

# Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood

Annual Report  
July 1, 2011 - June 30, 2012





Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood

## Our Mission

Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood supports parents' efforts to raise healthy families by limiting commercial access to children and ending the exploitive practice of child-targeted marketing. In working for the rights of children to grow up—and the freedom for parents to raise them—without being undermined by corporate interests, CCFC promotes a more democratic and sustainable world.

The Independent Charities Seal of Excellence is awarded to the members of Independent Charities of America and Local Independent Charities of America that have, upon rigorous independent review, been able to certify, document, and demonstrate on an annual basis that they meet the highest standards of public accountability, program effectiveness, and cost effectiveness. These standards include those required by the US Government for inclusion in the Combined Federal Campaign, probably the most exclusive fund drive in the world. Of the 1,000,000 charities operating in the United States today, it is estimated that fewer than 50,000, or 5 percent, meet or exceed these standards, and, of those, fewer than 2,000 have been awarded this Seal.



# Dear Friend,

At CCFC, two of our least favorite words are “inevitable” and “impossible.” Cynics tell us that the corporate takeover of childhood is inevitable. We never listen. Skeptics tell us that it’s impossible for a small nonprofit to stand up to huge corporations. We don’t agree. With help from our members, we’ve persuaded some of the world’s biggest companies, like McDonald’s, Hasbro, Disney, and Nickelodeon, to change their marketing practices. And now we’ve set our sights on another Goliath: the unprecedented and escalating time children spend with screens, robbing them of the time they need for creative and active play essential to a healthy childhood.

Marketers and media executives would have us believe that a childhood of all screens all the time is inevitable. But that’s not the case. In these pages you’ll learn about CCFC’s groundbreaking new initiative to help parents around the country limit children’s screen time and encourage play. You’ll also read about our successful efforts to hold corporations accountable for their egregious marketing and to protect schools and school buses as commercial-free spaces for children.

In our media-saturated, commercially-driven culture, the health of our children, our democracy and our planet depends on people willing to challenge the inevitable and do the impossible. We’re so grateful to you for standing with CCFC and making our work possible. Together, and only together, we can provide all children with the kind of childhood we know they deserve.



All the best,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Susan Linn".

Susan Linn, EdD

Director, Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood

# Virtual Babies

## Helping parents raise screen-free infants and toddlers

Conventional wisdom has it that nothing will convince parents to keep infants and toddlers screen-free. But no one has ever asked parents what they think—until now. With support from the David Rockefeller Fund, we interviewed a diverse group of mothers of young children, as well as health and child care providers, to understand what would help parents follow the public health recommendation of discouraging screen time for children under 2. Here's what we learned: Information, guidance, and alternatives to screen time need to be available to parents from pregnancy throughout early childhood and come from a variety of sources—including from health and education professionals, and blogs and websites aimed at parents of young children. Based on what the moms told us and interviews with health and child care professionals, we laid out steps for a public health campaign to engage whole communities in helping parents reduce screen time and promote hands-on and active play. And a grant from Kaiser Permanente brought us one step closer to that vision.

### Did you know?

- On any given day, 29% of babies under 12 months are watching TV and videos for an average of about 90 minutes. Twenty-three percent have a television in their bedroom.
- Between their first and second birthday, on any given day, 64% of babies and toddlers are watching TV and videos, averaging slightly over 2 hours. Thirty-six percent have a television in their bedroom.
- Little is known about the amount of time children under 2 currently spend with smartphones and tablets, but in 2011 there were 3 million downloads just of Fisher Price apps for infants and toddlers.

**CCFC is helping parents reduce children's screen time and encourage active and creative play.**

# Healthy Kids in a Digital World

## A strategic plan to reduce screen time for children 0 to 5 through organizational policy and practice change

Professionals working with families in health centers, early care and education programs, community centers and other settings are an important resource for parents. In turn, many of these providers rely on national professional and advocacy organizations for support, training, and education. So when Kaiser Permanente's Community Health Initiatives asked us to create a strategic plan for reducing children's screen time through organizational policy and practice change, we jumped at the chance. Our goal was to create a plan to help major organizations serving children and families—with a special focus on low-income communities—incorporate reducing children's screen time into their goals for members and constituents.

In March, we hosted a very productive strategy session attended by executive directors or senior staff from Head Start, WIC, the Praxis Project, the American Academy of Pediatrics, Voices for America's Children, and other national organizations. Working with these groups, as well as the National Black Child Development Institute, United Community Centers of America, and the National Association of Community Health Centers, we created a three-year plan that will fulfill our vision of infusing communities with messages about reducing screen time and promoting creative and active play.



**Healthy Kids in a Digital World is available at:**  
<http://commercialfreechildhood.org/healthykidsdigitalworld>



# Screen-Free Week 2012

Screen-Free Week was a rousing success and celebrated in schools, libraries, churches, and communities around the country. A host of Screen-Free Week organizers created all sorts of great activities. Here are a few of our favorites:

**Screen-Free Kansas** partnered with local businesses to offer discounted or free fun activities each day. **Unplug and Play** in Bozeman, MT also organized daily events, including free admission to the Museum of the Rockies, a bike rodeo, and family science night at the Children's Museum.

The **Francis Parker After School Program** in Chicago asked parents and teachers to sponsor a student for charity; the longer students went screen-free, the more money they raised for their sister school in Ghana! And the **Inland Preschool** in Calimesa, CA hosted a Screen-Free Week trike-a-thon.

The children's department at the **North Tonawanda (New York) Library** hosted events every evening including a scavenger hunt, a craft night, and "Plant a Seed for Spring." **John Lutheran Church** in Fargo, ND held a "Screen-Free Fellowship" with games, nature activities, invigorating conversations . . . and ice cream!

But even better than all the screen-free fun was that so many participants vowed to make important year-round changes. Here's what Michael O'Heaney at the Story of Stuff Project said about his family's week:

*I won't say that we'll never turn the television on again. We will. But just a week without screen time has helped me understand how reflexively I acquiesce to my daughter's requests for a quick Caillou fix. I feel better prepared now to guide her in a more creative direction, thanks in no small part to the resources offered on CCFC's site.*

Save the date for next year's Screen-Free Week!



# Holding Corporations Accountable



CCFC achieved a significant milestone this year in our ongoing efforts to hold the “genius baby” industry accountable for false and deceptive marketing. The Federal Trade Commission filed false advertising charges against *Your Baby Can Read*, a video series which retailed for as much as \$200. Our 18-month *Your Baby Can Read* campaign featured all of the hallmarks of our activism: evidenced-based advocacy, a committed grassroots, and significant media attention.

In April 2011, we filed an FTC complaint against the makers of *Your Baby Can Read* and showed the claims the company made about its videos were contradicted by research. Our complaint was featured on the *Today Show*, and received major print and internet coverage as well. We met several times with the FTC and our members also weighed in, urging the Commission to act. All of these actions led to the FTC’s landmark decision, which included a \$185 million judgment against the makers of *Your Baby Can Read* and a prohibition against using the deceptive product name.

## Save the Lorax!

For over forty years, *The Lorax* was a clarion call for conservation. But when the film arrived last spring in theaters with dozens of corporate tie-ins, its powerful message was in danger of being crushed by the same consumerism and corporate greed that the Lorax once warned against. CCFC’s “Save the Lorax” campaign and our call to shun the film’s corporate partners were featured in the *Washington Post*, *Mother Jones*, and the *Huffington Post*, and spread rapidly among environmentalists and fans of Dr. Seuss’ classic children’s book.

To learn about CCFC’s current campaigns, visit our action center at:  
<http://commercialfreechildhood.org/actions>

# Protecting Commercial-Free Space



Children should not be captive to marketers. That's why Josh Golin, CCFC's Associate Director, is passionate about helping parents and educators around the country keep advertisements out of schools . . . and off school buses. Here's how CCFC's hard work pays off: In Missouri, a bill allowing school bus ads was likely to pass. But Josh alerted legislators that proponents inflated figures about how much money the ads

would generate. The legislators were stunned to learn that it's often less than \$1 per student per year. They listened when he pointed out that their plan to allow advertising, but prohibit ads that districts found objectionable, could lead to costly First Amendment challenges. Josh helped our Missouri members organize to urge local groups who care about children to oppose the bill. Our newly formed coalition of parents, nutritionists, educators, and anti-commercialism advocates flooded members of the Senate Education Committee with calls and emails—and the bill died in committee. And Missouri wasn't our only victory. In all, nine states considered legislation to allow ads on school buses. Thanks to Josh, and CCFC members who contacted their representatives, all nine were defeated!

## And the TOADY goes to . . .

In 2011, CCFC members overwhelmingly chose the Vinci Touchscreen Mobile Learning Tablet, a \$479 iPad for babies, as the winner of the notorious TOADY (Toys Oppressive And Destructive to Young Children) Award for worst toy of the year. Timed for the holiday shopping frenzy, the TOADYs—now a social media sensation—spotlight the toy industry's most troubling trends.

*“Thanks so much for protecting children from commercialism! I know this is difficult work, but you are moving mountains one stone at a time.”*

- SUPPORTER RHETA RUBENSTEIN



# CCFC in the News

It was another banner year of media coverage for CCFC as major outlets around the world featured our advocacy. CCFC staff and Steering Committee members gave hundreds of interviews on topics ranging from school bus advertising to the essential nature of creative play. *The Associated Press* covered our *Your Baby Can Read* victory, the *LA Times* wrote about our FTC complaint against Webkinz, and our TOADY Award was featured in the *New York Times*, *USA Today* and on the CBC. In addition, CCFC's director Dr. Susan Linn was the subject of two glowing profiles in *The American Prospect* and *Boston Magazine*. And *USA Today* invited Josh Golin to write an op-ed on why prohibiting food marketing to kids would be much more effective than industry self-regulation.

## DONOR SPOTLIGHT

### Why I Support CCFC by Jonathan Hoch

Becoming a father began a joyful chapter in my life and also posed some unexpected challenges. I certainly wasn't prepared for my two boys to be targets of sophisticated corporate marketing selling everything from hair conditioner to SUVs. My moment of clarity came while reading the school lunch menu in the local newspaper—it featured something called “SpongeBob carrots.” SpongeBob carrots? I discovered that my school was serving carrots in packaging featuring Nickelodeon characters. I was shocked and outraged that my children would be targets for that kind of marketing in school, and I decided to do something about it. Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood was my biggest ally in what turned out to be a long, difficult process.



Through a lengthy series of meetings with school officials, letters, phone calls and well-timed e-mails, I set in motion a discussion about unhealthy advertising and commercialism at the public school. With CCFC, I did not feel alone. They were there when I needed them and were indispensable partners in helping the school go commercial-free. My participation in CCFC's 5th summit, “Marketing in Schools and Beyond,” gave me the hope, strength and means to fight against this assault on children. My school district finally adopted a comprehensive policy that prohibits advertising of commercial products or services in or on school buildings, school grounds, school buses or teaching materials. Were it not for CCFC's support and guidance, this simply would not have been possible.

I'm proud to be a CCFC donor, and grateful for all they do for children. I admire CCFC's determination and steadfastness, and give what I can when I can. Commercialism harms children in many ways, and supporting an organization so vitally important is something I feel must be done. CCFC is a force to be reckoned with, and the world is a better place because of it.

# Our Supporters

We are grateful to our supporters, whose generosity allows CCFC to continue its important work reclaiming childhood from corporate marketers. Below is a list of our fiscal year 2012 (July 1, 2011 - June 30, 2012) donors.

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