

**COLUMBIA COUNTY**



**OREGON**

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## **April is Child Abuse Prevention Month**

In 2007 the Department of Human Services received more than 63,500 reports of child abuse and neglect 1 report every 10 minutes. Investigations of those reports by DHS confirmed that 10,716 children were victims of child abuse or neglect. Almost half were under age 6. Nearly 75% were abused by one of their parents.

The number of child abuse victims in Columbia County decreased from 182 victims in 2006 to 119 in 2007. Of these 119 children, 20 were victims of physical abuse, 16 were victims of sexual abuse and sexual exploitation and 84 were victims of threat of harm. (Threat of harm means that a child is subjected to a substantial risk of harm to their health or welfare.)

The number of reports of abuse and neglect continue to increase in Columbia County as well as the number of cases that reach the threshold for assignment. Despite that the number of children in foster care has decreased. This may be attributed to earlier intervention and working safety plans with other safety service providers in the community to maintain children in their own homes.

While the decrease in numbers sounds promising for our county, it may be attributed to the fact that the founded report disposition definitions have changed over the years. Currently physical punishment that results in substantial harm can result in a founded disposition of abuse. Minor, temporary marks are no longer considered child abuse. The presence of a bruise may not always result in a founded disposition of abuse. The threat of harm dispositional guidelines also have changed with regard to domestic violence. A founded report of threat of harm

pertaining to domestic violence would mean that the child is either actively intervening, is held by a parent during an incident of domestic violence or the child is used by the abuser in a way that could cause substantial harm.

Locally, unofficial statistics indicate the major causes of child abuse and neglect in Columbia County are alcohol and drug abuse, criminal activity, chronic mental illness and family violence. It is expected the recent surge in family stresses caused by unemployment will result in an increased number of reports.

Columbia County also experiences a low percentage for all recurrences of abuse and neglect and has exceeded the target goal established by the state. This can be attributed to solid protective services assessments as well as appropriate and timely return home plans by DHS, community partners and the courts.

Columbia County DHS takes a collaborative approach with the local community to continue to keep kids safe, provide quality foster care for those who need it and place many of those children with relatives. Positive outcomes are due to the close knit work with the community who care about our children and youth. Partners such as CASA, Citizens Review Board, the Courts, foster parents, Columbia Community Mental Health, Columbia County Commission on Children and Families, Amani Center, Healthy Start, law enforcement, the Juvenile Department, the District Attorney's Office, Parole and Probation, schools and many others help keep our children safe.

### **Child Abuse Prevention**

The Department of Human Services shares the legal responsibility with law enforcement for taking child abuse reports and responding to them. DHS ensures children's safety, places children outside the home when necessary and works with families to make the changes that will allow their children to safely return home. Learn how to recognize and report signs of suspected abuse or neglect by requesting a speaker or training by calling the Department of Human Services, Child Welfare at 503.397.3292. Report suspicions of child abuse or neglect by calling 1-877-302-0077.

Healthy Start is the primary child abuse prevention program in our county and the largest child abuse prevention program in Oregon. It serves at risk first birth parents in all areas of Columbia County and is nationally accredited by Healthy Families America. Data collected for evaluation shows Healthy Start provides effective services to prevent child maltreatment and support school readiness to

Oregon's highest risk children and families. The local program is funded by the Commission on Children and Families via a contract with Community Action Team. For more information or to make a referral call 503.556.6556.

CASA of Columbia County is a private non-profit agency which is the voice of the child in the judicial system. CASA volunteers speak for what is in the best interest of children who have been removed from the home of their parent as a result of abuse or neglect. Children who have a CASA volunteer are less than half as likely to re-enter the Child Welfare system. The Commission on Children and Families provides funding for this program. To volunteer or make a donation, call 503.366.4133.

The Amani Center-Columbia County Child Abuse Assessment and Treatment is a non-profit organization created to assist the community in responding to child abuse. The program strives to minimize trauma to child abuse victims through professional medical diagnosis and treatment in a secure and child friendly environment with the goal of preventing child abuse in all forms. For more information, call 503.366.4005.

Since 1972, Prevent Child Abuse America has led the way in building awareness and providing education to prevent the abuse and neglect of our nation's children. Oregon's chapter has been formed through the leadership of the Oregon Commission on Children and Families and the Children's Trust Fund of Oregon. Visit their website to learn about what you can do: [www.preventchildabuse.org](http://www.preventchildabuse.org).

#### REPORT!

You should report any reasonable suspicion of abuse; you do not need to prove it. If you suspect a child has been abused or is being neglected, call DHS at **1-877-302-0077**.

#### What You Can Do to Prevent Child Abuse

Make your neighborhood, your extended family. Reach out to children and parents. Be positive and point out what children and parents are doing right. Help a family under stress: offer to babysit, help with chores and errands, give information about community resources. Be a mentor or volunteer. For volunteer opportunities, visit: [www.volunteercolumbia.com](http://www.volunteercolumbia.com).

Safe children and healthy families are a shared responsibility! On April 15, 2009, the Board of County Commissioners will be proclaiming April as Child Abuse

Prevention month in Columbia County. To learn more about how Columbia County supports children and families, contact the Columbia County Commission on Children and Families at 503.397.7211 or [www.co.columbia.or.us/ccccf](http://www.co.columbia.or.us/ccccf).