

It's 'our' responsibility to reduce abuse of children

By JENNIFER COLÉ

Guest columnist

We need to do a better job of protecting our children. Keeping children safe is everyone's responsibility. Tragically, one out of every 100 children in Oregon is a confirmed victim of child abuse. Last year in Klamath County, 382 children were victims of child abuse and neglect.

April is National Child Abuse Awareness and Prevention Month.

I wish I had a brighter outlook about ending the abuse of children. I wish I could tell you we've turned the corner on this blight on society — but I can't. According to

Jennifer Cole-Small is the executive director of Klamath-Lake CARES, and Chair of the Oregon Network of Child Abuse Intervention Centers. She is also the mother of two boys, Gabriel and Jonathan.

Children First for Oregon's Report Card 2004, Oregon earned a C- for keeping its children safe. The direct and indirect costs of child abuse and neglect in the United States are estimated at more than \$94 billion. We can't afford to wait for someone else to change the status of Oregon's children. We're the

adults — it's our responsibility.

But what can we do? How do we make an impact on child abuse in Oregon?

Here are a few suggestions that can make a difference:

- Report suspected abuse or neglect. Keeping children safe means each of us has an obligation to inform authorities if there is a reasonable suspicion children are being harmed. Your concern may protect a child from an abusive environment. You can report child abuse in our community by calling 883-5570.

- Support and honor the work the foster parents in our commu-

nity do — they are receiving less money and appreciation than ever for the job of housing victims of child abuse and neglect.

- Advocate for services to help families. Communities need comprehensive services to address issues affecting families. Parenting programs, health care and housing needs are all important to maintaining healthy children and families.

- Make a contribution to an organization working to impact child abuse. Your donations are put to good use in much-needed community programs and are generally tax-deductible. Child abuse intervention is critical to help children

lead healthy and productive lives.

- Let your legislators hear from you loud and clear: "Kids move to the front of the line." This means they will receive the services they need when allegations of abuse are made. It also means they get a hand up to begin healing.

Oregon is in the midst of a major budget crisis, but we must demonstrate our commitment to children and demand that our leaders continue to fund effective, proven child abuse prevention and intervention programs. We need to stand up for our most vulnerable citizens. Child abuse victims have only us. We're the adults — it's our job to be their voice and to work hard to protect them.