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Child Welfare System

Conference aims at success but shows gaping holes for kids

By Helen Silvis
Of *The Skanner News*

At the 13th Annual ‘Shoulder to Shoulder’ child welfare conference, Carrie Medina filed a missing report. Medina wasn’t reporting a lost child. She was drawing attention to a hole she sees in our child welfare system: a hole that causes families to lose children, and children to lose families.

“I think there is still a big piece missing in the system regarding support for biological families,” said Medina, a foster mom for more than 20 years. “We still treat biological families as the devil.

“If we can invest more of our resources in biological parents and foster parents we’ll be better off in the long run.”

Medina was a panelist for Families in the Foster Care System, moderated by Allison Frost of OPB. Also on the panel were Judge Nan Waller; Katherine Cahn, -who heads the Child Welfare Partnership at Portland State University; and Charity Briggs, a former foster child who ended up losing her own child to foster care for a short time. Briggs now works as a parent mentor for moms with children in foster care.

The panel agreed that the biggest barrier to keeping children with their birth families, is that few resources have been targeted to helping those families.

In fact, federal law puts no cap on the money that states can spend on putting children into foster care. Yet there is no mandated funding to help birth families parent successfully. And welfare systems have often worked against birth families

“If your only tool is a hammer, everything looks like a nail,” Cahn said. “Our child welfare system is designed around physical and sexual abuse, but most of our cases are about neglect. And there is a deep correlation between poverty and neglect.”

Child welfare interventions are necessary to prevent abuse and neglect. In Oregon 22

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POSTAL CRISIS

U.S. Postal worker Isham Harris and U.S. Postal worker Isham Harris and supporters held signs in front of the Martin Luther King Jr. Post Office on North Killingsworth Street this week as part of a spiraling postal crisis that could lead to a halt in Saturday delivery and potentially force the service into insolvency. Postal service supporters say a projected deficit in the bureau’s finances has been triggered by a Congressional requirement that the USPS fully fund future employee benefits, and that in fact the USPS has adequate operating capital. Meanwhile, USPS supporters are agitating against U.S. House Resolution 2309 which they say would, among other things, effectively dismantle the Postal Service. Demonstrations are planned at Post Offices around Portland through the week.



PHOTO COURTESY JAMIE PARTRIDGE

Shelters Need More Resources

Homeless coalition discusses winter plans for families, individuals

By Bruce Poinsette
Special To *The Skanner News*

Winter is coming early and the City of Portland is preparing for how it will combat historic homelessness.

“People are suffering in ways not seen since the Great Depression,” says First Unitarian Church minister Kate Lore.

City officials report 68 additional beds opened up as of Nov.

1 to add to the 165 beds that were open to homeless children and families during the summer; total capacity for homeless families in the winter is a meager 233 beds.

According to Brandi Tuck, executive director of Portland Family Solutions, homelessness has increased by 35 percent in just the past two years.

The group provides care for homeless families with children, including temporary emergency shelter and house specialists who work with the families to

develop self sufficiency plans.

Tuck says her department helped 85 percent of the homeless families it served move directly into permanent housing last year – all funded by charitable contributions from the public.

Lore echoed the lack of government funding, adding that 100 percent of shelter beds were provided by congregations within the faith community.

The two appeared at a press conference last week alongside other nonprofit representatives

as well as Multnomah County and the Portland Housing Bureau to outline homeless operations for the winter.

Jean DeMaster, executive director of Human Solutions, emphasized that Multnomah County and a coalition of faith-based and non-profit groups called the Family Shelter-to-Housing Partnership have a commitment to solve the problems that cause homelessness.

She says Human Solutions

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Experts Ask: Is Multiculturalism Dead?

Lewis & Clark’s Ray Warren Multicultural Symposium is Nov. 9-11

Multiculturalism is under attack. In Norway a mass murder was committed in its name. And German Chancellor Angel Merkel claimed Multiculturalism is dead. What’s really going on? Hear from the experts at this Lewis & Clark seminar.

Behring Breivik, the right-wing fanatic who gunned down 93 Norwegian teens last June cited multiculturalism as his motiva-

tion. And earlier this year, German Chancellor Angela Merkel said Germany’s effort to form a multicultural society had ‘totally failed.’ “Multiculturalism is dead,” she said, adding to the debate that is tearing some European countries apart.

That’s not the case in the United States, where individual religious and political freedom is enshrined in the constitution and vastly different communities have lived side

by side since its birth.

But what exactly is multiculturalism? What’s going wrong in Europe? And what place does it have in our own education system?

See for yourself, Nov. 9-11 at Lewis & Clark’s Ray Warren Multicultural Symposium. Experts from Portland and

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