



Marion County
OREGON

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Marion County Receives Funds to Help Runaway and Homeless Youth

The Marion County Board of Commissioners today approved receiving \$125,000 in funding from the Oregon Commission on Children and Families to provide services to support runaway and homeless youth. The Marion County Children and Families Commission will receive this funding.

Funds will be used to provide a full time runaway/homeless youth advocate position. This position will facilitate a response to runaway reports, provide case management and referrals to services, follow-up with youth and families, and connect service providers who are serving the same youth.

In addition, funding will support outreach services to locate youth and get them connected to services, get them off the street and ensure their basic needs are met while increasing their safety.

Family mediation services to runaway youth and their families will also be provided with this grant.

The implementation of this grant is a partnership with non-profit organizations providing services to homeless youth, the Children and Families Commission, Neighbor to Neighbor and the Salem Police Department.

The existing system capacity is an issue. There is a need for more shelter beds and wrap around services that will not be filled by the grant, according to Juvenile Department Director Faye Fagel. "Getting the grant is a start, what we really want to do is increase the awareness of the problem presented by runaway and homeless youth," she said.

The Runaway and Homeless situation in Marion County:

A disproportionately large concentration of runaway and homeless youth live in Marion County. They congregate primarily in Salem, the county seat and urban center. They are visible on the streets downtown, under bridges, in parks, and at the transit mall. Business owners, transit passengers, users of downtown restaurants and shops, and law enforcement regularly come into contact with them. However, their vulnerability, emotional fragility, need for safety, and need for constructive adult guidance are largely invisible to the community.

In 2006, the county population was roughly 311,000 with 135,000 in Salem. During that same year, the 0-17 youth population was 81,158. The 2005 Law Enforcement Data Center (LEDS) reports that Marion County had 13.3% of the state's runaways, although Marion County youth represent only 9% of the state's youth population.¹ Sixty percent of homeless and runaway youth are female.

The League of Women Voters report on Oregon's Homeless Youth indicates as many as 24,000 Oregon youth are homeless. The figure is calculated on the assumption that only 1 in 12 youth contact a service provider for assistance. Based on the LEDS calculation Marion County could have 3120 runaway and homeless youth. HOST and HOME Service providers estimate their numbers annually as 800 youth. Law Enforcement reported 786 runaway youth in 2006.

On 10/24/07, The State Department of Education reported at least 1,168 runaway or homeless youth are enrolled in Marion County schools. During the academic year of 2006-07, Marion County's largest school district, Salem/Keizer, identified 821 youth as runaway/homeless school age children. 662 were enrolled and attending school. 196 of these youth were unaccompanied, not living with a parent or guardian. To date this school year, 309 school age children/youth are identified, enrolled, and attending Salem-Keizer schools.

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¹ 2006 data from Puzzanchera, C., Finnegan, T. and Kang, W. (2007). "Easy Access to Juvenile Populations" Online. Available: <http://www.ojjdp.ncjrs.gov/ojstatbb/ezapop/>