

SEPTEMBER 8-14, 2006

ACADEMIC/RESEARCH AWARD

Improving the lives of children

DR. KARYN PURVIS AND DR. DAVID CROSS

BY EMILY CLARK | CORRESPONDENT

By all accounts, Dr. Karyn Purvis and Dr. David Cross are miracle workers. In what began years ago as a student-professor research collaboration, they have improved the lives of adopted children and their families through an innovative camp, training and home studies.

Purvis is director of the Institute of Child Development at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth. Cross is a psychology professor and director of TCU's developmental research.

"The first summer of my doctoral degree, I came across adoptive kids that no one seemed to be able to help," Purvis recalls. Often these children were adopted from overseas, where they had been neglected and abused. They entered their adoptive families angry, frightened, detached, out of control and often harmful to themselves and others.

Purvis and Cross began a summer camp, using an ad hoc program culled from parental suggestions and child development literature.

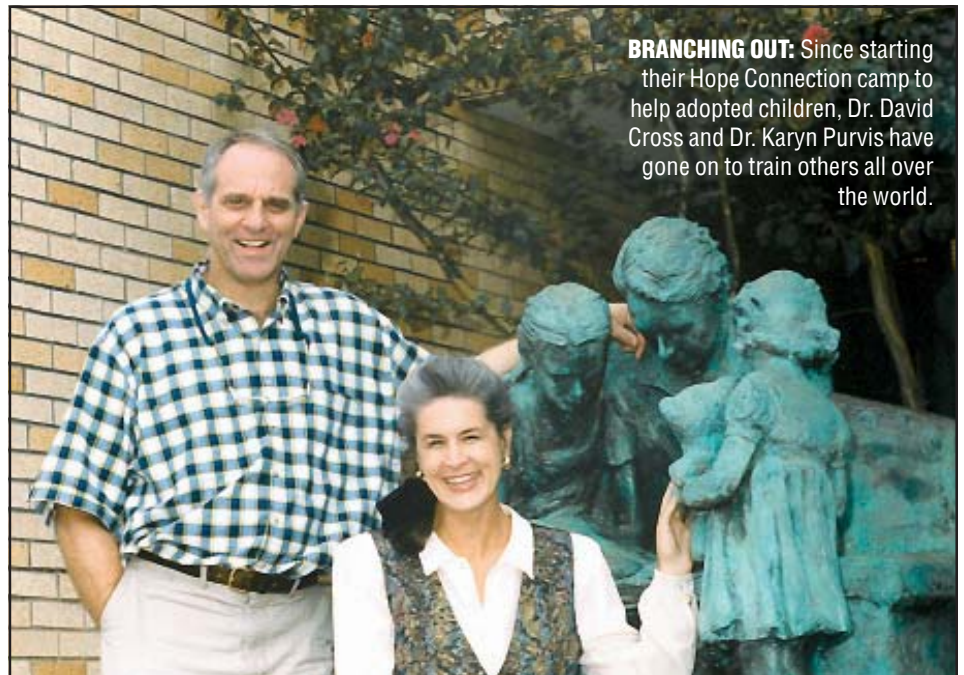
"At the end of the first week, we saw amazing transformations in these kids," Purvis says. "Children came to camp disconnected and suddenly they were making eye contact. The parents thought it was a miracle."

The program included sensory components rich in attachment concepts to make the children feel safe without being invasive.

"We loaded all that together, but we had no idea the power that would come out of this environment," Purvis says.

The initial program was "delivered by a little ragtag team of undergraduate and graduate students," she says.

"One of our greatest desires is to facilitate sweeping changes to these kids who've been stigmatized," she says. "When you teach them to get their needs met and give them permission to grieve for their losses, it's a miracle."



BRANCHING OUT: Since starting their Hope Connection camp to help adopted children, Dr. David Cross and Dr. Karyn Purvis have gone on to train others all over the world.

COURTESY PHOTO



HEALTH CARE HERO ACADEMIC/RESEARCH AWARD 2006

From the Hope Connection camp Purvis and Cross have branched out with 10 years of research and collaborative projects to become strong advocates for adopted children and their families. They train psychologists and caregivers

all over the world and work with Congress on behalf of children.

According to Cross, they are teaming up with institutions as varied as the Gladney adoption organization, Cook Children's Center and the Theraplay Institute, expanding their research to include children affected by autism and traumatic brain injury. They have written a book, "The Connected Child," to be published next year. Their work has been the subject of numerous magazine articles and television shows.

"We're at a point where our opportunities are outstripping our ability to cover them all," says Cross, to which Purvis adds, "We're definitely a two-horse team pulling an eight-horse wagon."

CLARK is a Dallas-based freelance writer.