

Nicholas Muldrow was only 48 months old when he was beaten to death. His stepfather has been indicted on murder and manslaughter charges and is being held without bond. The Bulletin's front page report of this brutal crime truly sickened and saddened me. How could such a heinous act occur in a community like ours with so many resources available to prevent it? How, when there was in a safe place where his mother could have gone for help?

Namely, Mountain Star Relief Nursery, which targets those at-risk children exactly like Nicholas, age 4 years old and under. These are the voiceless, invisible ones who slip beneath the radar of school, neither seen nor heard on a regular basis. Consequently, no one is able to report the suspicious slap marks, black eyes, moldy milk in a bottle or, in some cases, no milk at all. How then does a vulnerable child like Nicholas fall through holes of the well-woven safety net of our community?

Nicholas Muldrow's death is not an unusual occurrence. In fact, it points out a far deeper issue we are facing on local as well as national levels – the rampant escalation of child abuse and neglect throughout our country.

Did you know the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System recently reported that in 2002, 76% (three-fourths!) of all abuse-related deaths in children across the United States were those 4 years old or younger?

Did you know psychologists now believe that 90% of the major systems of a child's brain are formed by the age of three? And, when childhood trauma from abuse or neglect occurs, the brain's structure suffers abnormal development, resulting in a significantly smaller brain size? **And**, the consequences of abuse and neglect are economic, as well as human?

Did you realize that, according to [ChildTrauma.org](http://ChildTrauma.org), preventing the abused-to-abuser cycle in just one at-risk child would save the taxpayer many thousands of dollars before that child turns 18?

Relief nurseries such as Mountain Star have been proven to reduce the need for government spending on foster care, medical and mental health services and public assistance programs. Their goal is to find these neglected children and their stressed families before problems occur, in contrast to the majority of child-aid facilities which wait and treat the insidious results. Through their therapeutic programs for children and parental- retraining classes (plus, contacts for substance abuse programs) they create a safe place for the family **as a whole**...if, and only if, our community can find these vulnerable families before it is too late.

*The Bulletin's* reports of the past week are a wake-up call to us all. They tell us Nicholas' mother Lisa sensed danger on the day of his death. She stated that her husband "struggled with alcohol abuse," often spanked him "in a way that bothered her," and on that particular day, "was tired and angry." Yet, for reasons we can only leave to speculation, she left Nicholas alone with his stepfather and went to work on what was to be the last day of his life. Overlooking her incapacity to protect her son, why did others not speak out? Did a neighbor, relative, co-worker or friend notice something was amiss? Were they reluctant to intervene, or simply didn't want to get involved?

Nicholas Muldrow would be alive today had there been just one person with the courage to report it. Herein lies the tragedy. And we in this community must learn from **this sad case**...Anyone who sees signs of child abuse must speak out, **even** it is only a suspicion. **How** much better to err on the side of being wrong than to lose a child's life. A call – even made anonymously – to police, a school or hospital, welfare or any social service agency will activate the safety net.

**Be vigilant and responsible ...** for the sake of 4 year old Nicholas Muldrow. **We ARE** our brothers' keepers.

Nancy James  
Board Member  
Mountain Star Family Relief Nursery