



# Family Living

## Safety net works to prevent child abuse

**CONTRIBUTED STORY**  
FOR THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

A network of public and private agencies has joined together to assist families and children at risk for abuse and neglect. The Community Safety Net is designed to serve families who are reported to the State Office of Services to Children and Families Child Abuse Hotline, (SOSCF) but are then "screened out." These situations indicate serious, but not yet critical problems that are documented by SOSCF and do not require immediate intervention. In the past, such families may have received information on available services or resources, but there was no follow-up or active effort to assist them in accessing those services. According to John Richard, SOSCF, "each month the Multnomah County Child Abuse Hotline receives up to 450 calls about children and families who are not assigned to a protective services worker for in-person contact. Many of these children and families need help with food, child care, housing, parenting skills, and health care or counseling." This shortfall in the child welfare system is being addressed by the creation of the community Safety Net.

The goal is to provide families with support at this critical juncture by linking them with the necessary services to defuse crisis situations, enhance family functioning, and maintain child safety in their homes. For nearly five years child welfare advocates have collaborated to enhance a system of linkages to provide early intervention services: 1995 Child Welfare Planning Group identified the lack of capacity to provide services screened out at the SOSCF hotline.

1996-97 Community process designed "Family Advocate Model"

1996 State Community Safety Net concept developed

1997 Tualatin Valley Centers began providing Family Advocate services through a contact with Multnomah County Health Department.

1999-2000 The Community Safety Net Advisory Council began planning the next phase of services. Community Safety Net kickoff event to be held May 25, 2000

2000 Project includes the Youth Investment System as partner to address the need of youth ages 13-17.

Supporting families is one of the best ways to promote children's healthy development," states Multnomah

County Commissioner Lisa Naito. "We want to recognize the positive results of efforts made in our community and invite others to participate as we plan the next steps." Naito was presented at the May 25th Community Safety Net event. Community Safety Net partners included: State Office of Services to Children and Families, Adult and Family Services, Tualatin Valley Centers, Parents Anonymous, Parents Advocates, Youth Investment Services, Mt. Hood Head Start, Teen Insights, Multnomah County Health Department, Family Court Services, Multnomah Commission on Children, Families and Community, CARES Northwest, Department of Human Services Community Partnership Team, Christie School, Early Head Start, Volunteers of America Relief Nursery, ARC of Multnomah, CERES, and YWCA.



## Looking for a home

This Father's Day please consider looking into one of over 250 children waiting in Oregon awaiting adoption. These adoptions are of no cost and we welcome families, singles or anyone who has the time, experience, patience and love to take one of these children into your home.

**Blake, age 10**

This delightful young man is known for his quick wit and wonderful sense of humor. Blake is active in several team sports, including basketball, football, baseball and soccer. A fan of the outdoors, he enjoys negotiating the work on his skateboard and rollerblades. One of his accomplishments last year was winning the soapbox Derby sponsored by his church. Through hard work, Blake has made great progress and he is very excited about adoption. He prefers to have both a mom and dad and has requested a non-smoking family who attends church. He would be especially pleased if his new family had pets. Blake, with his generally happy personality, would be a wonderful addition to a small family.

To learn more about adoption and the children wait, please call the Special needs Adoption Coalition at The Boys and Girls Aid Society at 1-800-342-6688 or (503) 222-9661. Agencies waive or reduce fees for the adoption of a child in state care, and financial assistance is available to help meet the child's needs. Stable single adults as well as couples are encouraged to call.

## Improvements in food stamp system under way

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Managers of the Oregon Adult and Family Services Division, collaborating with community advocates, are working in the Portland area to implement solutions identified at a public forum to better serve food stamp clients.

"The tremendous response to the food stamps forum affirmed people's need for food stamps," remarked Patti Whitney-Wise, Director of the Oregon Hunger Relief Task Force. "It also helped identify barriers to the program that need to be addressed locally and federally."

A report giving details of the forum, just published, is being mailed to more than 230 participants who attended the mid-December event in Northeast Portland.

The Portland Food Stamp Forum is a compendium of data and comments, many of them critical of the food stamp system, operated by the Oregon Adult and Family Services Division. The division worked closely with community advocate organizations in hosting the forum and preparing the report.

"We are working hard to fix problems and do it in harmony with our critics," started Jerry Burns, district manager of District 2 in Portland. "While we acknowledge many recipients are displeased with the amount of food stamp benefits they receive and with our ability to deliver benefits quickly, many more Oregonians are now receiving food stamps than at this time of the forum."

AFS data reveal an increase of almost 10 percent in households receiving food stamps in district 2 over the four months following the forum. Factors likely contributing to the increase: the December eligibility of large numbers of able-bodied adults without dependents and the normal seasonal increase during winter months.

Food Stamp households in District 2 went from 16,795 in December, 1999 to 18,409 this March. Improved access to the food stamp program is being proposed in response to the many customer service comments at the Portland forum. AFS District 2 has implemented a customer service workgroup, currently generating suggestions to make the food stamp process better and faster, such as processing clients in any AFS office regardless of their home zip codes. This workgroup includes AFS managers and workers along with representatives from Legal Aid and Oregon Food Bank.

Another workgroup is getting the word out about food stamp availability. The Food Stamp Outreach Pilot Project in East Multnomah County has engaged a contractor to answer phone questions about basis food stamp eligibility, created posters and flyers, and is working to streamline the food stamp application form. The outreach workgroup includes representatives of Legal Aid, Oregon Food Bank, Oregon Hunger Relief Task Force and AFS.

This will also significantly delay any signature gathering efforts on any proposed constitutional amendment initiative, because it would enable opponents of the measures to tie up in court for additional months. The two proposed initiatives invalidated by the court were filed by their chief petitioners in August of 1998. The process took 21 months to determine the validity of these measures.

Also, this will enable opponents of virtually any constitutional amendment which has been approved by voters to challenge the validity of that amendment under the new "necessarily implies" test.

These court decisions are available at: <http://www.publications.ojd.state.or.us/A105873.htm> and <http://www.publications.ojd.state.or.us/A105913.htm>

way in District 2. This includes improved phone messages that explain extended hours and special appointments for persons who have special needs, particularly those who work regular business hours. "I look forward to the efforts AFS has begun locally," stated Whitney-Wise. "Hunger is truly a problem that needs the government, private sector and the community to work together so that Oregon can be a place where no one need go hungry."

Forum participants, who came largely from downtown and east Portland, sent two clear messages: We like the food stamp program and we expect better customer service.

A survey returned by 156 forum

participants revealed:

- 68 percent received food stamps at the time of the forum.
- 81 percent did not always have enough food for their families.
- 89 percent found it difficult to get food stamps.

Further, food stamp clients said they understand that federal rules establish the amount of benefits they receive to meet their needs and wish for less restrictive rules. They also said they want a simpler application process. Clients expressed frustration about how they are treated in the application process and offered suggestions for a better grievance process.

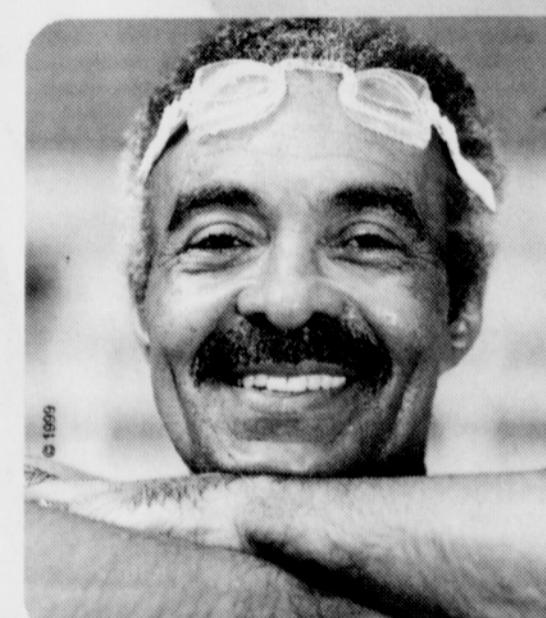
The Portland Food Stamp Forum was

an outgrowth of the Food stamp Stakeholder Group, which held three forums in 1999 in Medford, Salem and La Grande. Community advocates called for a consumer forum to be held in Portland. It was held Saturday, December 11, 1999, when more than 230 Oregonians who had received food stamps jammed the Great Hall at Westminster Presbyterian Church in Northeast Portland.

Advocates from Oregon Food Banks, Oregon Hunger Relief Task Force, Oregon Human Rights Coalition and staff from the Department of Human Services, Mt. Hood Community College along with the DHS Adult and Family Services worked together to plan and coordinate the forum.

Imagine this: You're proud of the children you raised. Your grandkids are talented and beautiful, too. The reality of retirement has finally arrived and it's even better than the fantasy.

*You have family behind you.*



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