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Statistics about county's children indicates several improvements, with room for more

Child care, early education, family well-being and health care, all seem to affect the status of Oregon's children, notes Children First for Oregon, which released county figures today, Jan. 26.

According to the organization: "In 1998 the population in Josephine County was 73,000, an increase of 17 percent since 1990. Out of this total, 8,735 children were in the 9 and younger age group, a 5 percent increase since '90, and 8,278 children in the 10-17 age group, an increase of 20 percent since '90.

"The availability of registered child care is 41 percent in center care and 59 percent in family/group care. An estimated 25 percent of children under 13 are in paid child-care arrangements for an average of 26.1 hours a week. In '98, there were 2,940 child-care slots or 25 slots per 100 children 12 and younger.

"Oregon Head Start prekindergarten serves 310 children 3 and 4 in Josephine County. This represents 53 percent of the children estimated to be eligible in the county.

"Early education outcomes in '97, suggests an estimated 51 percent of kindergartners in Josephine County were ready to learn in all areas of development. Last year's third-grade assessments reported 82 percent of third-graders met or exceeded standards in reading, and 69 percent of students met or exceeded standards in math.

"Family well-being was affected by many factors. In family risk factors for births from 1996-98, 35 percent of chil-

dren were born to unmarried mothers, 5 percent to teen-age mothers and 23 percent to mothers with less than 12 years of education. In 1998 a total of 220 divorces in Josephine County affected households with children. At least 404 children's parents divorced, representing approximately 2.4 percent of children in the county.

It's estimated that 26% of the county's children are living in poverty.

"Children estimated to live in poverty in this region (Josephine County with four other counties) was 26 percent. In this same region, 12 percent of women experienced physical abuse at least once in the last year. In '98 there were 173 confirmed victims of abuse or neglect among children under age 8, a rate of 25 per 1,000 children age 7 and younger.

"Health-risk factors for births from '96-'98 included statistics that 24 percent of the mothers used tobacco, 4 percent used drugs or alcohol, and 6 percent had inadequate prenatal care. Seventy-six percent of 2-year-olds were up-to-date on their immunizations in this region, and it's estimated that 16 percent of children under 8 lack health insurance.

"Josephine County has 73,000 residents with access to only substandard public libraries, thus prompting the community to support improving the quality of libraries. Josephine County's

Healthy Start program screened 33 percent of first-birth children in '98-'99. Basic services were provided to 70 families, and intensive services were provided to 141 families."

Statistics compiled by the county indicate the status of Oregon's children.

- Juvenile arrests (per 1,000 age 17 and younger), were 1,124; 5 percent better than '98.

- Teen-age pregnancies (per 1,000 girls age 10 to 17) was 60; 18 percent worse than '98.

- Suicide attempts (per 100,000 age 10-17) was 20; 12 percent better than '98.

- High school dropout rate was 248; 1 percent better than '98.

- Eighth-grade reading proficiency was 468; 2 percent worse than '98.

- Eighth-grade math proficiency was 411; same as '98.

- Child abuse/neglect victims (per 1,000 age 17 and younger) was 314; 10 percent better than '98.

- Crimes against persons (per 1,000) was 1,090; 10 percent worse than '98.

- Child deaths (per 100,000 age 1-14) was zero; 100 percent better than the previous year.

- Low birthweight infants (per 1,000 live births) was 48; 17 percent worse than '98.

- Infant mortality (per 1,000 live births) was one; 61 percent better than the previous year.

- Child-care supply (spaces per 100 for ages 12 and younger) was 2,940; 88 percent better than '98.