

# Molalla Pioneer

December 29, 2001

Molalla, OR  
(Clackamas Co.)  
Pioneer  
(Cir. W. 2,500)

DEC 29 2001

Allen's P. O. B. Est. 1888

## Children First for Oregon: good news for kids in county

BY JUDITH SPITZER  
OF THE MOLALLA PIONEER

With the unemployment rate climbing and an economy still showing signs of decline, low income families across the state have difficulty providing basic food and shelter for their children according to a statewide child advocacy group called Children First for Oregon (CFFO).

The group contends that even after many years of prosperity, many families have not experienced lasting financial stability. And if the economy declines even more, the same stress will affect support systems that already exist.

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

be ready to help families who are losing their jobs."

A report published in mid-December — Growing Up in Oregon — reports data on the economic stability and quality of family life in every county in Oregon.

Key findings in Clackamas County show:

\* Clackamas County with Multnomah and Washington counties had lower child poverty rates at 12 percent — compared to the state rate of 15 percent.

\* Unemployment in Clackamas County at 3.3 percent was better than the statewide rate of 4.9 percent during 2000.

\* A higher percentage of homes are owner-occupied, 71 percent, and more children live with married, 77 percent, in Clackamas County compared to the state rates.

\* Twenty percent of children re-

ceive free or reduced lunch at school while 8 percent receive food stamps at home in Clackamas County compared to the statewide rates of 34 percent and 15 percent respectively.

\* A smaller proportion of babies born in Clackamas County were born to mothers who smoked, were under the age of 20, were unmarried or did not have a high school education compared to the statewide rates.

### Quality of Family Life

\* Eighteen percent of children reported a positive relationship with their parents in Clackamas County compared to 13 percent statewide.

\* More children reported a high level of involvement in families activities and decisions in Clackamas County at 17 percent than the statewide rate of 15 percent.

\* Fewer students are identified at risk because of contact with family or other adults who have a history of substance or criminal activity.

### Other indicators

\* Most measures of child well-being have improved in the last year including juvenile arrests, teen pregnancy, and high school dropout and these measures remain above the statewide rates.

\* Worsening rates in child abuse and neglect are important to note. The current rate is 15 percent worse than the previous year's rate in Clackamas County.

### Statewide

\* Twenty percent of households with children have a single mother.

Turn to CHILDREN on page 2

## CHILDREN: There are options for improvement

\* 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).

\* 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.

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

Businesses can help their employees by letting them know about child care tax credits, the Children's Health Insurance Program and other services that can help lower income families.

There are also many ways families of any income can improve the quality of their family life Hoeven

said.

"We know that family relationships can make a big difference to a child's well-being, and the data show that most parents in Oregon do have positive relationships with their children," she said.

"But we also found that there are some children who are at elevated risk for drug and alcohol abuse, delinquency, teen pregnancy, violent behavior and high school dropout because of their negative relationships with their family and community."