



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
*Interviews & Historical Photos Available*

**Contact: Mark Stubis 800-25-PEACE**  
[mstubis@kidspeace.org](mailto:mstubis@kidspeace.org)

## **FROM THE ORPHAN TRAINS TO VIRGINIA TECH: WHAT'S CHANGED FOR AMERICA'S KIDS IN THE LAST CENTURY?**

-----  
**On 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Working with U.S. Kids, Leading Children's Crisis Charity  
Looks Back a Hundred Years, Launches National Dialogue on Progress,  
Problems Remaining for the American Child**

-----  
**In Wake of Virginia Tech Tragedy and Other Problems, KidsPeace Offers a Wealth of Prevention  
Materials, Healthy Parenting Information, and Innovative Free Crisis Tools for U.S. Youth**

**BETHLEHEM, PENN., May 16, 2007** – A hundred and twenty-five years after American children were seen all too often as commodities, sent to work in mines and workhouses—even shipped away by the hundreds of thousands on “Orphan Trains,” things are supposed to be much better for kids. But are they?

One organization that has literally watched America's children “grow up” is celebrating its *125<sup>th</sup>* birthday during National Family Month® (Mother's Day to Father's Day, May 13-June 17) and is using the occasion to look back at where kids were just a century ago, but more importantly, to open a national dialogue on the state of America's kids to see where things have gotten better and where we need to do better.

### ***Opening a Window On the Past...and a Door to the Future***

KidsPeace, one of the oldest, largest children's crisis charities, is not only opening its archives to shed light on the fascinating and often poignant challenges facing America's kids over the 125 years of its service since it was founded in 1882 by the president of Bethlehem Steel during a smallpox epidemic. In the wake of the Virginia Tech tragedy, unacceptably high rates of child abuse and youth suicide, and growing problems such as childhood obesity, the organization is launching a *year-long national examination on the state of the American child* and offering the nation a flood of crisis prevention materials, healthy parenting information, and innovative free tools for youth to avoid the greatest dangers they face today.

### ***An Invitation for a National Dialogue***

“Looking back at the history of how America has treated its children, you realize how far we have come,” says C.T. O'Donnell II, president and CEO of KidsPeace. “We must now translate the lessons of history into effective action that will help our children in tangible ways for the next 100 years. Today, we are opening a yearlong national dialogue on the American child—where we've come and where we need to go.”

### *Progress...and Problems*

“Progress has been made in many areas,” says Dr. Herbert Mandell, medical director for KidsPeace and the KidsPeace Children's Hospital. “Society places more value on the protection of children now than it ever has. Certain problems like teen smoking, pregnancy, and juvenile crime, are dropping. On the other hand, there has been a 42 percent rise in arrests for violence by girls in just the past few years, and the burgeoning child obesity epidemic is evidence not just of physical and dietary problems, but of psychological pressures that we are only just now beginning to appreciate.”

“We have seen a tremendous increase in the problems youngsters face, just in the last few years, not to mention more than a century of work,” says Dr. Lorrie Henderson, Chief Operating Officer for KidsPeace. “At this point, we need to look at our past so we can discover data and trends and develop solutions.”

### *Tools for Parents, Teachers...and Children*

Harvard's famed child expert Dr. Alvin Poussaint, who with polio vaccine pioneer Jonas Salk, family expert Lee Salk, and Brown University child development luminary Dr. Lewis Lipsitt, co-founded the KidsPeace Lee Salk Center for Research (a kind of “Manhattan Project” for the American child), has worked on many cutting-edge tools and prevention materials that KidsPeace is offering to parents, teachers – and children – to help them avoid or overcome the greatest challenges and dangers to American youth today. Just one, [www.TeenCentral.net](http://www.TeenCentral.net), is an innovative, free, problem-solving resource that provides clinically screened advice on everything from bullying to drugs, family problems to violence, school shootings -- and even fears of terrorism. Another, [www.KidsPeace.org](http://www.KidsPeace.org) offers adults expert advice on anything from abuse prevention to childhood depression to grandparenting tips.

“The history of childcare in America is rich and varied,” says Dr. Poussaint. “We need to combine the best lessons of the past with modern research and practice, and begin assembling a central core of knowledge that will help youngsters to deal with problems today as well as tomorrow. It's time for a national dialogue.”

“On their websites KidsPeace has information on coping with everything from bullying to school shootings,” says Leeza Gibbons, national spokesperson for KidsPeace, TV and radio personality, and founder of the Memory Foundation and ‘Leeza’s Place’ Alzheimer’s support centers. “On the 125<sup>th</sup> birthday of the charity that has literally watched America’s children “grow up,” the best present we can give is to provide the tools that will give kids peace.”

“I travel around the country talking to millions of children about what they face every day,” says Hollywood entertainer and national children’s safety and self-esteem icon RETRO BILL. “We’ve made a lot of progress, but kids still need help. We need to work with groups like KidsPeace to help kids cope with the new dangers they face, as well as the age-old crises that can strike any child growing up, whether it’s 1882 or 2007.”

“I keep thinking of that old adage about how those who do not learn from the mistakes of history are condemned to repeat them,” says KidsPeace Lee Salk Center for Research director Dr. Lewis Lipsitt. “When you think of some of the disasters of the past, including the horror of Virginia Tech, you realize that we had better learn -- for our children’s sakes, as well as ours.”

“I’ve seen the problems close up, but I’m also an optimist,” says KidsPeace President C. T. O’Donnell II. “It’s never too late to learn from the past and on this, our 125th birthday, our goal is to give America’s children the best present possible...the attention, the tools and the care that in a turbulent world will give kids peace.”

*KidsPeace is a 125-year-old national children’s crisis charity dedicated to giving hope, help, and healing to children facing crisis. Founded in Bethlehem, PA in 1882 KidsPeace directly helps more than 10,000 children a year at 66 centers nationwide, and millions more through prevention campaigns to help kids avoid or overcome the dangers of growing up. Supported by VIP leaders including its national spokesperson Leeza Gibbons, who now heads the Alzheimer’s Disease advocacy and support group, "Leexa's Place," Harvard’s famed Dr. Alvin Poussaint, Brown University child development pioneer Dr. Lewis Lipsitt, and child safety and self-esteem icon RETRO BILL, KidsPeace was named “The Outstanding Organization” of its kind in the country by the American Association of Psychiatric Services for Children and was called “a prototype of what we need for all children everywhere” by the late, nationally renowned child and family expert, Dr. Lee Salk.*