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Alcohol abuse, meth threaten North Coast children

*Services cut back at a time when
children most need help*

By **LEANNE JOSEPHSON**
The Daily Astorian

Eric Halverson, a general crimes detective with the Astoria Police Department, remembers the house on U.S. Highway 26.

The one with garbage littering the floor. The one without heat, electricity or running water. The one where a girl of 14 admitted she had only two years of formal education because no one inside that house cared what she did or where she went.

"What was important to the parents was the next fix, the next drink," he said.

During his three years investigating drug, felony and person crimes for the department, Halverson has seen children who have suffered sexual abuse, burns from a space heater, bruises from an alcoholic parent and symptoms of neglect ranging from hunger to reoccurring lice.

"Any of it is unacceptable," he said.

It's a sentiment shared by child advocates across the county. They're hoping that Child Abuse Prevention Month, which begins today, will remind residents to speak up for children they think are in unsafe situations, and to work to improve child welfare and safety programs.

"If we don't protect our youngest and most vulnerable, they can't grow up to be involved, caring, contributing citizens," said Alice Beck, human services supervisor for Clatsop County Health and Human Services. "As a community, we have a responsibility to see that all our children are safe from harm."

According to Children First for Oregon, a nonprofit organization that tracks children's health and safety, 109 Clatsop County children were victims of child abuse and neglect in 2003. That represents nearly 13 out of every 1,000 children, 2 percent higher than the state average.

Statewide, reports of child abuse and neglect have increased steadily over the last decade, up 61 percent since 1994, the report

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In Clatsop County, 109 children were victims of child abuse and neglect in 2003, according to Children First for Oregon. Today is the start of Child Abuse Prevention Month.

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