

Family support crucial for children

BY BOB ROSS

As a father of a 2-year-old girl and a newborn baby boy, I know parenthood can be very stressful. There are times that your children will test your patience and situations where you simply have to take a deep breath and realize that this, too, shall pass. I often look to my parents for advice and am thankful for the example they set and for all of our loving family members surrounding my two children.

Unfortunately, a large number of Oklahoma families do not have such a support system in place. *The Oklahoman's* recent special report, "Dying Too Young," reports that "more than 2,100 Oklahoma children have died since 2006 from all causes including accidents or abuse," giving Oklahoma the 10th-highest child death rate in the nation. *The Oklahoman* exposes a catastrophic problem in Oklahoma of parental negligence. I simply can't comprehend the chilling circumstances detailed



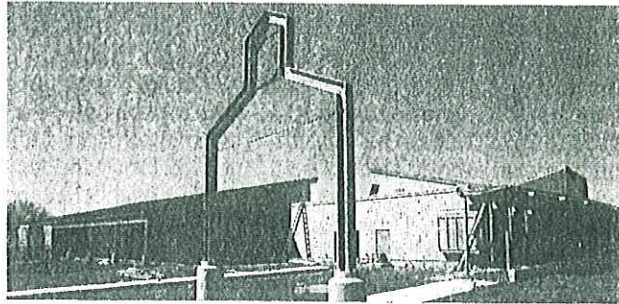
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time and again in which a child's death was at the hands of an abusive parent or caregiver.

I agree with *The Oklahoman's* call to action: We need educational solutions, and we need them now to prevent the next tragedy. We must reach out to parents and caregivers of young children, particularly those who have at-risk characteristics such as being single, young, poor and under-educated.

I would like to think Oklahoma is moving in the right direction with educational parenting programs such as Children First, Parents as Teachers and Smart Start Central Oklahoma's READY! for Kindergarten. Other programs include parental support in the child's early care and education such as Head Start, Early Head Start and the innovative State Pilot Early Education Program.

In addition, Oklahoma City Educare will soon open, offering excellent care and



Oklahoma City Educare, under construction in south Oklahoma City, will provide care and educational support for parents.

PHOTO BY PAUL HELLSTERN, THE OKLAHOMAN

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educational support for parents. We need to raise awareness of the existence of such programs and provide the resources to make these services available to our neediest citizens. These programs focus on parental support and care for young children and have a positive impact on each child's life and, ultimately, for our state.

As one of many supporters of Oklahoma City Educare, I'm ready to do whatever it takes to make Oklahoma a better place for children and families. I hope you will join us in our efforts at Inasmuch Foundation. While we are proud of Educare's excellent example, it is not the sole solution. Others must follow our lead in order to help the thousands of children who need support, love and special attention in order to thrive.

With more than half of Oklahoma's parents of young children living in poverty, it's critical these children receive the highest-quality care and education as early as possible. Then, and only then, will we be able to lift our citizens out of this horrific cycle of poverty that is keeping our state from reaching its full potential.

Ross is president and CEO of Inasmuch Foundation.