



Metropolitan Family Service

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Encouraging the Art of Face to Face Conversation

Portland, Oregon – October 29, 2010. Building a healthy community takes thought, discussion and wisdom. In the busy lives many of us lead, there seems to be little time to meet and discuss the bigger issues that our community is facing.

To help gain citizen involvement, local social service agency Metropolitan Family Service organizes a series of community events to promote face-to-face discussion, civic engagement and social change. Metropolitan Family Service developed the agog discussion series to raise community awareness on issues that affect everyone and to encourage personal action.

Throughout the year, Metropolitan Family Service works with people who would like to host a discussion as well as local topic experts to create unique discussions about topics relevant to our community.

Many people enjoy throwing an occasional dinner party for friends and relatives, but how often do they include noted researchers, university professors, or local experts who work on the social service front line? Imagine the lively discussions that these leaders might inspire.

The series began in 2009 and focused on improving education in Oregon. Building Healthy Communities was the theme for 2010. Fascinating and informative discussions addressed community health issues like maintaining healthy cognition, promoting healthy habits in our schools and health care equity.

Fifteen agog discussions are scheduled throughout the year. Typically, between 10 and 30 guests attend each event. Articles related to the topic are selected by the conversation leaders and provided to guests prior to each agog discussion so that

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everyone has some common understanding of the issues. One conversation leader is seated at each table and moderates small group discussions, easily allowing everyone to participate. Brunch or dinner discussions have been the most popular. Meals have been catered, home-cooked, potluck, or barbeque – each setting the scene for a lively exchange of ideas. Guests learn new information, engage in dialogue, and identify ways to get involved, from research to community action. There is no request for donations at agog discussions.

The agency is now gearing up for the 2011 season, “Changing Demographics, Changing Communities,” in which the series will explore Oregon’s rapidly changing population, and how we can prepare for the future. Topics will include how aging demographics affect the work place, health care and other societal factors; what we can learn from the 2010 Census; and implications for the average citizen of our changing demographics to name a few.

A major annual event, A Gathering of Good, is held each autumn to bring the community together and celebrate the learning and actions taken during the year, raise funds to support Metropolitan Family Service programs, and honor an exceptional community member with the Provocateur award. The 2010 award was presented to Eileen Brady, the co-founder of New Seasons Market at A Gathering of Good on October 16. Ms. Brady serves on the Oregon Health Policy Board and Oregon Business Association Board and speaks regularly on sustainability, building regional food systems and transforming health care. The Provocateur award was created in memory of Eileen Johnson, who was an inspiring example of community activism and dedicated to the mission of Metropolitan Family Service.

A Gathering of Good raised nearly \$270,000 in contributions to support Metropolitan Family Service programs that every year help more than 33,000 people facing cultural and economic barriers such as inadequate education, health issues, isolation and poverty.

For sixty years, Metropolitan Family Service has been providing support to children, families, and older adults. The agency collaborates with parents to improve family communication and motivate and support their children. It offers after school programs, mentoring and tutoring to students to help them achieve their potential. To

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support the independence of older adults and people with disabilities, Metropolitan Family Service offers transportation, home repair and companionship services.

Are you interested in hosting an agog discussion? Contact Monica Wirtz, Special Events Coordinator at 503.232.0007, ext. 201 or visit www.agatheringofgood.org.

Background information: About Metropolitan Family Service: For more than 60 years, Metropolitan Family Service has been building healthy communities to support children, families, and older adults. We provide services at 88 sites, including 55 schools. Metropolitan Family Service makes connections that strengthen the lives of 33,000 individuals and families each year.

For more information, contact Pat Kaczmarek, Marketing and Communications Manager, at 503.232.0007 ext.170. You can visit our website at www.metfamily.org.

Photo captions:

#1. **Eileen Brady** is presented with the 2010 Provocateur award from Krista Larson, Metropolitan Family Service Executive Director.

#2. More than 200 people participated in the 2010 agog discussion series focusing on topics related to Building Healthy Communities.

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