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## 5038 If we care so much, what should we do?

Annual report shows children in peril  
here and across Oregon

One of the most glaring contradictions in American life is the gap between how we esteem children and what we do about children. We proclaim to care a lot about young people. But we do something quite contrary. About 15 percent of American children live in poverty. In many states, including Oregon and California, the educational opportunity for children has diminished markedly over the past decade.

As Darren Dunlap noted in a Tuesday front-page article, unhealthy trends in Clatsop County are apparent in *Growing Up In Oregon*, the annual report on children that was just released. It is especially sad to see the rate of teen pregnancy increasing in Clatsop County. Motherhood during adolescence is a hindrance on the mother's development, and it is a detriment to the child.

To a certain extent, the

trends that one sees in Clatsop County are national trends. But that does not relieve our responsibility. Saying that children are worse off everywhere does not suggest there is nothing we might do to improve the situation of children in our county. Teen pregnancy is an area in which information and awareness are the keys. The STARS program, for instance, is proven to be effective. Similarly, a school district can do a lot to improve the drop-out rate. In fact, that is one area in which Clatsop County improved.

It is impossible to separate the dismal numbers about child welfare in Oregon from the national trend of the disintegration of family and social structure. And that is one reason why the annual County Data Book published by Children First for Oregon is such a valuable document.