

# No Safe Haven: Children of Substance Abusing Parents

By Kay Toran

The death of 3-year-old Tesslyn O'Cull was described by some legal experts as the worst murder-torture case in the history of Oregon. Two people have been charged with the crime: one was sentenced to Oregon's death row late last year and the other, her mother, is on trial now.

For Tesslyn, there was no safe haven in a place where violence, drugs and alcohol reigned. Although this case is an extreme example, parents in the grip of alcohol or other drugs have an addiction that competes with their love for their children. More than most other circumstances that cause or contribute to child maltreatment, substance abuse strips a parent of the ability to protect and nurture children.

A landmark report, "No Safe Haven: Children of Substance Abusing Parents," from Columbia University's Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse describes these children as endangered.

According to the report, "There is no safe haven for these abused and neglected children of drug-and-alcohol abusing parents. They are the most vulnerable and endangered in-



dividuals in America."

The survey found that when U.S. children are abused or neglected, their parents are likely to be drunk from alcohol, high on drugs such as cocaine or marijuana, or suffering hangovers and withdrawal symptoms that come after a binge. Children whose parents abuse drugs and alcohol are almost three times likelier to be abused and more than four times likelier to be neglected, according to the report.

For the past 10 years, drug and alcohol involvement has been the

number-one reason children in Oregon have been removed from their homes and placed in foster care. For the period 1995 to 1997, 65.6 percent of the children entering foster care did so as a result of parental alcohol or other drug abuse.

The State Office for Services to Children and Families studied more than 3,700 cases where children had been removed from their homes because of abuse. The Study found that alcohol and drug problems are pervasive in families of abused and neglected children and that substance abuse is a substantial barrier to these children returning home. One-third of children remain in foster care because of parental alcohol or other drug problems.

Such problems have forced a shift in the way child protection professionals deliver services. Overwhelmed by the number and the complexity of cases, child welfare workers struggle to protect children while juggling investigations, foster care placements and permanent custody decisions.

Parental substance abuse problems permeate every part of the social services system. Promoting prevention efforts and providing treat-

ment for substance-abusing parents gives children the chance to reunite safely with their biological families, protects other children, and minimizes costs in child welfare agencies and health, education and social service programs.

The national report calls for more funding for substance abuse treatment and concludes: "The best hope of a safe haven for these children is to prevent alcohol and drug abuse by their parents."

The Governor's recommended budget includes \$20 million for alcohol and drug prevention and treatment services. As a result there will be increased capacity for parents of children in foster care to participate in treatment programs.

Our children can't wait. Every child has the right to a safe, stable and drug-free home. Without a concerted effort from our communities, schools, churches and government, the tragedy of parental substance abuse continues and children pay the exorbitant price.

Kay Toran is the director of the State Office for Services to Children and Families in the Oregon Department of Human Resources.

# Row House Project Caught In Neighborhood Agency Feud

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

Perhaps not crucial, but certainly not helping, are changes within HOF. Gretchen Dursch, its first executive director, resigned last year shortly before the birth of her first child. Willer, who has filled the post since last August, will leave shortly to take a job with the Portland Organizing Project. She will be replaced temporarily by Joan Miggins while a permanent replacement is sought.

Longtime Boise activist Diane Farmer-Linkhart feels HOF has become too great an influence in the community, to the point of being "the tail wagging the dog." In presenting the Fargo

project, she says, "The attitude seemed to be, 'We hope you like this because we're going to do it anyway.'"

There have also been changes in both people and outlook within the Boise Association. At one time, according to former members, the group felt an obligation to provide low-cost housing to counter the rising cost of living in the area. Current members question this approach, and feel the area now has more than its share of such facilities. Brown and co-chair Tod Lundy both say they would rather the Fargo row houses be sold to low-income people.

Lundy notes that four members of the HOF board, previ-

ously uninvolved with neighborhood affairs, attended a recent Boise meeting. "I was impressed

by their statements, and they promised to continue attending our meetings," he says.

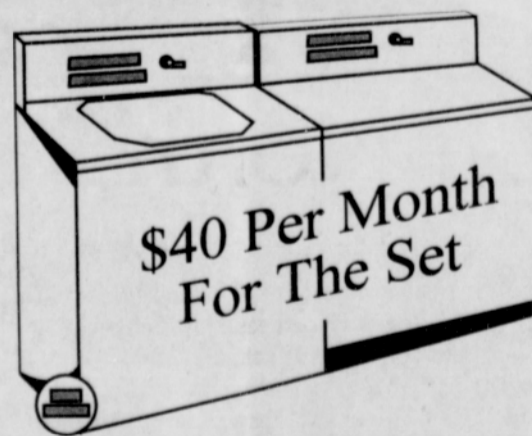
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MARCH 6	1:00 - 3:00P.M.
APRIL 3	1:00 - 3:00P.M.
MAY 1	1:00 - 3:00P.M.
JUNE 5	1:00 - 3:00P.M.
JULY 3	1:00 - 3:00P.M.

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