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Together For Children Comprehensive Community Plan 2008-2014

Throughout the planning process, efforts were made to incorporate recent community planning and to work through existing community groups and initiatives in order to build upon these efforts in the comprehensive community plan.

In meetings with community groups to discuss the planning questions, a consistent theme was to build on and strengthen the existing base of services and supports first.

Through the community meetings, four major focus areas emerged as areas of significant concern throughout the county:

- Access to health care
- Parenting and family support
- Positive youth development
- School readiness

These focus areas then provided the framework for organizing the comprehensive community plan, for reviewing the data, the needs and issues that emerged, reviewing the existing services and identifying the gaps and barriers, and identifying other potential strategies to address needs and issues in the focus areas.

These sections of the plan provide the foundation for funding, resource development and service delivery enhancements for this six year plan cycle.

At a Community Forum in the fall, more than 80 participants representing the full range of community groups that had participated in community meetings, met to review the preliminary findings from the planning process and to identify and prioritize county-wide cross-system



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strategies and approaches in each focus around which there is community impetus to make significant and measurable progress in the next several years.

These strategies and approaches will be summarized and discussed below. There will be follow-up sessions held for each in the coming months, where specific actions will be identified, lead conveners identified, and measurement approaches and mechanisms will be identified and / or finalized.

One strategic focus which emerged consistently in all four focus areas, which will be coordinated by the Commission on Children and Families and the Strategies Committee.



STRATEGIC FOCUS I: Increasing community awareness of and involvement in addressing issues facing children and families

This strategic area has three areas of focus:

- 1) Increasing service provider awareness of services and resources available for children and families, and increasing access to services
- 2) Increasing resident and consumer awareness of services and resources available for children and families, and increasing access to services.

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- 3) Increasing community awareness of the needs and issues facing children and families, increasing awareness of services and resources available, and increasing awareness of what individuals and organizations can do to help.

Benchmark addressed:

Increase volunteerism, measured by the percent of Oregonians over age 16 who volunteer time to civic, community or non-profit activities in the last 12 months.

Intermediate outcomes:

Increase the number of people who contribute financial resources to Washington County agencies, measured by the number of people and the amount of money contributed to Washington County agencies through the I Give Where I Live initiative.

Increase the number of people who volunteer in Washington County agencies and projects, measured by the number of people and the number of hours volunteered at Washington County agencies through the Hands On Portland volunteer system.

Increase utilization of services and programs that are underutilized.

Strategies to be undertaken to achieve these outcomes include, but are not limited to:

Sponsor issue specific cross-system forums to discuss needs facing children and families, and discussion of resources and services to address needs

Develop a press campaign to inform community of specific issues, resources and services, and ways to become involved

Conduct a multi-media marketing campaign for families, including under-served populations, about services and resources to address specific issues, and how to access them

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Produce a series of DVDs for families about critical service delivery systems (e.g. schools, DHS) and other services and resources

STRATEGIC FOCUS II: Expand access to health care

This issue has two areas of focus:



- 1) Increasing enrollment of eligible children and families in the Oregon Health Plan
- 2) Increasing access to and availability of health care: primary health care, mental health and substance abuse prevention and treatment services

Benchmarks addressed:

Decreasing teen pregnancy rate, as measured by the pregnancy rate per 1000 females age fifteen to seventeen

Increasing the childhood immunization rate, as measured by the % of two year olds who are adequately immunized

Increasing the healthy birth weight rate, as measured by the % of babies born at a healthy birth weight

Increasing the percent of children who are insured, as measured by the % of children insured reported by the Oregon Office of Health Policy

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Intermediate outcomes:

Increasing the number and percent of children who are enrolled in the Oregon Health Plan

Increasing the percent of youth who report, on the Oregon Healthy Teen Survey, that they have visited a health care professional in the past year

Strategies to be undertaken to achieve these outcomes include but are not limited to:

Outreach and provision of application materials to children and families through:

Schools: school nurses, counselors and child development specialists, family resource centers, school based community resource staff, etc.

Home visitation programs such as New Parent Network/ Healthy Start, Babies First, HIPPY, Head Start, Promotora Programs, etc.

School-based health resources

Outreach to and education of faith community leaders about Oregon Health Plan and eligibility processes, and engagement of their assistance in outreach to families

Continue cross-system collaborative initiatives:

to establish school-based and school-linked health centers for students with access methods for students from all seven school districts.

to develop structures and protocols for school based and school linked mental health services.

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STRATEGIC FOCUS III: Increase School Readiness

Two major areas for strategic focus emerged related to school readiness:

1) Expand access to and strategies to address early childhood mental health supports. Funding to sustain (and expand) early childhood mental health consultation for child care providers, Head Start, HIPPI, Child Welfare, New Parent Network/Healthy Start and other early childhood programs to help promote positive social emotional development and early access to treatment supports for young children with emergent behavioral and mental health concerns. Continue working to assure that young children and their families have access to developmentally appropriate treatment and practitioners with early childhood expertise, through the county mental health system.

Benchmark addressed:

Improve readiness to learn as measured by the percentage of children entering school ready to learn.

Potential intermediate outcomes discussed included:

increasing number of young children and families accessing mental health treatment services; increasing training for practitioners in early childhood mental health.

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2) Expanding early literacy supports for parents and other caregivers – Parents and caregivers need to be helped / coached in how to support kids exploring books, and developing emergent, early literacy skills. This includes training and workshops in components of literacy, how to promote literacy through exploration of print materials, providing language rich environments, promoting literacy through storytelling, art and play. A key component is related to ‘compelling conversations’; teaching those who interact regularly with young children how to *talk with* (versus talk to, talk above) young children, to build their abilities to carry on conversations, acquire verbal and language skills that are so important to early literacy.

Benchmark addressed:

Improve readiness to learn as measured by the percentage of children entering school ready to learn.

Potential intermediate outcomes discussed included:

increasing frequency of reading to young children (parents and child care providers); increasing frequency of doing literacy related activities with young children (singing, story telling, letter recognition games, etc.); increasing parent/caregiver participation in training in early literacy.



The Childhood Care and Education Committee will assume primary leadership for facilitating development and implementation of action plans related to these two priority areas, as well as for other priority early childhood and school readiness priorities which may emerge in the future. Those who attended the break out ses-

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sions at the community forum, and other key partners will be involved in development of the action plan, which will detail specific strategies to be undertaken, key organizations to be involved, timeframes, and outcome targets and specific measurement instruments.



STRATEGIC FOCUS IV: Expand parenting and family support

Two major areas of focus emerged in this arena, each with a number of strategies identified to assist in reaching outcomes:

1) Strengthening Families – Assuring Family Safety

Increase availability of parenting classes, both in terms of breadth and range of classes. Have child care for classes. Specialized classes for teen parents at school and after school.

Universal Head Start.

Classes to meet basic needs of families – budgeting, nutrition, etc.

Increase access to / availability of mental health and substance abuse treatment.

Increase service accessibility for immigrant families (including undocumented).

Increase emphasis and parenting support for fatherhood, nurturing. Increase respite services and crisis services for families.

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Increase parenting and family support services to reduce parent/family stress. Involve the faith community.

Provide supports for families with special needs.

Increase community/school involvement.
Increase collaboration and coordination of services.

Benchmarks addressed included:

Reducing founded cases of child abuse and neglect

Reducing domestic violence referrals



Potential intermediate outcomes identified in the Strengthening Families arena included:

Reduced numbers of children entering foster care

Increased percentage of parents participating in family support services such as parenting classes and reporting increases in parenting knowledge and skills

2) Strengthening Communities – Assuring Basic Needs Can be Met

Increase capacity and number of Family Resource Centers.

Build capacity of schools and communities to establish Community Schools.

Increase community involvement and access to services/supports through community schools.

Involve faith community.

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Increase availability and access to critical services to meet basic needs: housing, shelter, food, child care, employment, transportation, education, health care.

Increase access to employment -- employers willing to hire people with criminal records, outreach to businesses, employment fairs, county position that creates awareness of the benefits of employing individuals with challenges/barriers, education and incentives for employers, increase numbers of jobs with benefits for all family members, increase higher wage jobs.

Increase access to, availability of adult education.

Increase collaboration and coordination of services.

Those who attended the break-out sessions at the community forum and other community partners will be invited to re-convene early in 2008 to develop a parenting and family support action plan for the priorities which emerged in this focus area.

Benchmarks and intermediate outcomes to be tracked will be identified, and strategies to be undertaken to address benchmarks and reach outcomes will be finalized.



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STRATEGIC FOCUS V: Expand supports for positive youth development

The key strategy for initial work in the youth development arena that was prioritized to begin work, related to facilitating implementation of the concept of community schools.

Community Schools

Participants agreed that schools represent the hub of a neighborhood. By providing access to additional services, it was felt that families and communities could become better connected to one another. Community schools could become the place that neighborhoods identify as the one stop for a wide variety of services. The school facilities such as the library and gymnasium could be used during out of school hours. The classrooms could be locations for community meetings and classes. Funding should be secured to provide on site community school coordinators. It was acknowledged that federal grants may be a short-term funding source, but that the community should be part of sustaining these programs.

Several key features of a community schools approach were identified:

Additional youth mentoring programs should be integrated in all middle and high schools in Washington County.

Family resource centers provide an essential and school-based

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clearinghouse and access point to community resources for children, youth and families.

Participants also felt that creating more opportunities for parents to mentor one another could help decrease isolation and increase parenting skills and connections. To this end, participants want to see programs in all schools that normalize parenting classes by eliminating the stigma of participation. The message should be that these classes are for all parents, not just those with at-risk youth.

Although the overall school drop-out rate continues to decline, the drop-out rate for Latino students is still markedly higher than that of other ethnic groups. It was acknowledged that Latino parents are not used to going to schools to have conversations with instructors. Increased attempts should be made to engage Latino parents and students.

Benchmarks addressed:

Decrease teen substance use, as measured by the percent of 8th and 11th graders who report use of tobacco, alcohol or other drugs in the past month

Decrease juvenile arrests, as measured by juvenile arrests per 1000 juveniles

Reduce high school drop-out rate, as measured by the percent of students who drop-out of grades 9-12 without receiving a high school diploma or GED

Potential intermediate outcomes include:

Increasing grade completion and school retention among students who participate, and in schools and districts where community



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schools are implemented

Reducing student absenteeism rates and disciplinary referral rates among students who participate, and in schools and districts where community schools are implemented.

Decreasing student substance use in schools and districts where community schools are implemented.

Increasing students' protective factors among students who participate and in schools/districts where community schools are implemented (e.g. students feel more connected to school, positive peer relations, etc.)

Two additional priority areas were identified where there is an organized effort currently underway, which can be integrated as a specific strategy or focus within the community schools approach:

Services for children of incarcerated or criminal justice involved parents or to provide programs to support this population in existing program centers. Linking to Family Resource Centers were identified as a possible strategy for coordinating or housing these services.

Resource Center

The Juvenile Department and several inter-agency gang task forces in eastern and western Washington County have been working to develop and implement gang prevention strategies in light of growing youth involvement in gang activity. Prevention education, peer based approaches, engaging youth in positive activities, assistance with developing job skills, substance abuse prevention, were identified as service elements for a gang prevention strategy.

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Those who attended the break-out sessions at the community forum and other community partners will be invited to re-convene early in 2008 to develop a youth development action plan for community schools, and will coordinate efforts with existing initiatives to develop services for children of incarcerated and criminal justice involved parents, and gang prevention supports.

