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"I wouldn't want to raise my children anywhere else."

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— STACY HARPER, SINGLE MOTHER OF FIVE IN ROSEBURG

Rural living a challenge for low-income families

A new report says parents struggle with a shortage of good jobs, educational opportunities and affordable child care

By SCOTT MABEN
The Register-Guard

Raising children in a rural area is a mixed bag for Stacy Harper, a single mother of five in Roseburg.

Good-paying jobs and affordable things for kids to do are in short supply, Harper said.

"Having kids and trying to survive these days is just horrible," she said. "Just trying to get their school clothes and get them enrolled in school is astonishing."

But the 33-year-old Wal-Mart worker has deep roots in this Douglas County community of 20,000. Her parents live here and help her out with the kids, ages 8 to 15. Plus, crime and living costs are lower than in larger cities, she said.

"I wouldn't want to raise my children anywhere else," Harper said.

Her experience is typical among low-income families, according to a report released today by Children First for Oregon.

The nonpartisan, nonprofit group found that parents in rural communities want to raise their children there, but struggle with a shortage of good jobs, safe and affordable child care, educational opportunities, access to health care and youth activities.

About 480,000 children live in rural counties in Oregon and Washington, and 45 percent of them are in low-income households, earning less than \$36,800 a year for a family of four, according to U.S. Census Bureau data.

Based on interviews last year with focus groups in Roseburg,

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