

Forum addresses Lane child abuse

By Jacqueline Woge
Emerald Reporter

Community leaders met in relative quiet and anonymity Monday night to discuss the equally understated issue of child abuse in Lane County.

Youth Development Commission organizers hope that the invitation-only forum will help kick off renewed efforts and greater coordination in dealing with child abuse issues.

The fact that four of Oregon's 16 child-abuse deaths in the last nine months took place in Lane County prompted the discussion. The statistic looks even worse when considering that Lane County has only 10 percent of the state's population.

Participants agreed that child abuse in Lane County must change.

The forty-something group of about 56 community movers worked with professional precision through their agenda at the meeting in the Downtown Athletic Club's third-floor conference room.

The agenda included a key note address by Lane County Commissioner Jack Roberts, a personal story by recovered child-abuser Judy Bergstrom, writing personal pledges, and more than an hour of serious discussion.

Bergstrom's sketch of her alcoholic nightmare moved participants to glowering contemplation but not enough to make them think beyond their own work when making their pledges. The majority vowed to continue current efforts in their government agency or nonprofit and to try to network more for child abuse prevention. Some promised to pay more attention to their own children.

Bergstrom's addressed the issue of self consciousness or lack thereof.

"I didn't know I had a drinking problem," Bergstrom said. "I didn't know what love was."

She also said she didn't know why she felt the way she felt.

Although the speeches and pledges offered only a quick, broad sweep over the issue, the forum offered a positive start for future efforts. Good humor prevailed throughout the evening, never giving way to methodological spats. People got to know each other a little better. Participants agreed on the significance of child abuse in later adult behavior.

Each also agreed with the quote Roberts pulled from Russian writer Pyodor Dostoyevsky, that children need to have a future beyond that of an "infinitely gentle and infinitely suffering thing."

AGENT

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sources.

An agent makes about 10 percent more than a patrol officer, said Lt. Jan Clements of EPD.

This is not the first time Brooks has worked the University. He served as the campus agent 10 years ago. Shortly after Brooks left the post the University eliminated the position.

"In the past it was a matter of money," Clements said. "The University didn't have the additional money to keep the agent."

Brooks said he is excited about returning to campus and believes his presence will help to reduce campus crime for two reasons.

"The simple fact that more crimes will be investigated is one reason," he said. "The other is that patrolmen on campus will no longer be burdened with as much investigative work, which will allow them to get out of the office and patrol the campus."

Brooks said one of the reasons he applied for the position is because he enjoys the small community feeling the University has.

One of the main goals Brooks



Photo by Dylan Coulter

Eugene police department agent William Brooks said he likes the "small community feeling" at the University.

said he would like to accomplish on campus is to repair the rift between the students and the police. He said the students shouldn't see their relationship with the police as "us against them."

"I will work to define some problems on campus," Brooks said, "and try to work with student organizations to help the police and the students better

understand each other."

In the recent years, the only contact the students had with the police was confrontational, he said.

"It's my preference to have a more personal contact with the public," Brooks said. "So the students understand that we are people too."

NEIGHBORS

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scheduling and traffic monitoring the board would work out solutions to any problems.

Opponents spoke about fears: falling property values, outsiders who might care nothing about the neighborhood, and possible violence by extremist groups.

Neighbors expressed a lack of confidence in a board they said they believed should have consulted residents in the beginning.

Sonduck said the idea never occurred to the board because AIDS patient care "has become routine" and has not "encountered stark, negative reaction for some time."

One of the neighbors suggested there be a follow-up meeting in 60 to 90 days and board members agreed that would be possible.

When Osborne signaled that the allotted time was up, the chairs were still in a circle, but division was still apparent. Asked if they felt assured, one group of neighbors angrily replied in unison, "No."



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