

## Solutions from 1A

core prevention tool in accordance with its 2010 reauthorization.

Indeed, an analysis of studies by the Children's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services determined that robust parental education has far-reaching implications for not only families, but entire communities.

The brief said, "...parent education has a ripple effect that can resonate far beyond its original small group, helping parents to develop into the next group of leaders in parent education."

In practice, successfully educating parents can help mothers

and fathers acquire and implement protective factors such as knowledge of child development, parental resilience to adverse situations and relationship skills with their family and community.

One Florence organization filling this need for education is the Pregnancy and Parenting Center (PPC), a nonprofit program offering classes and mentoring for parents both before and after childbirth.

Classes involve video lectures covering an array of parental concerns, including how to handle temper tantrums and potty-training. After classes, clients meet with a PPC peer advocate to discuss the lessons learned and may even be assigned homework on

the topic.

As parents progress through lessons, they earn points that can be redeemed for concrete support items such as diapers, formula or clothing.

Joe Crenshaw, president of the PPC Board of Directors, pointed out that these items are not held hostage to the lessons, however.

"Would we give them what we have without them even having taken the classes if it came to that? Yes," he said, but stressed the importance of committing to parent education. "It's just a better way to help everybody involved."

In addition to classes, PPC's peer advocates offer a supportive environment for those in need emotionally.

"Even though they're called 'advocates,' they're really more of a trusted friend — someone you can tell things to," said Deb Vander Bogart, PPC's board treasurer. "It's about a bigger support group, especially if [parents] don't have support at home."

Crenshaw takes pride in the organization's ability to offer concrete support as well as a welcoming environment.

"Once here, they find they can get some emotional support in addition to diapers," he said.

### Domestic Violence

While education and emotional support go a long way to ensure responsible parenting, some problems are too pernicious for a few classes to rectify, particularly when it comes to violence.

Bob Teter, executive director at Siuslaw Outreach Services (SOS), has seen his fair share of domestic violence cases. Among roughly 300 SOS clients who have been victims of domestic abuse in the last year, 22 were minors, while 104 youths total were affected by some form of abuse.

In managing these problems, SOS is unique among local resources in that its staff are "mandated non-reporters," meaning they are not allowed to report an incident without a client's consent. The Violence Against Women Act of 1994 protects SOS clients' identity and this legal assurance of confidentiality goes a long way in securing victims'

safety.

"A lot of times people will refuse to report they are a victim because they're fearful of retaliation or they're fearful of other people finding out," said Teter.

Distrust of authoritative systems and fear of punitive measures also keeps many from seeking assistance. SOS provides an advantageous option for people unsure of their situation.

"A lot of what we do is sitting down and helping them understand their options," said Teter.

Additionally, SOS staff are trained advocates who can be creative in their approach, unbound by bureaucracy, and are thus able to personalize solutions on an array of issues including senior abuse, rent assistance and legal aid.

As organizations like SOS may offer support services for people already in need of aid, Teter feels preventative methods start with the community and personal relationships.

"It's got to start right here, with our next-door neighbors or the person down the street," he said.

### Community Factors

Weaving this intricate fabric of social cohesion demands an investment in fundamentals. In particular, communities with active youth programs are vital to providing stability for new generations and engendering virtuous cycles.

Upriver, the Mapleton School District has implemented a combination of initiatives to better connect youths to their community.

One of which, Beyond Me, is a service program which commits students to on- and off-campus projects such as beach clean-ups, bake sales and tree planting. Only in operation since last year, the program has already seen success and logged a great deal of experience hours for students.

"Last year, we did 3,359 hours of community service," said Terri Johnston, the Service Coordinator for Mapleton's programs. "And that's with a student body of only maybe 70 kids."

The program operates throughout the district and has become something of a required curriculum in Mapleton High School. To graduate, students must serve at least 50 hours per year and, by their senior year, will have

acquired a number of "soft skills" such as customer service and cash handling to ease their transition into adulthood.

"It promotes teamwork, leadership and camaraderie. It's just a win-win situation," said Johnston.

Johnston also coordinates Mapleton's Youth in Transition program, a partnership among the University of Oregon, Vocational Rehab and the Oregon Department of Education. In addition to the skills learned in Beyond Me, students in the Youth in Transition program are set on a career path through training and personality tests.

"The idea is, by the time they graduate, they have an idea what they're going to do," said Johnston.

While programs like these can benefit all, they are especially useful safety nets for children growing up in troubled environments as they decrease risk factors and provide opportunities for personal growth.

"We're creating a safe place for students to go, building relationships with them ... and giving them confidence, too," Johnston said.

### 90by30 Projects

Among the organizations in the Florence area committed to stemming child abuse, none may be as dedicated as 90by30, a University of Oregon-based initiative to decrease child abuse in Lane County 90 percent by 2030.

Suzanne Mann-Heintz is the regional co-chair of the non-profit. She believes firmly in the old adage that it takes a village to raise a child.

"If you are a working person and ... there's nobody to take care of your kid, that puts that child at risk," she said. "Without that societal support, if you can't call on somebody, then the child is in jeopardy."

Decreasing the number of children in jeopardy and increasing societal support is no small task. Mann-Heintz uses the analogy of a river to explain 90by30's approach.

"There's these children floating downstream in the river — these are the children who've been abused and neglected," she said. "Some of them you can pull out of the river and help and some of them you can't."

"The 90by30 project is going

back up the river to find out why the kids are falling in. And then based on that information, try to keep them from falling in in the first place."

To do this, 90by30 conducts surveys, compiles data and employs a series of preventative programs in coordination with local groups.

"If there are preventative factors in place in the community, it can reduce child abuse," Mann-Heintz said. "It will reduce child abuse."

One of these preventative factors is the Welcome Baby Box program. Slated to start in July, the program will see 40 boxes distributed to parents in the community. The boxes contain "basically everything a parent needs to get things going with a child," said Mann-Heintz.

Essentially baby starter kits, the boxes will include clothing, toys and even hand-knitted items made by members of the community. Moreover, the box itself doubles as a crib.

In tandem, 90by30 also distributes a resource notebook, which includes infant information on such topics as car seats, vaccinations and local resources for those in need of support. If the Welcome Baby Box is the starter kit, the resource notebook serves as the accompanying instruction booklet for child-rearing.

Another 90by30 program, Roots of Empathy, seeks to develop children's "emotional literacy" in the classroom.

Under this Canadian-based program, an infant and parent visit elementary school classrooms once a month while an instructor guides the interaction between students and the infant, teaching children to reflect on their own feelings and the feelings of others.

"Babies are perfect for this because there is no veil," Mann-Heintz said. "There's no subterfuge about their emotions — it's just right there."

The program will debut this September in both Siuslaw and Mapleton elementary schools.

### Empowering Parents

Support programs and preventative measures like the ones above certainly give credence to the idea that it takes a village to raise a child. Providing the social scaffolding that enables children to thrive depends on community members rowing in the same direction.

However, like all social movements, diffusion of responsibility can play its role and individual contributions may appear to be just a drop in the bucket.

Dr. Jim Waterman, a Florence resident and PhD holder in psychology, agrees on the importance of social cohesion, but challenges folk wisdom that places all importance here.

"For a kid to have enough sense of self and self-confidence and emotional stability, it doesn't take a village, it takes one person," he said.

Waterman, who served as Director of the County Mental Health Department in Kern County, Calif., worked in a human services capacity with a demographic not unlike Florence.

Particularly in cases of chaotic households burdened by problems like alcoholism, Waterman saw the deep damage inflicted, but also the influence one person can have in redirecting lives.

"Kids grow up with predictable kinds of insecurities and problems from those kinds of families," he said. "But kids make it because a lot of times there was a person who was there for them."

Doubtless, both communities and individuals play significant roles in empowering future generations.

Strong community bonds provide the opportunities to put that one person who can make a difference in contact with a child in need of direction.

In this sense, support and prevention programs are one in the same. Addressing vicious cycles may be more about improving upon individual structures than completely breaking them.

Regardless of one's station, taking personal responsibility for one's own trajectory allows access to spaces for improvement and obligates extending those improvements to others.

"The nature of life is that we all are responsible to take what we've got and do better," Waterman said. "Everybody needs to improve upon the parenting they were subjected to."

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