

Enlightenment is a rare gift, indeed

(This is the second in an ongoing editorial series, focusing on the problem of child abuse in Coos County and ways to address it.) 5348

There's no question that protecting the most vulnerable among us is a responsibility.

Especially in Coos County, it's an obligation.

Few here are so uninformed that they aren't aware of the county's reputation when it comes to child abuse. It's a reputation that's been well-earned. Last year, Coos County was ranked third in the state for such abuse and

neglect. Only in Eastern Oregon's Grant and Baker counties did children suffer more. That placement provided Coos County with the dubious distinction of being 189 percent above the state average for hurting kids.

There is an ongoing focus on such social problems and rarely a month goes by that some new report isn't issued, providing yet another miserable statistic for the county. One highly touted study is produced by "Children First for Oregon," a nonprofit, nonpartisan group that each year releases a report card based on overall services to children in the state and also focusing specifically on each Oregon county.

This year's Coos County chapter is not a pretty story. While there are a few positives — the county's teen-pregnancy rate has shown a marked improvement and is, in fact, better than in several other counties — overall the Coos report card can be characterized by one sentence:

There is plenty of room for improvement.

To that end, the Coos County Commission on Children and Families will host a presentation by Beth Kapsch, Children First for Oregon's policy and outreach associate. A question-and-answer session will follow Kapsch's talk, so county residents can learn firsthand about the current state of Coos County's children and how to improve their standing.

It was Scottish poet Robert Burns who suggested it was a gift to see ourselves as others see us. The Commission on Children and Families is offering people here that very opportunity. Coos County residents should accept it as such and attend the Feb. 22 meeting.

■ **Meeting:** At 5:30 p.m. on Tuesday, Feb. 22, at the South Coast ESD office, 1350 Teakwood, Coos Bay.