

# Report on kids <sup>5020</sup> shows mixed bag in Linn

Teen pregnancy,  
child neglect and  
abuse drop,  
juvenile arrests up

ALBANY DEMOCRAT-HERALD

Some conditions got better and others got worse for children in Linn County in 2001 compared to the year before, if a new report is any guide.

In December, Children First for Oregon published its annual booklet comparing counties in numerous categories, all reflecting on the well-being of children.

According to the book, Linn County indicators affecting children got better in 2001 in third-grade reading and math proficiency and in terms of teen suicide and the dropout rate.

Things also looked up because the teen pregnancy rate dropped, there were fewer victims of child neglect and abuse, and the rate of crimes against persons was lower than the year before.

On the other hand, Linn County got worse for children in terms of the supply of child-care slots and juvenile arrests.

There was a slight decline in eighth-grade math and reading proficiency, and the infant mortality rate went up.

The county got worse in terms of unemployment and the portion of child support paid.

In 14 of 17 categories, Linn County was said to be worse off than the state average.

The report is of interest to the Linn County Commission on Children and Families. Each year the commission allocates state funds toward programs intended to help children.

"We try to do what we can where we think the need is greatest," said Darwin Merrill, the commission's coordinator.

The commission, headed by Albany attorney Kent Hickam, is scheduled to meet Jan. 16 to allocate program funds for the 2003-04 fiscal year. Because of the state budget uncertainty, Merrill does not know how much the panel will have available.

The meeting, open to the public, will be at 5:30 p.m. Jan. 16, in the conference room upstairs in Two Rivers Market.

For this year, the county is spending nearly half a million dollars on Healthy Start, in which caseworkers offer to arrange whatever help families with newborn children may need.

The second largest batch of funding, about \$160,000, is going to the Education Service District for an array of efforts aimed at children 3-10 and 11-18 years of age, according to Merrill.

According to Children