

Step one: Half of PSU profit could fund child-abuse efforts

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My Turn

I should begin with the disclosure that I am not a Penn State alum nor am I a football fan. My interest in the Penn State/Jerry Sandusky travesty is purely from a social and clinical perspective.

For 30 years, as a therapist and program director of a counseling center, I have witnessed first-hand the devastating and indelible psychological pain caused by child abuse. The hurt, confusion and severe psychological damage to victims most often endure for a lifetime.

For victims fortunate enough to have timely and proper treatment, a process of normalcy and recovery can begin. Sadly, most victims receive no care, or at best, inadequate care after the abuse is discovered.

And as the Sandusky case so poignantly reveals, years can pass before the abuse is even brought to light. The more time that passes between the abuse and the victim receiving appropriate treatment, the less likely a reasonable recovery can be made.

Throughout the scandal, I have been struck by the juxtaposition of reactions among Penn State supporters, and especially Joe Paterno supporters. Some can't bring themselves to believe that JoePa could be culpable in any way, as they move to preserve his idealized grandfatherly place in their hearts. I get that. Others are profoundly sad and confused and say little. Still, others wish to take a scorched-earth approach and punish Penn State by killing the football program.

I think that we have a powerful opportunity here to make great things happen to mitigate and treat child abuse of all types in Pennsylvania.

Instead of punishing current Penn State football fans and alumni by sanctioning the football program, why not use its incredible money-making powers to help fund education, prevention, and treatment programs for children throughout Pennsylvania?

God knows we need it.

In 2010 alone, Penn State brought in \$70.2 million worth of revenue, of which \$50.4 million was pure profit and went into the athletic department's coffers. Just imagine the good-will if Penn State voluntarily placed at least 50 percent of that profit over the next 10 to 15 years into foundations to fund child-abuse programs.

If Penn State is proactive and smart, it will announce such a plan before the NCAA imposes its inevitable punitive sanctions that are more likely to occur.

Any money donated to Penn State should in no way diminish the current funding to these programs through our state budget.

I can imagine some politicians hoping to make political gain by using the money to reduce taxes and “shrink” government. If this should occur, the plan becomes a zero-sum game by simply shifting expenses with no real benefit to children and families in need.

This money **should not become a football** in any political party’s ideological tax game. Transparency on how it is used is a must.

I would suggest utilizing existing statewide educational departments and charitable foundations staffed by respected, volunteer community leaders who are knowledgeable and skilled in researching charitable causes. In addition, they would require no startup costs and very little overhead beyond their present expenses. The United Way and our own Central Susquehanna Community Foundation are excellent examples of such organizations. Most, if not every community in Pennsylvania, has similar foundations.

In addition to providing treatment directly to victims and their families, just imagine if we could create effective primary prevention programs that begin in elementary schools and even bolster athletic programs for children that foster healthy bodies and healthy minds. And as we know, children with health self-images are less likely to become victims of child abuse.

In the wake of the intense spotlight on the Penn State tragedy, let’s commit ourselves to making a healthy and positive change for the children of Pennsylvania and not idly stand by missing a great opportunity.