

FOSTER,

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it," said Slippy. "It's a lot for them to manage and they're carrying a really heavy burden."

The system has not always lacked so many foster homes. In the early 2000s, when Oregon was suffering from a methamphetamine epidemic, thousands of foster children entered the system all at once. For several years, over 1,100 children were in care on a monthly basis in Marion County. DHS orchestrated a huge push for foster families, and the community came through. But after that push, many of those foster parents adopted their foster children, and subsequently stopped opening up their homes to new kids.

The number of children in care has lowered considerably since then; yearly averages show around 650 children in care. But the system is struggling to keep up. As Erma Brundidge, a Child Welfare foster parent certifier said, "Our number of foster kids isn't as high, but we do have fewer foster homes and those fewer children in care are tougher."

Brundidge has held different roles within DHS Child Welfare for almost 20 years, and she's seen a shift in the kids arriving in care. Behavioral problems among children in foster care have intensified in recent years. While Brundidge isn't sure of the cause, they know that the kids who come into care "require more time and energy and skill level" from foster families, Brundidge said.

Foster families can rise to the occasion of dealing with difficult behavioral problems, but they must have the "desire to learn those skills and can

invest some time upfront," she said.

This is why all foster parents, regardless of whether they're related to the child, must complete foster parent certification training. For initial certification, foster parents must attend a set of eight, three-hour sessions, which cover everything from working with a child's biological family to child development to sexual abuse and trauma and how those circumstances impact a child's behavior. On top of these classes, DHS requires an additional six hours of trainings to become certified.

These additional trainings can take the form of DHS-offered classes in topics like extreme behavioral issues and how to deal with the grief of saying goodbye to a child who's been in the home for a long time, but training hours can also come from attending counseling sessions with a fos-

ter child or reading books specific to the child's case; these details can be worked out with one's certifiers. After initial certification, foster parents are asked to complete 30 hours of training every two years for recertification.

Aside from formal trainings, Slippy and Brundidge are dedicated to receiving foster parents in their office and working through issues together. This is part of DHS's effort to change the culture within the agency after the recent state audit of the foster care system.

"Our new DHS director and Child Welfare director are helping the culture of our agency to shift, in that this is a service agency and when you serve people you serve each other and serve in a bigger picture," Slippy said. For more on DHS's response to the recent audit, see side bar.

What's most important for

foster parents, Brundidge and Slippy emphasized, is to understand the limits of their knowledge: fostering a child who's been abused and traumatized won't be the same as raising one's own biological child. The ideal foster parent, Brundidge said, is "someone who doesn't think they have all the answers and would approach it just like a brand-new parent approaches parenting."

Just like a new parent, foster parents need support from those around them. Slippy and Brundidge emphasize the role of the community in creating successful foster homes. There aren't enough foster parents but there also isn't enough support for current foster parents. There's a role for those in the community to play, whether that's in babysitting or transportation of the child when the foster parents to attend an appointment or

community service is important. Community members should acknowledge how much dedication it takes to be a good foster parent.

"I honestly believe if we can have a mentality of thankfulness and acknowledgement, we could go far beyond reaching out and getting foster parents," Brundidge said.

In addition, recasting the role of the foster parent as a

community service is important. Community members should acknowledge how much dedication it takes to be a good foster parent.

"I honestly believe if we can have a mentality of thankfulness and acknowledgement, we could go far beyond reaching out and getting foster parents," Brundidge said.

Senior community hosts country cousins



Willamette Lutheran Retirement Community brought in farm animals, fair games and even a calliope player for a country fair Friday, June 22.

A: Raeann McDonald fullfills a longtime dream of Richard Thomas by giving him an eye

in the back of his head. B: Emelia Lane feeds a goat. C: Mary Ann Cotton tries her hand at a ring toss.

DHS changing in response to state audit

At a recent Foster Care Advisory Board meeting in Salem, Brooke Hall, a project manager in Child Welfare Field Services, shared some of the goals of the Oregon Department of Human Services in responding to the recent audit of the foster care system by the Secretary of State's office. While the audit recommendations were extensive and far reaching, DHS chose 10 recommendations to prioritize and launch immediate projects on.

Some of these projects include engaging the community more, which has resulted in a series of listening tours around the state,

where key players in DHS Child Welfare organize time to speak with groups of foster parents, foster kids, and community stakeholders and accept feedback about what's working and what's not. Other projects include creating a centralized statewide system for calls about child welfare and foster care, recruiting new caseworkers and creating surveys to understand when and why caseworkers burn out, and dealing with backlogged foster home applications by sending specialized staff to help process applications in areas where applications are particularly bottlenecked.

A new program called Positive Human Development is being implemented to improve the culture within DHS. The Positive Human Development project takes the form of trainings for DHS workers in leadership roles and seeks to create better relationships between DHS employees.

All these projects are in progress and are in various states of implementation.

The next Foster Care Advisory Board meeting is September 20 and is run by the Foster Care Ombudsman Darin Mancuso. For more information, email Mancuso at fco.info@state.or.us

TRACKS: 'We need to hammer out specifics'

(Continued from Page A1) Willamette Valley Council of Governments, the committee settled on one project with a smaller price tag and one that will require a more substantial investment.

Sidewalk improvements to Delight Street Northeast around Cummings Elementary School was deemed to be the most pressing concern with sidewalk access enhancements to the area around Kennedy Elementary School taking the No. 2 spot with a higher price tag.

"We need to hammer out specific streets and whether we want sidewalks on one side or both," said David Dempster, a committee member.

Subgroups of the committee planned walkthroughs of each area last week to discuss specifics.

The decision appeared to put to rest a months-long conversation regarding which of the two projects would get the full support of the committee. However, it was made easier this time around with input from Jaffe, who had the latest draft rules for the competitive fund-

ing process on-hand. The rule-making committee is favoring projects within a mile of Title 1, K-8 schools. Cummings and Kennedy are both designated as Title 1, which denotes schools with high percentages of children from low-income families.

Jaffe also encouraged members of the committee and someone from city staff to attend a transportation workshop in Salem as part of their preparation for submitting projects.

One question still outstanding where money to match the state grants will come from. Depending on the final rules, Keizer might be able to cite an upcoming investment from the Salem-Keizer School District into the Cummings area as matching money.

The recently-approved school bond measure includes a sidewalk build-out to the edges of the Cummings' campus and may qualify as a matching investment without the city dipping into its own reserves.

After determining the specifics for each project, the committee will need approval from the city council to move forward.

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KEEP ON TRUCKING SUMMER END CELEBRATION



Friday, September 7th 4:00 pm– 9:00 pm

- Food Trucks
- Live Music
- Beer & Wine
- Raffles
- Shuttle Service
- Family Fun at Center 50+

The Salem Food Truck Pod and Barrel and Keg are pulling together to support Friends of Center 50+. Come join us Friday, September 7th at Center 50+ for a fun evening. Bring your friends and family to enjoy great food, and great company to support a great cause. Proceeds from this evening's event will support such programs as Respite, Fit 50+ and Alzheimer's and dementia support and Senior Program Scholarships.

For more information please contact Center 50+.



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