

2008 Comprehensive Community Plan Success Story

Umatilla County has the distinction of being a High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area. This is neither a success nor something that we are proud of. Living in a H.I.D.T.A. county exposes many risks to families in our rural communities. The manufacturing, sale, and use of methamphetamine especially and other drugs in general have been and continue to be a problem that exacts a great toll on the community. Young women have been especially vulnerable to its grip. When women of child-bearing age use drugs their children suffer.

The Early Childhood Partnership Team is working on system improvement through collaboration and capacity building in order to develop a stronger infrastructure that can provide family supports in order to reduce the occurrences of child abuse and neglect that is often an unfortunate by-product of substance abusing parents. The expansion of Relief Nurseries in Oregon was discussed in meetings of this group three years ago. In May 2006, we applied for a federal Methamphetamine Prevention grant that would be used to support the creation of a relief nursery, expand our C.A.R.E. program and enhance both Healthy Start and Head Start's Free to Grow program. All four of these strategies are evidence based efforts that have proven to be effective in producing positive outcomes for families and children. Unfortunately, we did not receive the funding that we sought but knew that we were heading in the right direction.

Right about the same time, the Honorable Patricia Sullivan, Federal Magistrate from Pendleton, talked with her cohort, Ann Aiken from Eugene, who expressed to her how wonderful their Relief Nursery was and the difference that it was making in the lives of the families that they served. She invited Pat to visit and take a tour of it. Pat and Joan Howard, the Mediation Coordinator for the county, went and were impressed with what they saw. Upon their return a small group of people, which included Sally Duff and Pat Sullivan taking the lead at the grassroots level, organized with the goal of making the dream of opening a relief nursery on the east side of the state in Umatilla County a reality. A board of directors was formed, non-profit tax status was achieved, fund raising events occurred, community partners were solicited, a facility was secured and renovated, a large pool of volunteers was identified, licensing by the child care division occurred and they opened for business to receive referrals as the Pioneer Relief Nursery on December 1st, 2007. Most importantly they got the support of our state legislators who earmarked startup funding for two new relief nurseries and identified Umatilla County as one of the locations for this current biennium.

This addition to our social service infrastructure is awesome. The speed at which it came together showed how a small group of dedicated individuals who were not afraid of hard work and who have networked with people of influence that have a desire to improve the social condition can bring this wonderful asset here to help those children who are at the highest risk.

The Pioneer Relief Nursery will be able to function because of the collaborative efforts and contributions of many community partners. The Umatilla Morrow Educational

Service District will assist by providing trained early childhood teachers for the therapeutic classroom, St. Anthony Hospital is donating the use of a building and the utilities for two years. Drug Treatment Court clients are some of the first referred to receive services. Licensed Alcohol & Drug Counselors will provide services for parents on site and parenting classes will be conducted there as well. Healthy Start, Umatilla Morrow Head Start, Blue Mountain Community College's Early Childhood Education program, local church volunteers, Kiwanis Clubs and other service organizations, youth groups including Girl's Circle members and youth needing community service/restitution hours have donated time and energy to get the building ready and become trained to contribute where and when needed, and a kindergarten classroom from Washington Elementary School even donated their Christmas presents to the nursery.

The Umatilla County Commission on Children and Families is very proud of the successful beginning of the Pioneer Relief Nursery and plan on being able to share many success stories of individuals who will be served by them in the future.