

# Lawmaker Fights for Kids, Families

## Looks to chair key committee

BY PAUL GERALD  
FOR THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

State Rep. Chip Shields will likely gain a plum assignment as chair of the Human Services Subcommittee of Ways and Means. And that, he says, could bring benefits to his north and northeast Portland district.

Shields hopes to use his knowledge of health care and human services to keep kids and adults from winding up in institutions like the Oregon Department of Corrections and the Oregon Youth Authority.

The Democrat has been busy mastering human services issues at the same time the state faces an economic downturn and corresponding \$1 billion hole in the state budget.

One of his commitments is to improve foster care.

He and his wife, Shelda Holmes, recently became foster parents themselves. The couple hosted a roundtable last month at Widmer Gasthaus for local foster parents.

"All too often we forget that the foster home is really where children can be helped, not just

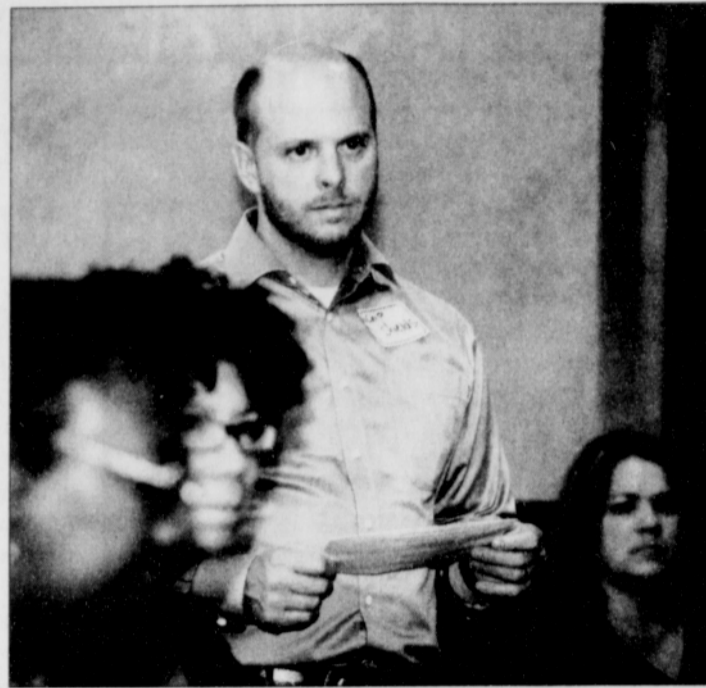


PHOTO BY CHERYL JUETTEN

Rep. Chip Shields, representing north and northeast Portland, hosts a thank-you dinner and focus group for local foster parents.

housed," said Shields. "We can do a much better job for kids by making every foster home one full of healing foster parents who are well trained and well supported."

The challenge is clear: between 25 and 41 percent of former foster youths spend time in prison, Shields says. One study found that the arrest rate is 67 percent higher for youths previously in

the child welfare system than for those never in that system.

Shields knows that failing to invest in kids on the front end means spending much more on prisons on the back end.

In 1998, he founded Better People, a nonprofit now located at 4310 N.E. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., which helps former offenders break the cycle of crime

with a mix of behavioral therapy, job placement and job retention services.

"Better People has shown that there are solutions to the problem of repeat offenders," Shields says. "We should invest in people, especially children, instead of prisons. That's the mindset I would bring to the Human Services Subcommittee of Ways & Means."

Shields completed his Master of Social Work degree at the MacLaren Youth Correctional Institution and the Volunteers of America Men's Residential Center, a north and northeast Portland inpatient drug and alcohol treatment center.

At VOA, Shields learned about addiction treatment under the

wing of Al Forthan, a long-time fixture in the African-American recovery community who passed away in 2006. Shields has been involved in VOA's effort to provide college scholarships to Jefferson High School students in Forthan's name.

Shields recently met with Greg Stone of VOA and other experts in drug treatment to help chart out the most effective way to respond to treatment provisions in Ballot Measure 57, the new sentencing measure passed by voters Nov. 4.

Shields also sees the health care crisis in all its complexity at Hands on Medicine, 5311 N. Vancouver, which his wife founded in 2007. He's the business manager of the clinic, which offers well-child checks, immuni-

zations, chronic disease management, physicals, women's health, family planning, and help with everyday injuries and illnesses.

"There are simply too many kids that don't have any insurance, and too many of their parents are uninsured too," he said.

Despite the economic challenges and slumping revenue, Shields is optimistic that there will be advances in health care and health care coverage through a fee on hospital providers and insurance companies.

"As Democrats, we are committed to solving the health care crisis, and with President-elect Obama at the helm and a strong majority in the Oregon House, we will make strides this session," said Shields.

## Warming Center for Families

continued ▲ from Front

of donations of blankets and pillows, twin sheets and pillow cases, bassinets, coats, jackets and other winter clothing, as well as food.

Key Bank of Oregon has stepped forward by donating to the Warming Center and will have three drop-off sites for non-food donations at branches located at Gateway 1205 N.E. 102nd Ave.;

Lloyd Center, 825 N.E. Multnomah St.; and the Gresham Mall, 390 W. Burnside.

There will also be a drop-off site at Human Solutions' Main Office for all types of donations, 12350 S.E. Powell Blvd.

Anyone wishing to make a financial contribution can go online at humansolutions.com or send a check to Human Solutions. Contributions will be used to purchase items for the Warming Center and for others in need.

Human Solutions is a nonprofit organization that has been in operation since 1988—and is dedicated to helping low-income and homeless families gain self-sufficiency by providing affordable housing, family support services, job readiness training and economic development opportunities.

## Oregon Legislature Helps with Heating Bills

Some 35,000 additional Oregon families will receive help with heating bills through a federal grant approved last week by the Oregon Legislature's Emergency Board.

The additional federal dollars—which require no new state ex-

penditures—will increase the number of low income families receiving heating assistance to nearly 100,000.

"These are struggling families that need some extra assistance during these tough times," said State Rep. Nancy Nathanson, D-

Eugene. "And when we can use these federal dollars it means families can afford to buy food and medicine; it means a little less of a burden on food banks and other service providers. These federal funds could not have come at a better time for Oregon families."

## Prototype for Public Decency

continued ▲ from Front

Loo. Instead there is a spigot on the outside for hand washing and a hand sanitizer dispenser on the inside.

The city has been mulling over what to do with the lack of public restrooms in downtown for years. Its most recent solution was to keep a security guard staffed all night at City Hall so that the bathrooms could remain open. However, this cost about \$120,000 annually.

"We cannot do nothing with people on the street," said Lan Nguyen, the owner of the Northwest Orchid Salon and a member of Public Hygiene Lets Us Stay Human, a group formed in conjunction with the Old Town-Chinatown Neighborhood Association.

Nguyen said that since she started her Old Town business five years ago she's had to constantly grapple with homeless doing their business on the steps of her salon, and is pleased to see the city step up to the issue.

Carol McCreary, the treasurer of the neighborhood association, said that the lack of public restrooms has been an issue since she moved to the neighborhood in 2003, and added that the association is pleased the city is addressing this longstanding issue.

"Portland stepped up to the plate," she said.

Oldtown-Chinatown has a large population of homeless people, which is why it was chosen for the first Loo.

"I'm delighted," said Fern Elledge, community service sector director for Transition Projects, which helps Portland's homeless and is based in the neighborhood.



PHOTO BY JAKE THOMAS/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Cameras capture the moment Monday after Mayor-Elect Sam Adams gives the Portland Loo its maiden flush. The public toilet is the first of a prototype to give street people and the public at large a place to go to the bathroom.

Leonard said he got the idea while on a vacation to Italy, where he saw similar facilities. That prompted him to wrangle \$500,000 from city council awarded in increments last year and early this year.

The prototype Loo was built by local metal fabrication company, Madden Fabrication for \$140,000. Leonard is hoping to put up two more Loos with the money left over. Two sites being considered are Northwest Third Avenue and Couch Street, and another at Jamison Square in the Pearl District.

In the future, the cost to build the facilities is estimated to go down to around \$25,000 a pop. The money would go to Portland's Water Bureau, which Leonard heads.

Leonard is hoping the Loos will bring in money for the city by selling the design to other cities. DiBenedetto said that the

city has received queries from Olympia, a suburb in Atlanta, and Victoria, Australia.

She said that the biggest difficulty with the project has been escaping the specter of a similar, and failed, project launched by Seattle several years ago. The elaborate and expensive toilets became hubs of unsavory activity and flopped, costing the city millions. Since then, people have been skeptical of Portland's similar effort, said DiBenedetto.

However, Portland might be onto something. Paul Brubaker, program manager with the American Restroom Association, said that no other city has anything quite like the Loo, and that more cities are looking to add similar facilities to enhance their "livability."

"There's been an interest across the country for this," he said.

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