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'Children First' releases 5038 county findings

Oregon's youngest residents are still poor, hungry and homeless

Low income families across Oregon have difficulty providing basic food and shelter for their children, according to Oregon's leading statewide child advocacy group, Children First for Oregon (CFFO). The 2001 County Data Book, *Growing Up In Oregon*, released this month, reports data on the economic stability and quality of family life in every county in Oregon.

"We found that even after 10 years of general economic prosperity too many children across Oregon are growing up poor, hungry or homeless," said CFFO executive director Marie Hoeven.

The prosperity of the 1990s resulted in some improvements in child well being, but it did not provide many families with lasting financial stability. As the economy continues to decline more stress will be put on Oregon's system of supports. "Our state needs to be ready to help families who are losing their jobs," Hoeven said.

In each of Oregon's counties, the Children First Data Book reveals many families are having difficulty maintaining financial stability:

- Forty-two percent of children in Oregon live in families with incomes below or near the poverty level (the federal poverty level for a family of four is an income of less than \$17,630. CFFO considers a family of four near poverty if they make between 100 percent and 200 percent of the federal poverty level);

- Twenty-eight percent of Oregon's families spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing;

- Thirty-four percent of the state's public school children need help paying for school lunch or breakfast;

- Forty-five percent of adults in families with children have only a high school education or less;

- Nearly 3,000 kids were homeless on a given night in 2000.

In Lincoln County, where the median household income was \$31,500 in 2000, 32 percent of households spent more than 30 percent of their income on housing. The average rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Lincoln County was \$530 per month.

Forty-four percent of babies in Lincoln County were born to unmarried mothers, and 17 percent of births were to mothers younger than age 20.

More than 2,200 people were served with emergency food boxes in a typical month in Lincoln County, and 48 percent of public school

children received free or reduced price lunches. Twenty-three percent of all Lincoln County children - 2,172 children - also received assistance through food stamps each month.

Low income working families do have some options for improving their financial stability, including taking advantage of state and federal tax credits.

"The refundable federal Earned Income Tax Credit has helped pull thousands of families out of poverty in Oregon," said Liz Smith, CFFO policy director. Businesses can help their employees by letting them know about the federal EITC, child care tax credits, the Children's Health Insurance Program and other services that can help lower income families.

Growing up in Oregon Key Findings

Family Stability

- The state's child poverty rate is estimated to be 15 percent while another 27 percent of children are estimated to live in families near poverty, with incomes between 100 and 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level.

- The statewide unemployment rate was 4.9 percent during 2000 (Lincoln County's unemployment rate during 2000 was 6.2 percent).

- Twenty percent of households with children have a single mother.

- Thirty-four percent of children receive free or reduced lunch at school while 15 percent receive food stamps at home in Oregon.

- Many babies were born at risk in 2000 due to mothers who were under the age of 20 (11 percent), smoked during pregnancy (14 percent), were unmarried (30 percent) or didn't finish high school (20 percent).

Quality of Family Life

- Thirteen percent of surveyed students in Oregon reported an especially close relationship with their parents.

- Thirty-one percent of students were at excessive risk due to contact with family members or other adults with a history of substance abuse or criminal activity.

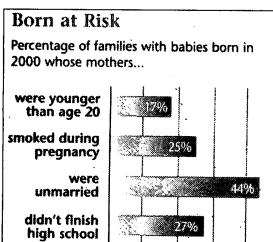
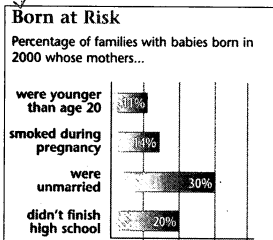
- Fifteen percent of students feel their neighbors are highly supportive of them.

Other Indicators of Child Well Being

- The teen pregnancy rate in Oregon decreased by 12 percent in the last year.

- High school dropout decreased by 4 percent over the last year in Oregon.

- The state's rate of confirmed child abuse and neglect victims decreased by 10 percent in the last year.



LINCOLN COUNTY CHILDREN - begin life at a disadvantage, according to information released this week by Children First for Oregon, the state's leading child advocacy group. Lincoln County statistics are shown below the statewide numbers in the upper graph. This information was included in the 2001 County Data Book, *Growing Up in Oregon*, released by CFFO on Tuesday.