

Angry parents ask for protection for their children

By Stephanie Sisson
Oregon Daily Emerald

The nine parents at the meeting Thursday night seemed, at times, more like members of a support group than citizens who had gathered to change the law.

But this was because the parents at the Keep Our Children Safe meeting were angry and disillusioned by what the law had done to them and to their children.

Once they acknowledged their bitterness, they were ready to use it constructively — to fight back.

The meeting of Keep Our Children Safe was sparked by the September conviction of Daniel David Lichau on six counts of sex crimes, the January decision of Lane County Court Judge F. Gordon Cottrell to allow Lichau to remain free on bail pending his appeal, and today's hearing, in which Cottrell will be asked to reconsider his decision.

Not all of the people at the meeting were parents of abused children; if they were, some kept it to themselves. Most of them told their stories right away as if to prove that they belonged, that they understood, and that they did want to change things.

Except for one man present, all

believed that the majority of men and women with a history of pedophilia could not be cured. None of them believed that the current justice system cared anything about their children.

If one had to summarize what they all wanted to change, it would be that each case could be looked at individually, with the aim of protecting children from re-living their abuse in court and from any further contact from their molester.

According to these parents, the current system will not allow you to have it both ways. Example after example of cases were given in which children's lawyers had to plea bargain to keep molested children out of the courtroom — thereby reducing the charge of sexual abuse, and eventually the molester's sentence.

The father of two girls, both of whom became involved with a neighbor before the age of 13, told of his frustration with the system. One of his daughters was visiting their neighbor every morning as soon as her father left for work, and skipping school all day one day a week to be with him. In exchange, the man promised to be her best friend and to give her anything she wanted.

"I fought with the police, I fought with the school, I even tried to get her thrown

in jail," he said. "I'll tell you — if I ever come across another situation like this one, I will not go to the police. I'd shoot him."

This man, who agreed to have his story told on the condition of anonymity, said that his neighbor was convicted of sex crimes, but, like Lichau, released on bail. When, after being told he could never harm them again, and his daughters saw their molester out of prison, they told their father they were afraid he would kill them.

In order to protect his children, this father sent them out of the state to stay with a friend, and is in process of finding a home in another town to start over. He is giving up a good job and a nice home, and is also struggling to hold his marriage together.

He, like many of the parents at the meeting, had difficulty maintaining control. Once upon a time, the law told these parents that if they were patient, justice would be served. Now believing that they have been cheated, these parents — hurt and angry for the sake of their children — want a different ending to their stories.

The most talked-about solutions were report cards for judges, evaluating them on each case, with periodic review from

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— Angry Parent

state legislators; and a bill that would prevent convicted child molesters from running children's tutorials. It was evident, though, that these ideas weren't enough.

"I'd like to just lock them away and keep them the hell out of society," said one woman, and all agreed.

Of course, the law is already supposed to do that — but, as these parents know, it does not. Until that happens, other solutions must be examined; these parents must attempt other, small steps of change until our society reaches the point where the molesters cease to be regarded as the victims, and the victims no longer live in fear.

COMMUNITY UPDATE

- A rally and march to the Hult Center will celebrate Martin Luther King Day Monday. The march is organized by Eugene Peaceworks and will focus on class and race issues. Participants will meet at the EMU Courtyard at 5:30 p.m. For more information, call 343-8548.

- The public is invited to discuss plans for restoring the Masonic Cemetery in Southeast

Eugene. The meeting is scheduled for Jan. 20 at 7 p.m. at Hilyard Community Center, 2580 Hilyard St. The purpose of the meeting is to recruit volunteers to develop a restoration plan. For more information, call the city Library, Recreation and Cultural Services Department at 687-5333.

- McKenzie-Willamette Hospital's Center for Healthy Living

is offering a series of classes to help people in making healthy lifestyle changes. Participants in the four-part program will learn about risk factors for illness and receive help in planning a healthy diet and a personalized fitness program. Classes are every Monday Jan. 21 through Feb. 21 beginning at 6:30 p.m. The first session is free, and all other sessions cost \$10. To pre-register, call 343-1883.

- The Eugene-Springfield Community Partnership and African-American Community Coalition are sponsoring a community development program Jan. 19-22. The program, called Institute for African-American

Mobilization, was organized for local African-Americans to develop an agenda for advancement in areas such as substance abuse, cultural recognition and broader access to all public resources. The three-day program is scheduled from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at First United Methodist Church, 176 Olive St.

- The United Way needs volunteers for the following positions: office assistant for Eugene hearing and speech, six hours per week; general office helper for the Girl Scouts Western Council, two hours per month; child care helper for the YMCA, four hours per week; store volunteer for Lane County Adult

Corrections, five hours per week; group exercise assistant for Eugene Good Samaritan, one hour per week. For more information, call the Volunteer Connection, 683-9000.

- A six-week class series on renting and housing begins Jan. 28. The Second Chance Renter Rehabilitation Program will teach people how to apply for housing and how to be a good tenant. People will also learn how to make and manage a budget, as well as how to establish good credit. The program is free and is sponsored by Clergy and Laity Concerned. Space is limited. For more information, call 485-1755.

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