

# Hearing Reveals Human Services Damaged

## Low Wages Root of High Turnover, Poor Quality Care

# Legacy Health System Announces First Programs

In a hearing room filled with direct care workers and their supporters, Multnomah County Commissioners heard in story after story that these employees, their families and their clients are damaged by low wages and poor benefits. Fifteen care givers, employees of non-profit agencies on contract with the County, testified to their own poverty, indebtedness, ill health, poor housing and overwork. Several clients and client advocates, including two quadriplegics, testified to the deteriorated quality of care with the high turnover of care givers, caused by low wages. Three non-profit agency heads agreed that low wages were a serious and growing problem in the industry.

In this first step of an unusual collaboration by County government, Jobs with Justice and the Living Wage Campaign, including labor unions, community and faith-based organizations, the hearing kicked off an effort to move the state legislature to appropriately value the labor of human service workers. These workers serve children, the elderly, the sick and dis-

abled, the homeless and abused. Mallory Pratt, president of Oregon Action, led off testimony with excerpts from the Northwest Job Gap Study, which pegs a living wage for a single person in Oregon at over \$10 per hour and for a family of three at over \$16. The average wage for contracted mental health and developmental disability workers was only \$7.17 per hour in 1998, according to a recent Direct Care Staffing Report of Oregon's Department of Human Resources (DHR). While above the minimum wage (\$6.50), the wage for non-profit contract workers is more than \$2 below the market wage rate for the same or similar work, according to Oregon Employment Services.

Joan Booth union president at CODA, a non-profit drug and alcohol treatment center, testified that 25% of the workers she represents are eligible for the Oregon Health Plan, foodstamps and public housing assistance, 29% have second jobs, 11% have a third job, 18% are without medical insurance for their children, and 54% are seeking employment elsewhere.

Tim Crawl, Executive Director of the Oregon Rehabilitation Association, unveiled the results of a study showing a 91% per year turnover statewide (up from 72% in 1996) among workers in non-profit agencies serving the mentally ill and developmentally disabled. He noted that the turnover is as high as 200% at some local agencies. According to DHR, 8% of positions are continually vacant, causing short staffing, reduced client service and major overtime expenses. 14% of positions are "in transition" at any one time, seriously impacting stable client relations. Home bound clients testified that the difficulty in retaining home care workers could force them into costly institutions.

Turnover in Oregon's state operated human service programs is only 19%, with direct care staff (state employees) paid a first-year wage, on average, of \$9.44 per hour.

The County Public Affairs Coordinator, Gina Mattiotta, reported that the Governor's Proposed Budget allocates a two-percent COLA (cost of

living adjustment) for direct care workers. Other measures before the legislature that affect low-wage workers are SB 1114 which increases wages for home care workers and SB 1169 which allows home care workers to form a union and bargain for better wages with a Home Care Providers Commission.

County commissioners reaffirmed their commitment to act in accord with their historic Living Wage resolution passed last October, which recognized that "employees of non-profit social and human service agencies continue to experience low wages and a lack of benefits. The county's ability to affect those wages is limited because the Oregon Legislature controls the funding for those contracts... Multnomah County will seek the support and cooperation of the living wage advocates and together with them will bring a strong request to the 1999 Oregon Legislature for a substantial increase in wages and benefits for the employees of contractors that provide social and human services."

# Following Philadelphia's Example

By MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

I've written in this space before about Freedom Schools, an educational enrichment program of the Black Community Crusade for Children (BCCC) that offers summer options to children ages 5-18 who may otherwise be idle, intellectually underchallenged, unsupervised, unsafe, or unfed. I want you to know more about them and tell you what is planned for this summer.

Last year, Freedom Schools operated at 32 sites across the country serving more than 2100 children. This summer, we expect 43 sites will serve over 3000 children. Through an activity-based reading curriculum and a superb collection of books, children spend summer hours with positive images and role models, gain a sense of their own history and culture, and discover and develop their individual identities and talents. The Children's Defense Fund (CDF) and the BCCC provide training and support to staff on supervision and management, the reading curriculum, child development, conflict resolution, and leadership development.

The Freedom School program model is unique in that it serves two generations of young people - the students enrolled in the program

and the college-aged adults or 'servant-leaders' who staff the program. Throughout the summer, college-aged adults act as teachers, role models, and mentors and are responsible for the day-to-day care of the children. Experienced adults and seasoned veterans serve as sponsors and administrators to the individual programs, providing guidance, leadership, and support to the servant-leaders throughout the summer.

In a new expansion of one city's Freedom Summer 1999, the School District of Philadelphia will operate eight Freedom Schools sites throughout the city serving 700 children. David Hornbeck, Superintendent of Philadelphia's Schools, has appointed Kenneth Holdman, Director of Service Learning for the School District, to organize and provide oversight for this new collaborative. Using the highly successful Freedom School model as a foundation, the School District is coordinating a city-wide youth leadership development initiative that will employ 140 high school students as 'junior servant-leaders' working alongside 70 college-aged servant-leaders to provide assistance with daily activities, planning, and classroom management. A certified teacher will be assigned

to each site to provide instruction and project assessment. Children who are enrolled in the program and successfully complete the summer will receive School District academic credit. The junior and college-aged servant-leaders serving the sites will receive a stipend for their participation.

Philadelphia's college-aged adults will join others from across the country at the 1999 Ella Baker Child Policy Training Institute convened at the former Alex Haley Farm in Clinton, Tennessee and the University of Tennessee-Knoxville, June 13-20, 1999. A separate training session will be conducted for the junior servant-leaders May 13-16, 1999 at the former Alex Haley Farm. A comprehensive training has been designed to ensure that the junior servant-leaders will have an understanding of the Freedom School concept and vision.

This collaborative effort will ensure that three generations of children - school-aged, high school, and college-aged - will be safe this summer. They will have a high quality summer experience, and 210 new servant-leaders committed to their community and each other will emerge under the Philadelphia School District's leadership and

guidance.

This Freedom School and High School Youth Leadership Initiative is a city-wide partnership including the Mayor's Children and Families Cabinet, the Department of Human Services, the Private Industry Council, and the School District of Philadelphia. I would love to see more cities across the country follow this model.

For more information about this effort or starting a Freedom School in your community, please call Karmen Pinkney, BCCC Program Associate, 202-662-3501. For more information about the BCCC, contact Barbara Kelley Duncan, National Director, BCCC, at 202-662-3522. Also, anyone interested in purchasing the Freedom School curriculum guides and any or all of the wonderful collection of children's books available to the young people who attend each summer can call CDF publications at 202-662-3652.

# ORS High School Honor Choir to Celebrate Mom with Concert

The Oregon Repertory Singers High School Choir will perform their annual Mother's Day Concert at the Agnes Flanagan Chapel on the Lewis and Clark College campus at 2:00 p.m. on May 9, 1999.

Program will feature ten movements of Johannes Brahms' Zigeunerlieder and also pieces by Pachelbel, Pascanu, Malcolm

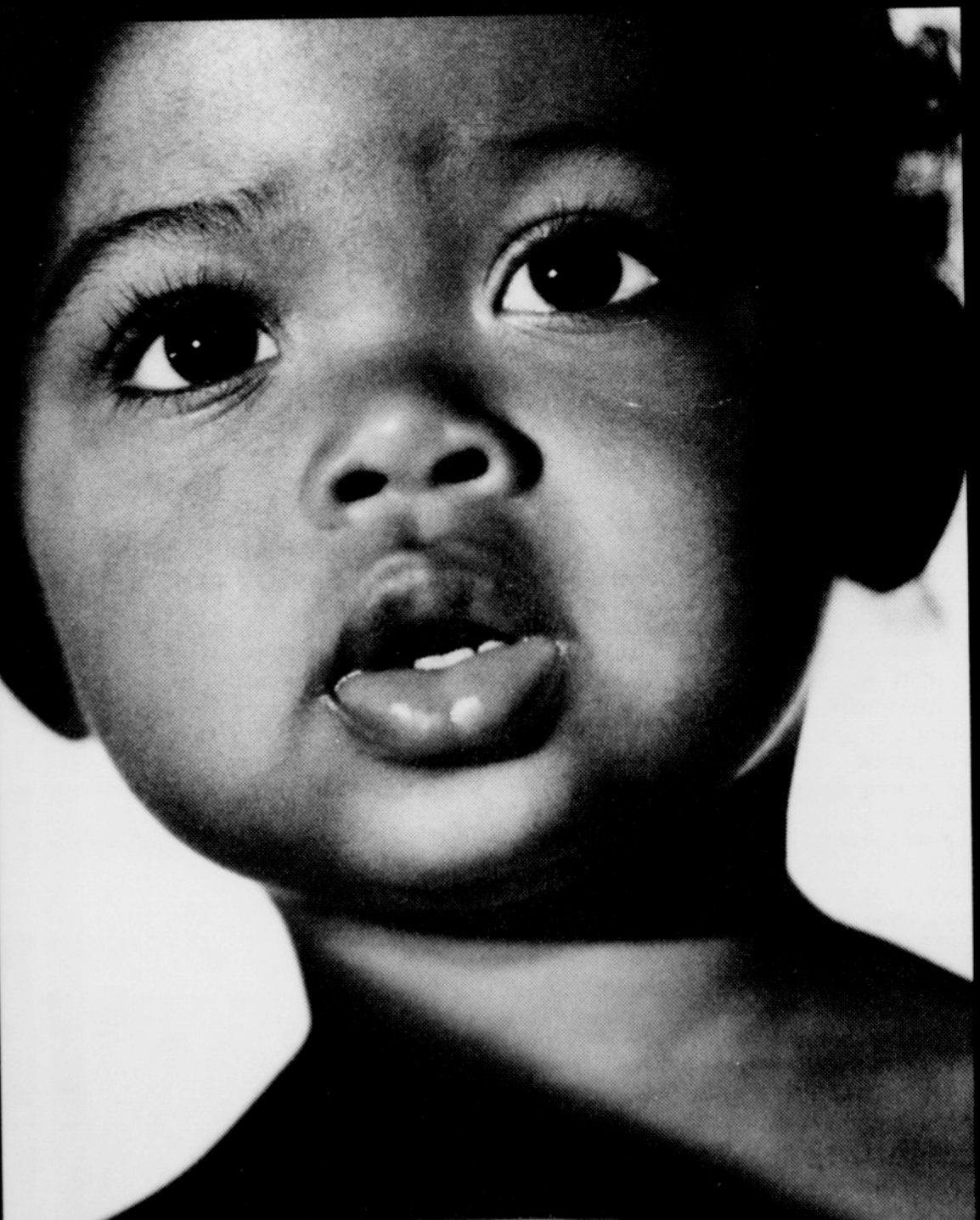
Williamson, and Jean Belmont.

General admission tickets can be purchased at the door or through the ORS office at 230-0652. Prices are \$10 for adults, \$5 for all 18 years and under.

About the ORS High School Honor choir. The ensemble of 25 vocally talented students is approaching its fourth season, which

will include a tour of greater Oregon and a performance of Vivaldi's Gloria. The choir, under conductor Dwight Uphaus, performs a broad range of repertoire in concert by themselves and with Oregon Repertory Singers and the ORS Children's Choir. Auditions for the 99-00 season will begin May 18, 1999.

**Diversity** Call (503) 288-0033 To Advertise In **Community**  
The Portland Observer



**HOW TO PREVENT YOUR DAUGHTER FROM COMMITTING SUICIDE**  
**16 YEARS BEFORE IT HAPPENS.**

Without a father in her life, she'll be 53% more likely to attempt suicide. Give your kids a better chance. Even if they don't live with you, they need your emotional and financial support. They're your kids. Be their dad.

**Ad Council**

# TOP TO BOTTOM

FASHION ATHLETIC SHOES & CLOTHING

**We Feature Fubu, Boss, Nike, South Pole, First Down, Fila, Adidas, Lugz and work boots**

**T-Shirts 3/\$10 Freaky Chains "Free" COME SEE US**

7 Days a week Mon-Sat 10-7pm Sun 10-5pm  
Phone 100-3817  
3700 N.E. Marlin Fisher King Jr. Blvd.