

TRENDS & Ideas

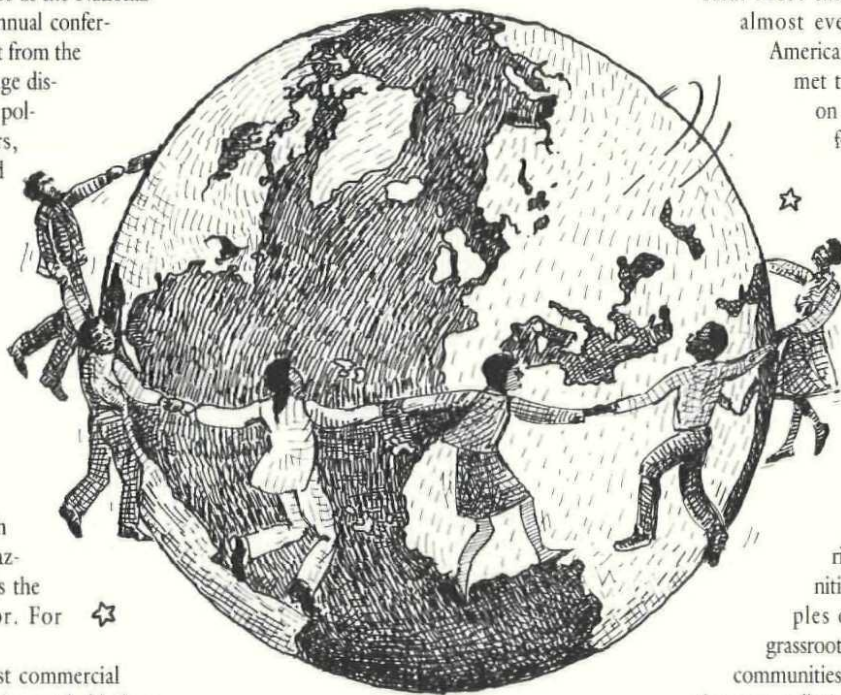
THE ENVIRONMENT

The People's Movement for Environmental Justice

Though environmental hazards affect the health of all people, some "hazards disproportionately take their toll on low-income communities, communities of color, and countries of the developing world," according to Helen Rodriguez-Trias, MD, a leader in the women's health movement for more than two decades.

Some of the hazards—such as lack of safe water, housing, and healthcare facilities—are problems of neglect, Trias told an audience at the National Rural Health Association's annual conference in May. But others result from the deliberate placement of garbage disposal sites, toxic dump sites, polluting factories, incinerators, military dump sites, and Superfund sites.

Trias, who is immediate past president of the American Public Health Association, cited a ground-breaking study by the Commission for Racial Justice of the United Church of Christ, which found that although a community's socioeconomic status plays a role in the location of commercial hazardous waste facilities, race is the largest determining factor. For



example:

- Three of the five largest commercial hazardous waste landfills are in mostly black or Hispanic communities. These account for 40 percent of the nation's commercial landfill space.

- Three out of five black or Hispanic Americans live in communities with one or more uncontrolled toxic waste sites. Cities with large populations have the largest numbers of these sites. And in areas of Los Angeles, "the higher the concentration of Hispanics, the higher the concentration of uncontrolled waste sites."

- About half of all Asian Pacific islanders and Native Americans live in communities with uncontrolled toxic waste sites.

Over the past two decades, a people's movement has sprung up as minority leaders and institutions such as churches became increasingly aware of "the disproportionate effects of deliberate environmental policies," Trias noted. The movement began in 1970 when Sen. Philip Hart facilitated a meeting of labor, environmental, and minority

their First Amendment right to freedom of religion); struggles by Native Americans over threats to their land by the government, loggers, mining companies, and all manner of developers; and calls by farmworkers for changes to reduce our dependence on pesticides.

In October 1991 decades of activism culminated in the first national leadership conference on the environment involving communities of color, Trias said. More than 600 people representing

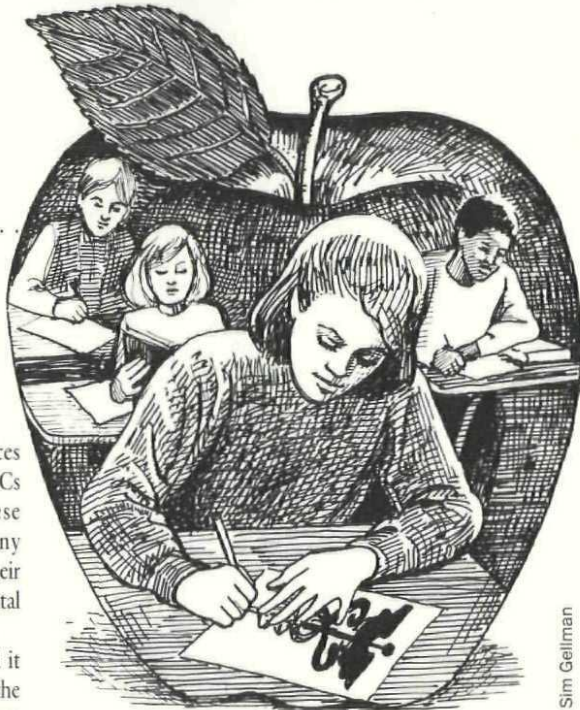
almost every state, Canada, Central American countries, and Puerto Rico met to seek a "global vision based on grassroots reality." The conference called for "action to end global environmental genocide, proper enforcement of environmental protection laws and policies, a ban on the export of hazardous wastes and materials, reparations for past injustices, restructuring of relationships between mainstream environmental organizations and activists with communities of color and indigenous peoples, the right to live in healthy communities, the embodiment of principles of environmental justice in grassroots social and political work with communities of color, and an end to one of the most polluting factors of all, war, violence, and militarism."

Trias noted that these holistic principles have not yet been incorporated in public health or policy. "We need to touch base with our own third-world communities in our midst and listen to their people," she advised the group of healthcare professionals. "There can be no environmental justice without economic and racial justice. . . . To work effectively, we have to start where people are, and we have to commit to an inclusionary process from beginning identification of the problems to decisions about how they can best be solved."

groups to address problems concerning the urban environment. Other meetings and actions over the past two decades have involved labor groups and the Urban League looking at how to address problems in urban areas; demonstrations against the location of landfills near minority communities; protests by indigenous residents of Hawaii against the development of geothermal energy plants that tend to destroy the rainforest and subvert their worship of the volcano goddess Pele (in defiance of

CHILDREN

Reading, Writing, and Primary Care



Sim Gellman

Many young people are getting more from their schools than an education: They are receiving healthcare services through school-based health centers (SBHCs). These centers provide services such as primary care, physical examinations, and injury treatment.

SBHCs can improve children's access to healthcare, says a U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) report. Such centers remove financial barriers to care because they provide services free or at a minimal cost—an important feature to students who have no health insurance. Because the centers are in the schools, parents do not have to leave work or

provide transportation. In addition, "SBHCs are particularly suited to meet the special needs of adolescents" by creating an atmosphere of trust and confidentiality, according to GAO.

Although SBHCs can help youth overcome barriers to healthcare, the centers face challenges of their own. Of major concern is establishing a stable source of financing. GAO reports that SBHCs currently rely on fragmented state, local, private, and federal funding.

Billing insurers poses another challenge. Many centers lack the administrative capability to implement a billing process. In addition, private insurers may not

cover the preventive services and health education SBHCs provide. Because of these funding problems, many SBHCs cannot meet all their patients' needs such as dental and mental health services.

SBHCs also often find it difficult to hire and retain the physician assistants and nurse practitioners they need. Such midlevel practitioners are in short supply, and SBHCs cannot offer them competitive salaries. "Also, SBHC providers are expected to work more autonomously than providers in private settings or to work in potentially dangerous urban neighborhoods or remote rural areas," according to GAO.

Healthcare reform legisla-

tion may provide SBHCs with greater financial stability through award grants to develop school health service sites, but such legislation will not cure all the centers' woes. The prospect of increased managed care will continue to pose reimbursement problems. GAO reports that, under current proposals, managed care networks would not have to pay

SBHCs developed outside the grant program. In addition, because these networks would not always have to pay SBHCs outside their service areas, the centers may not be reimbursed for services provided to all students. Finally, managed care providers may choose to withhold payment for public health services (e.g., tuberculosis testing).

PSYCHOTHERAPY

New Technique Inspires Enthusiasm, Doubts

A treatment involving eye movements is one of the hottest new trends in clinical psychology, Geoffrey Cowley reports in *Newsweek*. EMDR, or "eye-movement desensitization and reprocessing," has been hailed as a breakthrough therapy for traumatized rape victims, combat veterans, and survivors of natural disasters. But EMDR has its critics, too.

However it may work, Shapiro's therapy has found many enthusiastic adherents. Dr. Steven Lazrove, a Yale psychiatrist, says EMDR is "the most significant advance since the introduction of pharmacological drugs."

Critics note that the therapy's efficacy is almost entirely anecdotal. And several scientific studies indicate that patients receiving EMDR show no



EMDR is the creation of Francine Shapiro, a California therapist who, while on a walk one day, discovered that a persistent troublesome thought became less painful if she moved her eyes from side to side as she thought about it. She tried something similar with patients, asking them to follow her finger movements with their eyes while recalling traumatic events in their lives. Many of Shapiro's patients reported significant relief.

Some EMDR supporters theorize that the eye movements, like those appearing naturally in deep sleep, help a patient file away painful memo-

ries. However it may work, Shapiro's therapy has found many enthusiastic adherents.

Advocates say their own controlled studies support the tales of EMDR success—although these studies have not yet been published in scientific journals. Meanwhile, Shapiro has founded EMDR Institute in Pacific Groves, CA, at which students pay \$570 for a four-day training course in the new therapy. Students must agree not to reveal what they learn in the course. Shapiro says this protects her therapy from being diluted by amateurs. Critics say it protects EMDR from the gaze of science.