

Promise the Children

“If you don’t like the way the world is, you change it. You have an obligation to change it. You just do it one step at a time.” Marion Wright Edelman

As a result of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (Welfare Reform Act), the UUA, with the guidance of the UU Service Committee, launched the Promise the Children Initiative to monitor the effect this legislation would have on the lives of children.

Locally, long time social justice advocates and members, Bill Brach (also on the UUSC Board) and Frank Rennie, organized our Promise the Children Committee, with contributions made by Jackie Lahey, Diana Autin, Diane Connell, among others. Similar to today’s UU Legislative Ministry of NJ initiative, the group met with UU congregations across the state to work on policy, advocacy and lobbying for children’s welfare.

One of the group’s outcomes was the establishment of the After School Tutoring program, now in its 11th year. Its purpose was, and continues to be, the leveling of the academic and technological playing field for all children.

In January of 2007, Joe Thomasberger conducted a worship service on the current status of children, during which he invited members and friends to join him in reinvigorating the temporarily lapsed committee. Nine persons gathered the following month to renew the Promise the Children Committee.

– Promise the Children Committee Mission Statement –

We are part of the Social Justice outreach of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Montclair,

Striving to be a channel for the Congregation to provide direct assistance to children and families in special need;

Encouraging and enabling the Congregation to advocate on behalf of children and their families in the public arena to assure their health, safety and general welfare;

Engaging in research, study and action on behalf of the Congregation in consultation with religious and other concerned organizations to address public policy issues that affect children and their families.

What We’ve Done –

- 1 Mantel of Giving (**Newton Street School**) project
- 2 Technical Assistance in the **Newton Street School** playground project
- 3 Leadership in the development of the **UU Legislative Ministry of New Jersey**
- 4 Urged State Legislators to address Home Schooling regulations and practices

- 5 Book drive targeting **Newton Street School**
- 6 School Supply and Backpack Collection targeting **Newton Street School**
- 7 Participants in the **New Sanctuary Movement**
- 8 Supporters of **Association for Children of NJ**
- 9 Supporters of **Statewide Parents Advocacy Network**
- 10 Education and outreach within our own community

– Ways to Get Involved –

After School Tutoring Program –
Pete Williams, 973-744-2065

UU Legislative Ministry of NJ –
Dianne Finn, 973-809-6628

Mantel of Giving (Newton Street School) – Courtney Allen, 973-243-0376

Promise the Children Committee—
Joe Thomasberger, 973-678-8204

KinderSmile—
Ellen Rothman, 973-744-7003

Promise the Children Committee Members

Nancy Brach	Ellen Rothman
Stacey Cermak	David Szmak
Lauren Carlton	Joe Thomasberger
Becky Doggett	Sabine von Aulock
Carol McGough	

– Resources –

Association for Children of NJ (ACNJ) is a statewide child advocacy organization. **Cecelia Zalkind** is the Executive Director as well as the Chairperson of the state Adoption Services Advisory Committee. She is the author of numerous reports on children’s issues, including *You have a Right!*, a handbook on the legal rights of children in NJ, and a series of reports on children in the foster care system. Ms Zalkind is an adjunct professor of family and adoption law at Seton Hall Law School.

Kindersmile, www.Kindersmile.org, is a non profit organization providing free dental services to low-income children, free oral health education workshops for caregivers and teachers and a dental hotline for dental emergencies. **Ellen Rothman** is their Executive Assistant.

Newton Street School, located in Newark, is where **Peggy O’Donoghue**, PhD,

LCSW works as a School Social Worker. Peggy is a psychotherapist and works as an Adjunct Professor at NYU School of Social Work She has written "Racial Identity in White Mothers of Biracial Children," Journal of Women and Social Work.

Statewide Parent Advocacy Network's (SPAN) mission is to empower and support families and inform and involve professionals and others interested in the healthy development and education of children and youth. **Diana Autin** is the Executive Co-Director for Health and Special Education of SPAN.

UU Legislative Ministry of NJ will provide focused resource information, public policy alerts and advocacy. The network will empower UU values with a forceful collective moral voice. **Dianne Finn** is one of our representatives (973-809-6628, finnflynn@comcast.net).

"We each can make a difference if we are vigilant to create a new kind of society, more compassionate, more caring, more sharing where human rights, where children's rights are respected and protected. Politicians ultimately offer what the people want. Let us tell them we want peace and prosperity for everyone." Archbishop Desmond M. Tutu