

Get involved, take action to help Oregon's children

As the president and CEO of Morrison Child and Family Services since 1992, I've made the acquaintance of many of the leaders in Portland's private sector. Morrison's nonprofit board of trustees boasts some of the top business minds in town.

Many of our longtime supporters are executives who understand that the future lies in the hands of today's children.

As a board member of Children First for Oregon, I'm quite familiar with that nonprofit's signature product: its annual Report Card on the Status of Children in Oregon.

This year, the state's overall grade was a D+ — the lowest score since Children First began tracking the state's performance in 1992.

Not a few of my friends in the private sector read this report with a sense of failure. Sure, Oregon's economy has been hard hit, and dollars are tight.

But, my private-sector friends ask, how can we justify depriving children of a proper education, of decent health care and clean, affordable housing? I would counsel people in the busi-

ness community not to despair, but to do something that comes naturally. Take action.

Guest Opinion

JAY BLOOM ▼

If we say, "Children are our most valuable asset" while we refuse to get involved with institutions and programs designed to ensure a healthy future for kids, we've really cast our vote against the future.

But if we decide to become actively involved in the lives of our children, we can turn the tables on the regressive trend the Children First Report Card is charting.

Here are some steps that make a personal statement about your commitment to children.

Tune into reality, not reality TV. This step is critical in becoming engaged with children. Too many of us are anesthetizing ourselves through television, drugs and alcohol, and other forms of entertainment.

We need to wake up to what's happening and stop kidding ourselves that everything's OK.

A good reality check for Oregonians is to compare the time we spend on outdoor activities or with our pets (two "healthy" activities) with the amount

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of time we spend with our children or with children in general. Most folks are surprised with the result.

Decide to become an advocate for children by sharing with others your concerns and the need to actually change our priorities. Join a group like Stand for Children and help get the message out.

Look for opportunities to support and listen to children. A local survey of 15,000 children recently revealed that three-quarters of the kids interviewed said adults do not listen to them. Think

about your own interaction with children: Do you do most of the talking, or do they?

Volunteer or become a mentor with an organization that works with children. If you are at or near retirement age, think about "returnment" rather than retirement.

Returnment is the act of giving back to your community with your time, energy and passion.

This one's easy on the surface but it will mean so much if you do it. Find ways to thank and acknowledge the thousands of folks in our community who work every day on behalf of children. Thank a teacher, a social worker, a child caregiver.

These people don't work for significant financial rewards, but because they truly believe the adage, "Children are our greatest asset." They need our daily acknowledgment and support.

Can one person making the decision to get involved with a child's life make a difference to Oregon's future? You'll never know unless you become that person.

JAY BLOOM is president and CEO of Morrison Child and Family Services, a Portland nonprofit that helps at-risk children and families. □