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In Our Opinion

For kids' sake, do something positive

Are we – as families, communities and a county – doing enough for kids? According to a recent report we're not.

Children First For Oregon, a statewide advocacy group, recently released a study which found Jackson County coming up short for its youth. Juveniles are arrested in Jackson County at more than the state rate, only 76 percent of the county's two-year-olds are up-to-date on immunizations and 16 percent of the county's children lack health insurance, which is twice the state average.

What's the solution to creating a healthier environment for kids and why does it really matter, especially to communities like Rogue River and Gold Hill where the average age is well beyond parenthood? To answer the second question first, for every dollar spent on quality pre-school services and care, more than seven dollars are saved in averted special education, crime, welfare and other costs. By investing – both emotionally and monetarily – now and doing the things it takes to care for children we have a chance to make their lives more meaningful. Interaction is also about taking proactive steps to head off future problems, the kind of problems that get expensive to deal with in the future.

Concerning the first question, it all starts with a healthy family environment. And it doesn't have to be what we know as the "traditional family". Divorce rates continue to rise (in 1998 a total of 561 divorces in the county affected households with children in the county) and single parents face an uphill climb. Still, a secure family life is where success begins. It offers the best chance for cognitive growth, physical development and emotional well-being for children.

Rather than money (although it is important when you're talking about building or improving schools), the investment is most meaningful when it consists of time – the time it takes to support children and help them grow up in a positive world.

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