

## Citizen Review Board To Honor Tribal Foster Care Program

■ Blue Ribbon Award highlights outstanding services in the interests of children as the agency looks for Indian volunteers to fill its ranks.

By Ron Karten

The Tribe's Tribal Foster Care program is slated to receive a Blue Ribbon Award for providing "excellent services" to troubled Tribal families. The award is more than a pat on the back.

"It's not often that you see programs get positive recognition in this kind of work," said Dave Fullerton, Social Services Department Manager.

"Our program has built a strong relationship with service delivery Area Three, which is Polk, Yamhill and Marion counties," he said, "and that relationship has opened up specific services that benefit Tribal children, Tribal families and ultimately has resulted in successful reunifications for Grand Ronde families."

The award is presented annually by each of the countywide CRBs, and honor "individuals or programs that exemplify excellent services in the interest of children," according to Tom Carranza, one of three coordinators of the Marion County CRBs.

Efforts on behalf of kids have increased since the 1997 federal Adoption and Safe Families Act required government agencies charged with this task to have a permanent home for children roughly within a year of their first report.

"The Board makes sure that children are placed in safe, permanent homes for the shortest time possible and are receiving adequate services from the State," according to a press release from Ann M.

Hubard, another Marion County CRB Coordinator.

But foster care is a business that takes a toll on all involved. Some parents have a very small window of time in which to clean up their acts. Never mind that for most, these acts were developing for a lifetime. It can't be easy.

hoods in what may most neutrally be called 'non-compliant' homes.

Temporary foster homes are not deemed an acceptable alternative to family life, and no doubt some permanent foster homes are not deemed acceptable, either, so those on both sides of the fence face per-

ment of the problems and then timely treatment for the family involved may seem to be obvious components of any program addressing family issues, but according to Carranza, not all agencies handling foster care cases perform these tasks in a timely way, and sometimes important tasks are not performed at all, he said.

Part of the problem in getting the ball rolling can be the absence of people crucial to the process.

"At the Grand Ronde Tribes," said Carranza, "almost every time, we have an ICWA (Indian Child Welfare Act) care worker, a DHS (Oregon Department of Human Services) worker, Tribal foster parents, the biological parents, treatment providers, other family members and the children involved. It's rare that all those people would appear, but in Grand Ronde, (attendance is) almost always a hundred percent. Everyone is working together the way they should."

Simply and dramatically, the success of the Tribe's Foster Care Program means literally that many families on the edge do not slip over the edge and are not shattered.

Success can be a giant benefit for the families involved. Convincing parents to alter behaviors may be the most difficult problem these families ever overcome, but it may end up being the thing that keeps them together.

Results are bad for a failed effort, but mostly, efforts fall somewhere in between, agreed Fullerton.

"Efforts go a lot further with the work that the state and the Tribe do together," he said, "and they result in more positive results for families."

The award presentation will be made on January 21 at 1:30 p.m. at the state Supreme Court Building in Salem. Oregon Supreme Court Chief Justice Wallace P. Carson Jr. will make the presentation. Tribal Council members Valorie Sheker-Robertson and Angie Blackwell, Social Services Department Manager Dave Fullerton, Program Coordinator Ron Hudson and ICW Unit Supervisor Dana Ainam will accept the award for the Tribal program.

Tribal staff deserving credit for this success also include: Kristi Petite, Lead Supervisor; Melissa Sampson-Grier, Foster Care Coordinator; Shawn Lorenzi, ICW Investigator; Shane Degraffenried-Smith, Caseworker; Melissa Morris, Intake; Donna Hill, Caseworker Assistant/Driver and Chelsea Peters, Driver.

"We have workers here who have strong passion for what they do," said Fullerton. "It can be a pretty thankless job."



**Honored**—Dave Fullerton (l to r), Kristi Petite, Melissa Morris and Shawn Lorenzi of the Tribe's Social Services Department. The Tribe's program was honored with a Blue Ribbon Award.

When it comes to the world's most difficult jobs, working with troubled families has got to be near the top of the list. It means having the authority to tear families apart. And sometimes it requires actually tearing them apart. Those can't be the good days.

Nevertheless, though the difficulties and drawbacks are many, the professional community has long favored fast action for children in troubled families, and with good reason. Until the 1997 law, many children languished their entire child-

hoods in what may most neutrally be called 'non-compliant' homes.

"The reality," said Fullerton, "is you have to change the thinking in order to change the behavior. It's an uphill battle."

Oregon's CRBs for foster care programs came about in 1985 as a tool of the judicial branch of state government. That gave them independent clout because the actual foster care programs are under the Governor and within the Human Resources Department.

The facets of a successful intervention are many. Timely assess-

### Volunteers Needed For Citizen Review Boards

Yamhill and Marion County Citizen Review Boards (CRB) are looking for volunteers to provide the most important oversight work any community ever has to do: foster care decisions.

Recently (SS 10/15/04 issue), *Smoke Signals* put out a call for volunteers for the Tribal Member Review Board that oversees foster care programs under Tribal jurisdiction. And volunteers continue to be needed for those posts. If interested in serving on the Tribal Member Review Board, contact: Stephanie Grim at 503-879-1367.

The countywide boards look over the work of state and county programs, and Tribal members should care what happens there because almost half of Tribal members in custody are in state custody, according to Fullerton.

Tribal Court currently has jurisdiction over some 40-plus Tribal children, said Fullerton, while state courts maintain jurisdiction over about 35 Tribal youth.

Board members agree to serve a two-year term, participate in 16 hours of training before serving (as well as on-going training), and to review the case materials (that can be extensive) before each review. Members participate in fact-finding at the review by interviewing the caseworker, family members and other interested parties who are invited to attend the review.

The Board also develops a summary of the review with findings and recommendations that are sent to the Juvenile Court and the Department of Human Resources (DHS) or Oregon Youth Authority (OYA). All information handled by the Board is confidential. The board also makes recommendations to Juvenile Courts, DHS, OYA and the legislature concerning services, policies, procedures and laws that affect children, youth offenders and families.

A knowledge of or interest in foster care and child welfare is desired and board members must either work or live in the county they wish to serve. However, a board member cannot be an employee of DHS or OYA or any private agency regulated, certified, directed or licensed by DHS or OYA. Nor can a board member be an employee of a Juvenile Court or the Oregon Judicial Department.

The mandate is to develop diverse boards with board members who have unique life experiences. It is important that the boards reflect and represent the socio-economic, ethnic and racial groups of the area served.

Anyone interested in serving on a board can call the CRB office in Salem at 503 986-5906 or write to Ann Hubard, Citizen Review Board, 1163 State Street, Salem, OR 97310, or via email at [ann.m.hubard@ojd.state.or.us](mailto:ann.m.hubard@ojd.state.or.us).