The Wentzville Crisis Nursery, located at 700 Medical Drive, is one of five crisis nurseries in the St. Louis metropolitan area that provides a safe, temporary, 24-hour shelter for children whose families are faced with emergencies or who are facing a crisis.

The governor and first lady joined me and other citizens of the 2nd Senatorial District to recognize the people who helped make the new crisis nursery a reality: Home builder T.R. Hughes, Inc., SSM St. Joseph Health Care Center-Wentzville, and the Community and Children's Resource Board of St. Charles County. Funding also comes from a portion of this year's \$1.3 million state allocation that supports the critical programs and services of Missouri's crisis nurseries.

For those of you who may not know, this is how a crisis nursery works. Parents or caretakers of infants and children up to the age of 12 can bring these young Missourians to any St. Charles County crisis nursery when parents are overwhelmed by stress, when there is a family illness or death, when there is a lack of food, shelter or utilities, or when children are threatened by domestic violence or substance abuse issues. The nurseries provide a safe and nurturing environment, plus offer parenting education, home visits, therapy, and development screening for children. Children also receive medical exams, any needed medication, and meals.

The need for the new crisis nursery in Wentzville was the culmination of a two-year study and assessment of St. Louis, St. Charles, and Wentzville area needs by the St. Louis Regional Crisis Nursery. Prior to the new facility opening, hundreds had to be turned away each year due to a lack of space. The Wentzville site can accommodate up to 10 children per night and is expected to serve an additional 400 children each year.

The first crisis nursery in the St. Louis region opened in 1986 and admitted 274 children and provided counseling and support for 435 families in that first year. Today, the regional crisis nurseries admit more than 5,000 children per year, with approximately 5,300 families receiving support and counseling each year. The nurseries are staffed by a remarkable group of dedicated professionals and volunteers who are committed to reaching out to help our area's most vulnerable and innocent citizens. The goal of everyone involved in the crisis nurseries is the same: to help families overcome obstacles and maintain family stability.

According to a report by the Community and Children's Resource Board, St. Charles County crisis nurseries provided a safe haven to 1,943 children in 2007. And of the children receiving care, 99 percent returned to their natural families and 100 percent remained free of any abuse or neglect.

Those figures confirm our crisis nurseries fill a vital need for area families seeking refuge for children during emergency or crisis situations and provide positive results.

If you have comments or questions about this week's column or any other matter involving state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach my office by phone at (866) 271-2844.

###