

Child advocate provides aid to state-based organizations

by **A.J. McClannahan**

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James J. Lardie doesn't just "care" about poor and minority children in the United States, he wants to do something about the fact that many are hungry. And he wants it done now.

Lardie, executive director of the national Association of Child Advocates based in Cleveland, Ohio, was in Alaska recently to meet with Thelma Langdon, coordinator of the Child and Family Advocacy Project of the Alaska Children's Services Inc.

Lardie travels throughout the United

States working with state-based child advocacy organizations. He provides counseling and technical assistance.

Lardie said he draws a distinction between "caring" and "doing" because many people are concerned about poor children, and yet their plight continues to worsen.

And that problem stems from the political arena itself, he said.

"The vast majority of decisions that will be made about the most vulnerable of our society — children — will be

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Advocate works for children

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made by politicians in the political arena for political reasons," he said.

Lardie said at least a fifth of all children in the nation go to bed without sufficient nutrition. In fact, three million more children are in poverty now than when the Reagan administration took over, he said.

"It's just morally unacceptable," Lardie said.

In Alaska, he said problems of poor and minority children are exacerbated by the sheer distances involved in providing services in the nation's largest state.

And although there is an awareness on the part of Alaskans about the fact that the state has the highest divorce rate nationally and a very serious alcohol problem, many children are still suffering, he said.

"Alaskans are a little busier just trying to survive, physically and emotionally," he said.

He said Alaskans need to undertake a needs assessment of children throughout the state, making sure people from rural and urban areas participate. And that information should be used to develop public policy, Lardie said.

Lardie's visit to Alaska included meetings with the citizens' advisory committee of the Child and Family Advocacy Project as members work on an independent and enlarged organization. It is aimed at addressing public policy issues affecting dependent children and their families.

Lardie also conducted a political skills workshop in Juneau and spoke at the annual meeting of the Alaska Association of Homes for Children.



James Lardie is from Cleveland, Ohio.

photo by Walt Hays