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OUR VIEWS

Reach out to lighten children's burdens

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Readers helped Jessie Lacy, who wanted a funeral for his mom.

How to help

To reach a variety of local agencies that assist people in crisis and help people become self sufficient, contact United Way, 455 Biller Ave NE, Salem, OR 97303.

FOR INFORMATION: (503) 363-1651, or www.uwmwv.org

A proper burial was the last, best gift that Jessie Lacy gave his mom.

Statesman Journal readers responded quickly to the recent story of the middle-schooler who had been his mother's mainstay during her final illness. They contributed approximately \$5,000 to give Kathryn Lacy the funeral service and casket Jessie thought she would have liked.

That says a lot about the decency of local residents. They may not have felt they could do much to solve social problems in general. But a kid who juggled school with caring for his ailing mother; who looked after his sister's kids while she worked; who remembered his mother's jokes and good cooking more than her illness — people could respond to that.

Of course, for every Jessie who touches people's hearts, there are thousands of local children who struggle in anonymity. You don't see their faces over your morning coffee, but they're just as real.

This month's report by Children First for Oregon sketches the big picture: 15 percent of Marion Coun-

ty's kids live in poverty, and another 19 percent in near poverty. One in five households with children are headed by a single mother.

One in three kids are at risk because of an adult who breaks the law or abuses drugs or alcohol. On a given night, 300 of the county's children are in shelters for the homeless.

Any one of these worries would edge out most other thoughts for an adult. Just imagine what it's like for children who head off to school hungry, or uncertain where they'll sleep, or neglected by drug-addicted parents.

At Christmas, it's natural for us to dig deep and share. But many kids struggle all year long.

Please keep them in mind in 2002 when you are asked to help with a food drive, or volunteer for a non-profit group, or contribute to United Way or other charities.

That way you can lighten the burden for many other "Jessies" in our midst.