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Allen's P. C. B Est. 1888

Kids count, or do they?

THE ISSUE: A recent survey shows children are worse off than we may think.

WE SAY: Improving the status of children has to begin with a change in thinking and priorities.

A recent study indicates that Oregon isn't making very much progress in its care of children.

According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation's 1999 annual "Kids Count" survey, Oregon's ranking among states dropped from 23rd to 29th place based on measures such as crime, poverty and health.

While Oregon's children are better off in most categories compared to the national average, the statistics are a sobering reminder of how far we still need to go in caring for our kids.

These statistics for Oregon's children stand out from the rest:

- 17 percent live in poverty; 6 percent live in what is considered "extreme poverty" — their families have an income of less than half the poverty level.

- 33 percent live with parents who do not have full-time, year-round employment.

- 12 percent of teen-agers (ages 16-19) are high school drop-outs, and 10 percent of teens are neither working nor attending school.

- 28 percent of teen births involve mothers who smoked.

- 13 percent of children have no health insurance.

- 39 percent of fourth-graders scored below a basic reading level.

- 22 percent of eighth-graders scored below a basic reading level.

Finally, the foundation compiles a "family risk index." Children living in families with four or more of these characteristics are considered to be at "high risk":

- Child is not living with parents.
- Household head is a high school drop-out.
- Family income is below the poverty line.
- Child is living with parents who do not have steady, full-time employment.
- Family is receiving welfare benefits.
- Child does not have health insurance.