

Meet Cover Director Robert Siegel Mary Crane Center, Chicago, Illinois

"Let us accept the child in our midst as our greatest wealth and our highest responsibility. Let us exalt him above industry, business, politics, and above all the petty selfish things that weaken and destroy a people. Let us know that the race goes forward through its children." These words were spoken over 50 years ago by Jane Addams, founder of Hull House and one of the mothers of Mary Crane Center. Edna Dean Baker, president of National College of Education, Evanston, is also credited with creating the Mary Crane Center because of her efforts to enable her students to understand through firsthand experience the effects of the variety of stresses the human family faces in our society.

In 1907, Richard Teller Crane built the Mary Crane building in the original Hull House complex as a memorial to his wife, Mary Prentice Crane, and designated that it was to be used as a Day Nursery. When Hull House turned the Day Nursery over to the National College of Education in 1925, it became one of the country's first experiments in nursery school education. The Depression threatened the existence of the school until a group of women associated with the College formed the Mary Crane League, which continues its work to provide operating funds.

With the cooperation of the Chicago Housing Authority, in 1962 the school moved to its new location in the Julia Lathrop Homes where a diversity of nationality and race is represented. In 1969, the demonstration program for school aged children (5 to 8 years), Casa Uno, moved across the street from the Nursery into the Mary Crane Family and Day Care Center. Six years later, Casa Dos, providing before and after school care for children ages 8 to 11, was added. And just a year ago, Mary Crane became one of the first community agencies to join the statewide network of pre-kindergarten programs in conjunction with the Chicago Public Schools.

When Robert Siegel first became executive director of Mary Crane Center over 12 years ago, he was

not yet a parent. "I was **only a child development expert**. I didn't know how much I had yet to learn about how difficult parenting really is. I didn't know how many mistakes I had yet to make as a parent. Most importantly, I did not know how deeply I could love and give . . . my daughters, Erin and Carlye, taught me that."

During his term as executive director, Robert has established an integrated approach to family services, reduced staff turnover by 50%, restructured the curriculum to provide more compensatory education in concentrated areas, installed a streamlined system for personnel management which allows for more effective and equitable staff evaluation and compensation, initiated an inter-agency effort against substance abuse, and placed a gang intervention team in the community.

He serves on the graduate school faculty and is currently working on a doctoral degree in instructional leadership at National-Louis University. He has provided extensive training both in Illinois and nationally in day care management and is best known for his work on staffing issues and personnel and financial management. He has worked with the Illinois Commission on Children, The Statewide Training Consortium, the Government Task Force on Abuse, and is in his second term as president of The Day Care Action Council of Illinois.

The Mary Crane League and The Mary Crane Center are dedicated toward bettering the social, moral, and educational status of underprivileged children and their families regardless of race, color, or creed, reaffirming Jane Addam's principle of helping people to help themselves to enrich and improve their lives.

Cover Director