

Milligan professor leads efforts on preparing child care for disasters

FROM STAFF REPORTS

The tornadoes that struck East Tennessee, Joplin, Mo., and other parts of the country this spring were devastating reminders of the importance of disaster preparedness in every facet of the community — from emergency responders to child care programs.

A national set of standards written by Dr. Beverly Schmalzried, a nationally known child care advocate and professor of the practice of education at Milligan College, could help child care centers and family child care homes across the country better prepare themselves and their communities for emergencies such as these.

The National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (NACCRRA) and Save the Children's U.S. Programs recently released the standards, titled "Protecting Children in Child Care During Emergencies." These standards make specific recommendations and establish guidelines for incorporating disaster preparedness in state child care regulations.

"This is so important because children are our most vulnerable citizens, and we want to do everything we can to make sure the centers and homes that are caring for them are not vulnerable due to lack of preparation," Schmalzried said. "A lot of child care programs don't have an emergency plan in place. They might know what they would do, but they don't have these important things in writing, such as where they're going to evacuate the children to, how they would get them there and how they're going to reunite the children with their parents."

The recommended national standards address issues uncovered in a 2010 Save the Children study, which found that 36 states are missing key child care regulations that would better protect children in child care before, during and after disasters.

"Our nation's children spend, on average, 36 hours per week in some form of child care and most of the child care workforce has not received basic disaster preparedness training," said Linda K. Smith, executive director of NACCRRA. "A comprehensive and viable emergency plan must be a core component of state child care regulations to ensure that all children are protected in times of crisis."

As a result, NACCRRA and Save the Children developed detailed child care emergency preparedness standards to implement Save the Children's policy recommendations and serve as a model for states.

"Another critical thing child care programs must address is a plan to reopen after a disaster."



Dr. Beverly Schmalzried

Schmalzried hopes her work will encourage states to implement the recommended standards in their state child care licensing rules. She has also completed a training curriculum consisting of 10, one-hour online lessons to accompany the standards.

"I started working on developing training materials for child care centers after Hurricane Katrina," Schmalzried said. "Later, we held a meeting and brought together people involved in disasters all over the United States. But my interest in this issue really began when I worked at the Pentagon as director of the U.S. Air Force's child care program."

Prior to coming to Milligan in 2003, Schmalzried served for 23 years as the chief for Family Member Programs of the United States Air Force, where she directed the Air Force's early childhood education programs serving more than 65,000 children around the world. During this time the Air Force's 245 early childhood programs earned national accreditation.

She was at the helm of the Air Force's early childhood education programs during several natural disasters, including Hurricane Andrew and a volcanic eruption in the Philippines. In addition, she had to ensure that the Air Force's child care centers near active runways were prepared for potential emergencies that could occur there, such as plane crashes and chemical spills.

"This issue is something I've worked on for

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