

## PHONEFRIEND FACTS

### The National Picture:

According to a recent article in the Daily News, October 31<sup>st</sup> of 2000, 7 million children are home alone nationwide says the U.S. Census Bureau. A survey of 30,000 homes found that 9 percent of the children are between 5 to 11 years of age and 41% are between the ages of 12 to 14 years of age. The census study found that children living in poverty were less likely to be left home alone because they have more resources and more subsidized programs in their neighborhoods. Of middle class working families, 22% are more likely to be faced with an impossible choice of work or quality childcare says Alan Simpson from the National Association for the Education of Young Children in Washington, D.C. "The pathetic part is school buildings for the most part are empty after school", says Barbara Pollard, professor of child development at California State University Northridge. School officials have already begun to take notice and have written grants to fund after school programs that offer homework help, tutoring, snack and various activities. Many are offered at little charge to parents or are based on a sliding scale. School districts are having trouble filling up their programs because the census study also found that self-care was much more prevalent especially among middle school aged youth. This means 2.4 million are 5 to 11 years and 4.4 million are 12 to 14 years of age, with the latter group regularly caring for themselves. Self-care ranged from 2 percent among 5-year-olds to 48 percent among 14-year-olds.

### Our Community Picture:

The following information is taken from Alfred Gabor Associates, Labor Base Analysis and Los Angeles County Children's Planning Council Report.

The Antelope Valley is approximately sixty miles from the San Fernando Valley. It is often recognized as fifty percent of North L. A. County. The Antelope Valley spreads out over two thousand five hundred sq.miles of desert and forest. Boundaries go north to the Kern County line, east to San Bernardino County line, the southern border is formed by the Angeles National Forest and the western border includes the Ventura County line. The Antelope Valley is located in the L. A. County Supervisorial District number five. The community has thirty rural un-incorporated communities along with two mid-size cities, Palmdale and Lancaster. The population of the Antelope Valley is based on the combination of Kern County and Los Angeles County figures. The current estimated population is four hundred thousand, two hundred and eighty-five.

The top employers in the Antelope Valley are Aerospace, Military, Government and School Districts. Current leadership in the Valley continues to strive towards diversifying the job base, however fifty-seven thousand people have an average commute of fifty-eight minutes daily or longer to the San Fernando Valley, Central Los Angeles and as far as the South Bay area. Commuter incomes are higher than non-commuters. Commuters are also more likely to be homeowners and are better educated. Twenty-six percent of commuters arrive home between 5 to 6 pm, fifteen percent between 6 and 7 pm.

There can be a delay of parents returning home on time nightly, to their children. Thirty-one percent of the population is 17 years of age or less. Twenty-two percent are under age 6 with nine percent between the ages of 6 to 9 years old. Children under 10 are the primary users of childcare. The heaviest youth population is located in the cities of Palmdale and Lancaster. According to census tract information outlying areas with heavy youth population include Littlerock, Lake Los Angeles, Wilsona, High Vista and Sulphur Springs (adjacent to Santa Clarita). Ninety-one percent of these children attend public schools. There are one-hundred and two public schools in the area. Sixty-three of the elementary schools; are serviced by PhoneFriend . This population receives over 50,000 flyers distributed in their classrooms. Of these households fifty-five percent of working parents have both parents (and the single parent) in the labor force.

In an Antelope Valley Press article, "Juvenile Crime up In Valley," By Mary Beth Alexander, Sgt. Bobby Denham attributes thirty-five percent of this year's crimes are committed by youth. He goes on to say that the commuters' lifestyle is producing more "latchkey kids," leaving them more susceptible to bad influences. "We have thousands of kids in the Antelope valley that are unsupervised for six hours a day or longer." Denham said, "the chances of something occurring is very high."

Who are our troubled at risk children in our communities? Sometimes these children find a "home" with gang members, instead of their own families. Gang membership involves all racial and many ethnic groups and yes, girls too. How can we help? By supporting families and their children!

The PhoneFriend help-line supports the children of middle class working families. Especially homes with two parents working, along with commuting households and homes with a single parent heading up the family. The average age of a resident in the Antelope Valley is 45 years; the average income level is \$41,000 for a family of four. Many schools are in new housing tract areas. The affordable housing is still a factor which draws families to the Antelope Valley. This is reflected in the ranking of schools placing the most calls. A single parent heads up eight percent of the households in Lancaster and five percent of the households in Palmdale. The U.S.Census Bureau cites a national trend toward the largest population of children left home alone starting at age twelve. Our line reflects that 12, 13, 14 and 15 year olds are calling the line the most often, which supports the census data. There is still no correlation with Chapter One Welfare AFDC poverty level families utilizing our service more. Often this has been the case in other communities with such help lines. This may also reflect the results of the census study, which found that children living in poverty were less likely to be left home alone because they have more resources through subsidized programs.

However, we have a large number of apartment dwelling families. These multifamily dwellings are more prone to a higher vacancy rate and influx of new tenants. In addition, as residents in older neighborhoods begin to move up to larger homes in new housing tracts, there is a trend for the owner to keep their old home as a rental, especially if home

prices are reduced during a real-estate downturn. Many of these rentals qualify for Section 8 tenants. These are also more prone to a higher vacancy rate and an influx of new tenants. We appear to be serving these families as well with our help line as reflected in the ranking of schools calling the most.

Other trends reflected in our quality exchange examples are frequent calls from special needs students who spend more time at home. We also have a number of calls from children who live in Foster Family households. A community with affordable housing also seems to attract such housing options because there are budgetary advantages. These children have many issues that they need to talk out with our volunteers.

The Antelope Valley has had a high rate of child abuse and domestic violence reports. During the year of 1996 over 169,000 reports were made for child abuse and over 72,000 were reported for domestic violence. Factors that contribute to these situations are:

- ...Periods of rapid growth when services can not keep up with the needs of families.
- ...An influx of new residents from LA metropolitan areas who sometimes seek to escape the negative influences of gangs and drugs.
- ...The geographic isolation of our community.
- ...The lack of efficient and effective public transportation.
- ...The availability of drugs and manufacturing that occurs in the community.
- ...The commuting lifestyle and the lack of job opportunities locally that can support a family.
- ...The boom and bust economy common in a young and developing metropolis.
- ...A higher incidence of teenage pregnancy.

PhoneFriend is there as a safe alternative during the after school hours. This year we answered over 1,000 calls keeping children company while talking with them to pass the time, including the reading of stories and jokes. We help them with homework, a variety of problems and minor mishaps like spilled juice or escaped pets. See our stats list attached.