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Children seen as 'well-off' in county

By DOUG BROWNING
Of the Argus

Most general indicators of children's "well-being" are higher in Washington County than in Oregon's other 35 counties, according to Children First for Oregon.

In its annual assessment of kids throughout the state, the statewide advocacy group focused this year on factors important to early childhood development: family stability, child care and early education, health and community investments.

Measurements of family well being include incidents of physical abuse, the mother's age and marital status and the mother's education.

Family income determines a family's housing options, whether it can afford health insurance, what it eats, and so on. Yet, in affluent Washington County, 11 percent of our children live in households with incomes below the federal guideline for measuring poverty, the report said.

Between 1996 and 1998, the report said, 21 percent of all children born in Washington County were born to single mothers, and 17 percent were born to a mother without a high school diploma or GED.

"There is no greater asset for a young child than a supportive, stable, stimulating and loving home environment," the report said.

"Mothers who have children while still in their teens, before completing a high school education or outside of marriage all face significant obstacles to success. The young children in

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Area kids above average

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these families will be impacted by these obstacles."

Domestic violence also shapes a child's view of the world, the report noted: "It is estimated that nearly one out of four children under age 18 in Oregon live in homes where physical abuse took place (and) that one out of six children have seen or heard abuse at least once in the past year."

In the child care and early education category, Washington County did better than most other counties.

Measures included the number of children who receive paid child care (43 percent of those under 13, compared with 36 percent statewide) and the percentage of kindergartners considered "ready to learn in all

areas of development" (63 percent vs. 58 percent statewide).

"Preschool was an important factor in children's readiness to learn," the report said. Statewide, "64 percent who had preschool were considered fully ready to learn," compared with 51 percent among kids without preschool experience.

In the community investments category, the report examined factors such as access to public libraries. While almost everyone in Washington County has such access, the report noted that residents of eight other counties have no library and that service is limited in 12 other counties.

In health care, 84 percent of Washington County 2-year-olds were up to date on immunizations against common childhood diseases, slightly better

than the 81 percent statewide average.

Here are some other comparisons:

• Juvenile arrests: Washington County reported 35 per 1,000 youths aged 0-17; the statewide average was 54 per 1,000.

• Teen pregnancy: In 1998, the Washington County rate was 17.2 per 1,000 girls age 10-17, the same as the statewide average.

• Child abuse/neglect: Washington County reported 7.5 confirmed cases per 1,000 youths age 0-17; the statewide rate was 12.3 per 1,000.

• High school dropouts: Washington County lost 6.9 percent of its student population; the statewide average was 6.6 percent.

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