

Reform

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had a “difficulty to engage families of color in safety and permanency planning.” That same system had little respect for the importance of extended family in that planning; the report found similar patterns of behavior across the state.

Like Murray and members of Grandparents Raising Grandchildren, a group founded by grandparent caregiver Carolyn Smith, the Multnomah County Child Welfare Workgroup takes an interest in reducing the number of placements in foster care. Put quite simply, placing a child in foster care may cause more harm than the home from which they were removed.

Most children are not removed from homes because they have been abused. In 50 percent of cases, there is only the

“threat of harm” and in 30 percent of cases it is “neglect,” which can include homelessness. In some cases, if one partner commits a crime of domestic violence against the other, the children are taken away and the victim must then work to regain custody.

Furthermore, a 2005 “Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study” by Peter Pecora, Ph.D. et. al., found that one-third of former foster children reported that they were abused or maltreated in their foster homes.

In Oregon, Child Welfare case workers place nearly twice the national average of children into foster care. We’re fifth in the nation for foster care placements (5.6 placements per 1,000 children), behind West Virginia, Alaska, Nebraska and Washington D.C. (which is more than three times the national average with almost 19 placements per 1000 children).

In 2009, a coalition of state agencies – including DHS – came up with six goals to safely reduce the number of children in foster care.

1) Safely reduce children in foster care by 20 percent; 2) Increase relative placements by 50 percent; 3) Reduce children entering care by 10 percent; 4) Increase foster care exits by 20 percent; 5) Reduce disproportionality and disparities for Native and African American children, and; 6) Hold the child re-abuse and neglect rate stable.

Gene Evans, spokesperson for the Department of Human Services, says the agency is on track to meet several of the goals. Here’s a breakdown of where the agency stands on the goals:

1) Children in foster care have been reduced by 19 percent; 2) Relative placements have doubled since 2006, and children immediately placed with relatives instead of foster families is at 25 percent, up from 12 percent in 2007;

3) Not met; 4) Native American exits have been increased by 20 percent, but African American exits have remained flat; 5) Remained flat; 6) The re-abuse rate has declined from 7.5 percent to 4.2 percent in 2010

Murray says she wants Child Welfare to remove subjective barriers for relatives who wish to adopt that she says are rooted in cultural differences. She says she’s met many relatives who have worked hard to comply with the demands put forth by case workers, only to see children permanently adopted out to non-relative families.

Murray wants to see parents get a ‘First Call Option’ so children can stay with relatives ...

Good in the Hood



Hundreds turned out Saturday for the Good in the Hood parade up Martin Luther King Jr Boulevard, which featured community groups and girls drill teams from Seattle. See more pictures from the Good in the Hood parade on *The Skanner News* Facebook page.

Murray has a long list of reforms she’d like to see, including to see so many powerful psychotropic drugs prescribed to children. Children in foster care are prescribed these medications – some of which have been shown to cause brain shrinkage according to at least one study <http://archpsyc.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/abstract/68/2/128> – at a much higher rate (13 to 52 percent of foster care children depending on the state) than the general youth population (4 percent).

The Child Welfare agency itself does not directly prescribe medication and new rules require permission from program administrators before a foster parent can administer these drugs.

She also wants to see parents get a “First Call Option” so children can stay with relatives instead of foster families; recruit more African American foster parents; and create a family defense fund to teach both parents and relatives caregivers about their rights when dealing with DHS.

Art

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one room. That won’t happen again soon. At 8 feet by 15 feet, the murals are larger than life. But they were made in panels so they could easily be deconstructed and moved. Two of the murals will stay in the detention center: one in the lobby and the other behind the locked doors where youth

wait to be a beacon of hope for the teens there.

Funding for the project came from the city’s 2 percent for art program, set aside in the mid-90s when the center was built. The Regional Arts and Culture Council commissioned the project as part of its artist-in-residence program, “Intersections”.

In his speech Cogen too talked about the value of art, especially in places of confinement and despair.

“It is going to change lives,” he said. “We believe in the power of transformation and that there is potential in these young people: potential to contribute to our community.”

“They are learning they have something

to offer and that they can be part of something bigger than themselves, something beautiful, something transformational.”

Richard Hall, who has spent 19 years working with youth in the detention center, told the Skanner News that detention staff get close to the teens and want to see them succeed.

“We get all kinds of kids,” he said. “Some should be here; others it is their situation that got them here. We form relationships, and it’s hard to see them come back.”

Hall said sometimes he will be out and about when he will hear his name called. A young man will come up and say ‘Hi Richard, remember me?’ Maybe he is now married with children, living a normal, happy life.

“That happens sometimes,” he said. “Just not often enough.”

Artist Arvie Smith also spoke, quoting Cornel West and W.E.B. Dubois. But perhaps his most moving words were about the fate of those youth he came to know well during his time as their art master.

“We must show them the spirit of love and forgiveness that gives hope to those who have been cast aside,” he said.

“Most of the children charged under Measure 11 are of a darker hue. We can’t let these children land on the garbage heap of disappointment and despair. These children are looking for hope; hope for a better future; hope for a better world. We must give them that.”

The first names of the young artists who worked with Smith are etched into an extra panel. That panel is all the more poignant because at least one of those students is now dead: a victim of gun violence.

See them in real life at the Courthouse or the Central Police Precinct

await trial or serve their time. You will have a chance to view the other three murals in all their real-life splendor, simply by visiting the downtown police precinct and the Multnomah County Courthouse. Eventually they will return home to the detention cen-

Freedom

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vanized youths to mobilize against oppressive institutions, often in the face of government violence.

“It’s something that was done quite a bit in the 60’s and vary sparingly since then, but its just carrying on a tradition that got lost somewhere,” Medina said.

Portland’s Freedom School is named in honor of Jacqueline Holmes, a community organizer who worked with the Bradley-Angle House, the Albina Ministerial Alliance, and the Metropolitan Public Defender.

The local Freedom School is funded by a Youth Action Grant grant written by three teenagers who participate with the AFSC

youth group, United Voices: Vy Nguyen, 18; Indasia Summerfield, 17; and Jessica Valdesiera, 17. More students have also helped with the project, including Christopher Luchini 15.

These same four kids won second place in a national video competition earlier this year, creating a film, “Trillionaire,” on the subject of, “If I Had a Billion Dollars.”

Medina said the group had attended a Freedom School organized in Seattle last winter, and they decided it is something needed in their own home town.

“Young people are not learning a lot of these things in school, they’re not learning about why some people are poor and what is

race and what is racism – so it’ll answer a lot of questions,” Medina said of the weekend events.

“One of the kids told me yesterday, the reason why it’s important to her is she doesn’t want to live in the past anymore she wants to live in the future and for young people to build the future.”

Medina, who works with the young people all year round, says youth of color need to be educated about their political and social history as a way of combating a sense of oppression they carry with them which damages their self-esteem.

“The subject matter may seem kind of adult, but the young people need to learn

about the history of immigration in this country, and some things about race and police in this country, and what to do if you’re stopped by the police and what your rights are – things that most often impact the lives of people of color,” she said.

They’ll also be looking at issues that impact others – such as age-ism.

“It should be a pretty inclusive and cool three-day training, then the last day we’re taking a field trip to MercyCorps,” she said.

This event was made possible by the City Of Portland Youth Action Grant Program and Portland AFSC.