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Children's lot 5038 in county remains grim

Children First report on state's family
financial stability released

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Shayna Hess, 26, of Newberg, is raising two children on food stamps, as well as housing and child support. And, according to the data book recently released by Children First for Oregon, her family is not unique in its poverty.

A nonprofit "voice for children" since 1991, Children First last week released to the media its "Status of Oregon's Children County Data Book 2003." Among its numerous statistics it says that in Yamhill County, with an estimated 23,573 children age infant to 18:

- 25 percent of households with children have a single parent.
- 62 percent of babies are born to mother with a high school education or less.
- 10 percent of children live in poverty, based on the federal poverty level of \$18,400 for a family of four.
- 21 percent of children live near poverty (less than double the federal poverty level).

The focus of the this year's data book was family financial stability. The report card that First Child released in late September had given Oregon an "F" grade in that category.

In its executive summary Children First writes: "Oregonians share a belief that the first step toward improving child well being lies in building stronger families, equipped to provide their children stable, nurturing environments."

Hess, who described herself as a "clean, proper person,"

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Shayna Hess

"The one thing I want and need in my life is stability," she said. "Especially for my children."

She said she once had an apartment in Tigard for five and a half years, along with her long-time boyfriend. She was going to college when they learned she was pregnant. At the time their daughter was born, she said, they had the money to support her.

"It was the picture perfect family," she said.

But they were living paycheck to paycheck and their bills, although paid every month, were constantly late. The landlord finally had enough, Hess said, and after they turned their rent in late the couple was given 30 days notice to move.

Around this time the father quit his job and the couple soon split. When she went to Adult and Family Services of Oregon for assistance, they wouldn't help her because she was a college student.

With no place to study and a heavy stress load, her grades began to drop, and soon she no longer qualified for financial aid through the school.

"When I first got into my situation, I could have still been OK if I had gotten help then," she said.

A place to stay was hard to come by, though. In Washington County she said the wait for housing would have been eight years; two homeless years passed before she got housing in Yamhill County.

Her second child with the same father was born into a household where food stamps and child support buys food and the state pays the rent.

The jobs she could get pay minimum wage, she said, which would barely cover the cost of daycare. The father pays \$182 a month in child support, but she constantly worries about how her family will go on living day to day.

"The hardest part of it all is your state of mind," she said.