

# State-funded network links parents to agencies

By June Russell  
Emerald Reporter

Whether their youngsters are toddlers, teens or somewhere in between, parents can find answers through the Parent Information Network, a free service linking parents to Lane County agencies and other resources.

The network started in September through the state-funded Great Start program. As a clearinghouse for information on parent education, the network links parents to resources in the community ranging from classes and workshops to various state and local agencies' services.

Parents don't have to be in a crisis situation to call, said network director Marisela Rizik-Graham. Parents with any questions or problems are encouraged to contact the network at 747-2409, from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

"We are not a crisis center," Rizik-Graham said.

"We're an information network. We want to normalize the concept of parent education, and the idea that you don't have to be a bad parent to wonder if your parenting is right or wrong.

"We see parents needing help and guidance, or sometimes just to tell them they're doing a good job," she said.

"Sometimes parents don't know what's right or wrong. There's been so much publicity about child abuse that sometimes a parent is afraid to show affection in public."

Changes in the family structure and economic demand are changing parenting concerns and problems, said assistant director Kathleen Kingman. As time constraints for parents become tighter, more parenting jobs are being done outside the home, often in child-care facilities.

"Families are smaller today," Kingman said. "We

don't have the extended families we've had in the past, with grandparents living with the family and taking care of the kids. There just aren't as many people to handle the parenting.

"It's a lot tougher for parents today," she said. "Economic pressures force both parents to work more. There just isn't as much time for parenting."

In addition to answering parents' questions and linking them with community resources, the network also provides counseling at no charge for low-income families with children under the age of six.

The network also coordinates with school counselors and other agencies in the community. Since its start in September, the network has served about 50 families, Rizik-Graham said.

"Parenting is difficult in the '90s, and you don't have to be in a crisis situation to seek help," Kingman said. "All parents can use advice."

# Non-profit agencies follow court's tax decision

PORTLAND (AP) — Executives of non-profit agencies are watching with interest as the Oregon Supreme Court prepares to hear arguments in a dispute over whether a Coos County legal defense agency must pay property taxes.

The question in the case is whether a non-profit agency with a budget fixed by state government is entitled to an exemption from local property taxes. The state Department of Revenue and the Oregon Tax Court have said Southwestern Oregon Public Defender Services is not.

The Oregon Tax Court ruling is being appealed to the Oregon Supreme Court. The court probably will hear arguments

in late January.

Executives of other non-profits that depend on government money are worried that if the public defenders' service in Coos County is ordered to pay its \$5,000 tax bill, their agencies may be next.

"Our agencies are very worried," said Priscilla Seaborg of the United Way of the Columbia-Willamette, a Portland-area umbrella agency for smaller charities.

"We know it would have a devastating impact on our agencies," she said.

Jim Wilcox, manager of program services in the state revenue department's

Property Tax Division, said the state found the public defender was a subcontractor for state government, not a charity.

Directors of legal-defense agencies for the indigent are accustomed to property tax exemptions.

Their lobbying group, the Oregon Criminal Defense Lawyers Association of Eugene, has drafted proposed legislation specifically exempting them from property taxes.

"In 1986, the state took over indigent defense from the counties. And now that the counties are trying to tax them, it adds to the resentment," said Ed

Jones, director of Multnomah Defenders Inc. in Portland.

Multnomah Defenders Inc. defends indigent clients accused of misdemeanors. Its tax bill would be about \$10,000 if it had to pay property taxes.

The bill for the Metropolitan Public Defender office, which handles felony defenses, would be about \$45,000.

About 1,300 non-profits are in Multnomah County alone. Most receive some government funding.

Seaborg said her agency likely will try to draft legislation that would exempt non-profits from property taxes.

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# Mandatory seat belt law in effect Friday

SALEM (AP) — Buckle up on Friday or face a \$50 fine.

Oregon's mandatory automobile seat belt law goes into effect this week and police say they won't have any trouble enforcing it.

All the police need to see to pull a car over is a shoulder harness or a lap belt dangling unused.

"Police officers routinely tell us that safety belt laws are easy to enforce," said Geri Parker, safety belt program coordinator for the Oregon Traffic Safety Commission.

Oregon voters approved a ballot measure Nov. 6 to extend mandatory seat belt use to people age 16 and older. Seat belts or safety seats already are required for everyone under 16.

Beginning Friday, everyone in the front and back seats of a car will need to buckle up if belts are available.

Although police probably will have some latitude to issue warnings as the new law gets broken in, the safety belt law will be enforced like any other law, said Capt. Jim Stevenson of the Oregon State Police Patrol Division.

In 1988, 394 drivers and passengers who died in Oregon crashes had belts available but didn't use them. That is 72 percent of the 545 deaths that year.

"We can conservatively estimate that we will save 10 percent of serious injuries or deaths in Oregon if we achieve 70 percent use," Parker said. "I think that is attainable."

She noted a compliance rate of more than 70 percent with the law requiring those under 16 to buckle up.

Oregon's new law will be far

tougher than Washington's 5-year-old mandatory seat belt law.

Under Washington's seat belt law, officers cannot stop someone solely for not wearing a seat belt. Washington officers can issue a citation only after they stop the person for another infraction, such as speeding, and find the person not wearing a seat belt.

The new Oregon law does not require school buses to be outfitted with seat belts.

There are other exceptions to the law. People in older cars not manufactured with belts don't have to wear belts. However, if a belt was later installed, the belt must be used.

Stevenson said it would be more difficult to enforce the law for older cars that don't have shoulder harnesses because the officer can't see whether the seat belt is buckled. But the driver or others in the car can be cited if the car is stopped for another reason and the officer sees the seat belts are not being used.

Some people, such as those who suffer from severe arthritis, might be able to get a medical exemption certificate issued by the Division of Motor Vehicles after receiving a letter from a doctor.

Other exemptions include: people who are in custody of law enforcement personnel; people delivering newspapers or mail; people in ambulances who are administering or receiving aid; occupants of privately owned commercial vehicles, except for pickups; and a passenger if all seating positions in the vehicle are occupied by other people.