

Organization honors Portland ⁵⁰⁹⁸ as most child-friendly city

PORTLAND — A national organization with a kid-unfriendly name has rated Portland as the nation's most child-friendly city.

The Kid-friendly Cities Report Card 2001, sponsored by Zero Population Growth, ranked Portland No. 1 out of 25 major cities.

Eugene and Salem ranked 27 and 28, respectively, in a survey of 140 smaller cities.

The survey calculated rankings for the cities in 17 indicators of quality of life for children, in health, education, public safety, economics, environment and community life. Each of those categories was compiled from statistics such as teen birth rate, class sizes and unemployment rates.

The survey used government data, most of it gathered during the past three years.

Zero Population Growth is a national organization promoting voluntary limits on population growth. Its president, Peter H. Kostmayer, said the organization wants to focus on quality of life.

"Too often, population advocates focus too much on numbers," he said. "We have a fundamental concern with the quality of life for children. We're not just about numbers."

This is the organization's eighth survey. It has compiled this data every two years for the past 16 years.

Portland got "honor roll" distinctions in health, environment and community life.

The survey's authors touted the city's good air quality, number of parks, high library circulation per child and community programs for children.

"Portland seems to have attracted people who care a lot about these things," Kostmayer said. "Of course, there are people who care about the quality of life all over the country, but a lot of those folks seem to be going to Portland."

The Kid-friendly Cities report found that Portland's weakest area was housing costs. Only 30 percent of housing in Portland is affordable to people making average incomes, Kostmayer said.

Liz Smith, policy director for Children First for Oregon, an organization that compiles data on child well-being and lobbies for funding for child welfare programs, said the survey results are welcome but shouldn't lead to complacency.

"Obviously we're really excited to see that Portland has done so well. But not every child has the opportunities we'd like them to have," she said. "We haven't reached the kind of benchmarks that we've set for ourselves."

She said the Kid-friendly Cities report didn't address many of the issues addressed in the Kids Count survey,

funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and handled locally by Children First.

"One of the things they don't address is poverty rates. Child poverty is about 9 percent in the metro area," Smith said. "That may be better than some other places but that's not acceptable."

Gayle Atteberry, executive director of Oregon Right to Life, thinks the study's information sounds good, but the author is suspect.

"I'm very pleased about the child friendliness," she said. But "I think they're a little disingenuous when talking about the welfare of children. Anytime you have a list of abortion proponents, they're in it. That is definitely one of the bigger ways to have zero population growth."

Kostmayer defended Zero Population Growth's pro-choice position.

"We don't go around telling people not to have children. We're not against people having lots of kids. We are for people having the ability and capacity to make those decisions for themselves."

He said while the group is pro-choice, its position is that the best way to reduce the number of abortions is to provide universal access to family planning — one of the areas in which Portland does well, he said.