

# Family Living

## Part Five: A Time For Success For African American Youth

### Elderly and disabled at risk during cold weather

During this time of extreme cold weather, Multnomah County's Aging and Disability Services encourages the public to look out for their frail elderly neighbors or persons with disabilities who may be isolated or unable to get to a warm place.

Persons with limited incomes and resources and/or health problems are particularly vulnerable during extreme weather conditions. Pneumonia is a very real threat to persons whose health is already compromised by cold weather.

People who have a concern about an elderly or disabled neighbor or about staying warm themselves can call Multnomah County's Aging and Disability Services Helpline at 248-3646, 24 hours a day.

Many of the essential things that African American young people need in order to thrive are missing from their lives. That's the conclusion of a survey that included 789 African American sixth, eighth and tenth grade students (as part of a survey of 10,000 students overall) within Multnomah County. The survey measured the presence of 40 assets or building blocks that all young people need to grow up healthy, caring and competent.

On average, as our survey revealed, local African American youth have only 19 of these 40 assets, leaving them vulnerable to many problems.

Now that we know that, what do we do? Well, as this research report reveals, you can do a great deal. For example, few African American youth say they have a positive adult role model, something family, school and community members can provide. Only one in three says young people are given useful roles in the community. We can provide those roles for our youth. Only one in four believes that the community values them, so we need to communicate with young people and let them know we care. We can be proud of the relationships we have established that have given our young people inner strength. Now we need to recognize that many of the assets they lack are within our power to provide.

What do we know about our African American youth? We know most have hope. We know they have integrity and accept personal responsibility. We know they are motivated to do well in school.

Their inner strengths and attitudes contradict the myth that young people simply don't care. Many are involved in community service and their religious com-

munities, are motivated to do well in school, care about others, stand up for what they believe in, and see a bright future for themselves.

African American youth continue to believe and to care and to hope even as they lack the support that can virtually guarantee success.

While African American youth have many inner strengths, they suffer because they don't have enough adult involvement in their lives. Inner strength isn't enough—young people simply can't do it all on their own.

Most African American youth say they don't have a caring neighborhood. Most African American youth say they don't have a positive adult role model. Many say they feel adults don't value them or listen to them. These are things adults can help to fix.

Through this survey, we discovered that most of our young people feel they have family support and love, but the majority says their family doesn't communicate well. Far too few feel the community cares about their success or failure. While young people care about learning and we know their school environment can have an enormous impact on shaping their skills and ambitions, too few have adults who are involved in their education.

On the average, African American youth have just 19 of the 40 assets they need, but it doesn't have to stay that way. There are things we can do to provide our youth with positive role models, and to show our interest in the success of every African American young person.

For our African American young people to succeed, we must take the time to show them we care for them, take the time to communicate with them, and take the time



A profile of African American youth was conducted by Multnomah Commission on Children & Families.

to support them. By doing so, we give our youth the assets they need to succeed. To order additional reports, call the Take the Time Line at 503/248-5066. ■

## SKIDS HAPPEN:

### A guide to surviving winter road hazards

'Tis the season for driving hazards. Please share the below winter driving tips from Liberty Northwest and help your readers be safe this season:

#### Speed of light

Your night vision is limited to the area your headlights show. Normally low-beam lights allow you to see about 100 feet ahead. At 60 miles an hour, your car travels at 88 feet per second. Driving at greater speeds could cause you to overdrive your headlights for bad conditions, such as snow, rain, ice, and fog.

#### Glare aware

Staring at bright lights may temporarily hamper your night vision. To diminish the effect of on-coming headlights, look at the lower right side of your traffic lane as much as possible until the car passes.

#### Skids happen

Avoid sudden braking, acceleration or steering moves. Remember ice forms on bridges before roadways - except ice underneath passes, in shade or at high altitudes.

#### Take a brake

In freezing conditions, stop slowly. Never slam on the brakes. Pump brakes slowly and if wheels lock, let off the brake immediately and pump the pedal again.

#### Keep your distance

In wet and freezing weather, allow for at least two to three the following distance and reaction time.

#### Surviving the splash

In extremely heavy downpours, keep the windshield wipers on high. Passing cars can splash a tremendous amount of water on your windshield blinding you temporarily.

#### For the long haul

Begin long trips well-rested and take breaks every two hours or 100 miles. Don't drive after your normal bed time since your alertness naturally decreases at that point. Remember to follow the warning for prescription and medications - take care to avoid anything that may make you drowsy.

#### See and be seen

Clean headlights and windshield frequently and replace wiper blades regularly. Drive with your headlights on day and night, especially in foggy wet and dark days.

## Oregon's Minimum Wage Jumps to \$6.50 per hour January 1, 1999

It will be an especially happy new year for the 11.4 percent of Oregon's work force scheduled for a pay raise January 1, 1999 when the state's minimum wage increases to \$6.50 an hour.

In the final of three minimum wage hikes mandated by a ballot initiative in 1996, Oregon's minimum wage increases to \$6.50 an hour January 1, 1999. Currently \$6.00 an hour, up from \$5.50 an hour in 1997, Oregon's rate is the highest in the nation. The only exceptions are a few mu-

nicipalities, such as the City of Portland and Multnomah County that have set higher "living wage" requirements for certain workers under service contracts. Since employers must comply with the requirements most beneficial to the employee, all Oregon employers must pay the highest wage mandated. For example, even though the current federal minimum wage remains \$5.15, Oregon employers must pay the higher state rate.

"Most employers seem to be prepared for the wage hike,

but the bureau's Technical Assistance for Employers program info line is still receiving dozens of calls asking about the minimum wage," noted Joan Stevens-Schwenger, Technical Assistance for Employers Program manager. "Employers want to know if there are some exceptions such as a tip credit or a lower training wage, or if they have to give their employees who currently make \$6.50 an hour another raise January 1."

BOLI officials say the answer to all three questions is

"no". "The minimum wage is just that - the minimum," says Stevens-Schwenger. "You can't pay less to offset for tips or training. But employers are not required to pay more than the minimum wage when the rate increases to the current wage level of some of their employees."

For more information about Oregon's wage laws, employers can visit BOLI's web site, [www.BOLI.state.or.us](http://www.BOLI.state.or.us), or they can call the Technical Assistance for Employers Program in Portland, 503/731-4073.

## Policy Makers End Month Spent On Food Stamp Budget

Last Friday marked the end of a long and frugal month for twelve Oregon policy makers who spent the four weeks living on a food stamp budget and being paired with a food stamp recipient in their district. The public officials participated in Walk a Mile, an educational program coordinated by Oregon Food Bank and sponsored by a number of other social service agencies.

The participants this year included Sen. Marilyn Shannon; Sen. Lenn Hannon; Sen. Verne Duncan; Sen. Kate Brown; Rep. Ken Messerle; Rep. Barbara Ross; Rep. Kitty Piercy; Rep. Tom Butler; Rep. Lynn Lundquist; Julia Cooley, Governor's

office; Bob Repine, Director of Housing and Community Services; and Gary Weeks, Director of Department of Human Resources.

As part of the project, pairs talked on the phone, met together over lunch or went grocery shopping together. Legislators learned about the myriad of issues facing low-income Oregonians.

Rep. Ken Messerle, Coos Bay said "Talking with her (his match) brought into focus the pressures these folks are facing." Added to the pressures of surviving on a tight budget, Messerle added, "The economy here is very depressed and looking worse all the time."

Sandra Savage, a food stamp recipient and single mother paired with Sen. Lenn Hannon of Ashland shared the difficulties of a food stamp budget.

"It's hard to live on \$237 a month on food stamps for three people; we buy what we can to make it through the month." Savage recently shared dinner with Sen. Lenn Hannon and his extended family. "We had tacos, talked about education and how hard it is to find affordable housing."

"This year's project made some profound connections between groups of people who are not often able to connect. Both legislators

and food stamp recipients expressed gratitude and understanding after having the opportunity to meet," said Cassandra Garrison, project coordinator. She added, "the project really highlighted the void left by welfare reform, social service agencies simply are not able to fill the gap."

In addition to Oregon, eight states including Alaska, Arkansas, Indiana, Louisiana, Montana, New York, Ohio and Wisconsin also ran Walk a Mile projects this fall. The Walk a Mile program went national in May of 1995 when 16 members of Congress, eight Democrats and eight Republicans were matched with welfare recipients in their home districts.