

The paper for  
professionals who work  
with troubled youth



# STARR POINTS

STARR MICHIGAN \* OHIO

## Trauma and Loss in Children (TLC) now part of Starr Commonwealth

Trauma is trauma, whether it's experienced by a soldier in battle or a child caught up in a toxic daily environment. "It's another kind of war zone," says Starr's Dr. Jim Longhurst, "and it produces a terror that manifests itself in distinct physical and behavioral ways."

Since 1990, The National Institute for Trauma and Loss in Children (TLC) has been providing direct services to traumatized children and families and training professionals who work with traumatized children, families and schools. TLC is the only program of its kind in the nation and offers certification programs, conferences, books and videos that instruct thousands each year, including school professionals, crisis intervention teams, medical and mental health professionals, child care professionals and clinicians.

Now under the umbrella of the Starr Commonwealth Institute for Training,

TLC was founded by internationally recognized expert, Dr. William R. Steele who also joins Starr as Senior Vice President of Training. Steele's trainings, intervention programs and research speak to his focus on excellence in outcomes for the treatment of troubled children. With degrees in education, social work and psychology, he has long insisted that it is the responsibility of the childcare field to be flexible in its efforts to help children, as there is no one intervention that fits every child.

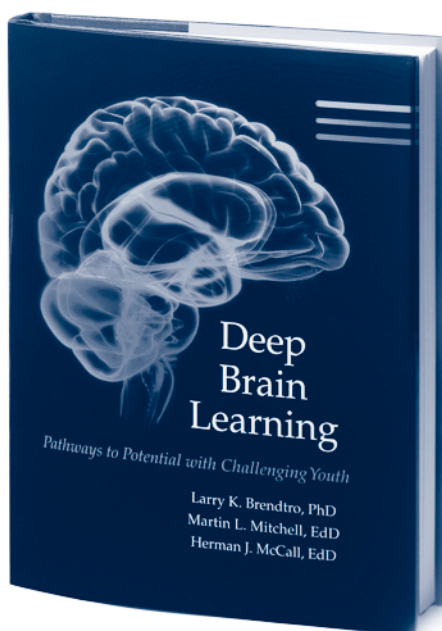
"We welcome the opportunity to become a program of Starr Commonwealth and together expand our collective expertise to actually reach more traumatized children and their families as well as practitioners like you," said Steele in an announcement of the move to colleagues and clients. For more information visit [starrtraining.org/tlc](http://starrtraining.org/tlc).



## Deep Brain Learning: Pathways to Potential with Challenging Youth

A widely acclaimed new book, *Deep Brain Learning: Pathways to Potential with Challenging Youth*, examines the science behind the developing brain to confirm what professionals in strength-based youth programs have long believed: our brains are wired to respond to community and relationship. The book offers compelling, evidence-based research and real-life examples to point out what works – and what doesn't – in creating long-term change in troubled youth. "Traditional programs that modify superficial behavior will never give you anything more than superficial change," says co-author Larry Brendtro, former President of Starr Commonwealth and President of The Resilience Academy. Brendtro, a licensed psychologist, wrote the book along with Starr President and CEO Martin Mitchell and Starr's Executive Vice President Herman McCall.

Today's advances in brain science offer conclusive proof that the human brain is predisposed to respond to attachment—or the lack of it. "The brain doesn't want to reinvent the wheel," says Brendtro. Instead, he says, the brain's tendency is to look for things that support what it already believes and discard the rest. If you are a child who has experienced abuse and neglect, for example, that's the lens through which you will view everything and everyone whether the threat is there or not. "Kids who are struggling don't need a new way to act," says Brendtro. "They need a new way to think."



"A cutting-edge, reader-friendly synthesis of cognitive neuroscience, positive psychology and the classic truths of human development...astonishingly creative."

John C. Gibbs, Ph.D.,  
Professor of Developmental Psychology,  
The Ohio State University

The key, say the authors, is in creating powerful environments where kids are treated with dignity and respect by adults who truly believe in them. With a child who constantly

"pushes buttons" that can be difficult. "Many of the kids we see are using strategies that work for them, as negative as they may seem," says Brendtro. "Our job is to give them new strategies." To do that, he says, you have to look at problems as opportunities to learn instead of obstacles to overcome. A trained and dedicated staff is essential. Relational techniques such as Motivational Interviewing and RAP (Response Ability Pathways) are just two ways Starr childcare professionals are reaching even the hardest-to-reach kids. Brendtro himself will begin an intensive summer-long series of internal training seminars on *Deep Brain Learning* principles and practices. "The most powerful chemical changes in the brain come through human attachments," Brendtro says. "It's been said and it's true—programs don't change people. People change people."

Now that medical science can actually measure the positive brain activity of people when they are engaged in positive relationships with others, science and technology have reaffirmed what Starr psychologist Dr. Jim Longhurst calls "the tried and true." As Longhurst points out, "People who work with kids knew in their hearts that certain things worked when the relationship was there," he says. "But it's always been hard to identify and quantify what is actually happening in that relationship. *Deep Brain Learning* is helping us bridge that knowledge gap with a look at the science behind these truths."

To order a copy of *Deep Brain Learning*, visit [starr.org](http://starr.org) or call 800.837.5591.

## IN THEIR OWN WORDS

### Tim's experience.

When the courts first placed Tim in Starr's community-based substance abuse program, he told himself, "I'll just do whatever I have to do to get through it and get out of here." The 16-year-old refused to believe he had a substance abuse problem. "Everybody does it," he told anyone who would listen. "I was just partying like all kids do." It took a group of teens his own age from his own background to open his eyes. Gradually, Tim's peers helped him see that "partying" was robbing him of so much. How did they know? Because they'd been there themselves. When a boy who has serious issues comes into contact with others who have successfully dealt with the same issues, the results can be life-changing. "It took me awhile to realize it but when I did my group was so happy for me," says Tim. "They really celebrated. It was actually kinda cool."



## THE LONG VIEW

Dr. James Longhurst is a licensed psychologist for Starr Commonwealth. In addition to his role as Director for Montcalm Schools, Jim is involved in all case planning and clinical services for the organization. He is a member of the American Psychological Association and is a charter member of the International Positive Psychology Association. Jim is a certified lead facilitator and trainer for Starr's Healing of Racism and Glasswing<sup>SM</sup> facilitator training initiative.



## The Mind-Body Connection

You might be wondering why I chose to highlight Starr's emphasis on recreation and wellness in this issue where there is a focus on *Deep Brain Learning* and the neuroscience of change in kids. Why talk about the body when the focus is on the brain?

Well, I believe that you can't really separate the two when we talk about what takes place when kids are helped to change. In fact there is widespread concurrence that you really can't affect one without affecting the other. Viewed this way, the mind-body connection is inextricably linked – the same coin with two sides.

Let me start with a true story I heard from our Wellness team last week. They told me about a 14-year-old student, new to the residential program that refused to get into the water at the pool during the two week focus on swimming skills. They observed that this youth would not maintain eye contact with anyone talking with him, would rarely speak and did his best to avoid social contact with others.

Together with his treatment team, the Wellness staff worked with this student and eventually got him to hang his feet in the water while sitting on the ledge. From there, he was able to stand in the water at the shallow end and later put his head under the water voluntarily – the first time he had done so in his life.

By the end of the two weeks, this youngster was awarded the "Green Tag," which indicated that he was able to swim "down and back" the full length of the pool; could tread water for a full minute; and could jump off the diving board which for him was the "scariest thing I have ever done!" His group members and the staff members present cheered him on for his accomplishment.

Let's look at these two weeks in the life of this student in our residential program for the incredible accomplishments they represent:

- With the power of supportive relationships from his team, group and the Wellness staff, he was able to break through his fear of water. Just as importantly, this successful experience serves as proof that he can overcome other challenges he will face in life. He is beginning to develop an "internal focus of control" that serves to erode his feelings of inadequacy and powerlessness.
- He has learned a basic skill that not only could possibly save his life but also allows him to interact socially with others in an activity that involves swimming. He does not have to again experience the panic he had no doubt felt when someone suggested that they go to a pool or beach for recreation.
- This youth is beginning to see himself physically in a much different way. He is becoming more aware of the changes this physical activity is having on his body. He is much more enthusiastic when entering into other physical and recreational activities. He can even be seen "checking himself out" on occasion! Although this is just a beginning, the changes in his body that he is guided to experience will no doubt affect his overall self-image.
- Very importantly, he now is much more comfortable in social activities and in relationships with both adults and peers. The Wellness team states that once he overcame this hurdle, "his personality was released!" He maintains much better eye contact, seeks out involvement with others, and initiates greetings and conversations.

I had the opportunity to meet this young man yesterday while in his cottage. I noticed that he was smiling as he introduced himself to us. He stuck out his hand and told me his name – all the while looking me square in the eyes.

I believe that one of the strongest components of our Starr Psychoeducational Model is the excellent work done in enhancing kids physically and recreationally. There's not enough space to talk about the impact that our athletics and health components have on the kids we serve. Maybe next issue!



*Starr Points* is a quarterly newsletter published by Starr Commonwealth, an internationally recognized leader in transformational programs for children, families, schools and communities. Founded in 1913, Starr's treatment philosophy is rooted in seeing something good in every child, which serves as the guiding principle in its strength-based approach. Starr offers a full spectrum of community-based early intervention and prevention services along with specialized residential programs. Through the Starr Institute of Training, parents, clinicians, educators and childcare professionals now have access to Starr's highly successful and innovative techniques aimed at bringing out the best in every child. For more information, visit [www.starr.org](http://www.starr.org).

### Starr Commonwealth Programs

#### Albion, Michigan

Juvenile Justice (residential)  
Sexually Reactive Youth (SRY residential)  
Abuse/Neglect (residential)  
Alternatives (substance abuse, residential)

#### Battle Creek, Michigan

Day Treatment  
Intensive In-Home  
Starr Life Skills  
(supervised independent living)  
Treatment Foster Care

#### Columbus, Ohio

Sexually Reactive Youth (SRY residential)  
Transitions (supervised transitional living)  
MyPlace Transitional Living  
Ohio Families First  
Treatment Foster Care

#### Detroit, Michigan

Alternatives  
(substance abuse, community-based)  
New Boundaries (residential transition and reintegration support)  
Starr Life Skills  
(supervised independent living)  
Transitions (supervised transitional living)  
Treatment Foster Care  
The National Institute for Trauma and Loss in Children

#### Van Wert, Ohio

Traditional Delinquent for Boys  
Traditional Residential for Girls

For Michigan referrals, please call toll-free 800-837-5591 or e-mail [michintake@starr.org](mailto:michintake@starr.org)

For Ohio referrals, please call toll-free 866-289-9201 or e-mail [ohiointake@starr.org](mailto:ohiointake@starr.org)

[www.starr.org](http://www.starr.org)

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