



Metropolitan Family Service

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

SE Portland residents host discussion on promoting healthy habits in schools

Portland, Oregon – July 20, 2010– Eastmooreland residents Mark and Brenda Saling welcomed friends and neighbors to their home recently to discuss ways to improve school provided food and support children's health and academic success. The discussion is part of **A Gathering of Good (agog)**, a series of events organized by Metropolitan Family Service to promote face-to-face conversation, civic engagement and social change. This year, agog discussions focus on the topic of Building Healthy Communities.

Metropolitan Family Service contacted local experts to facilitate the discussion including **Dr. Michelle Markesteyn Ratcliffe**, Farm to School Program Manager with the Oregon Department of Agriculture, and **Caitlin Blethen**, Youth Grow Manager at Growing Gardens.

The conversation started with discussion about the school lunch program. Mark and Brenda and the other guests all have children attending local Duniway Elementary School. Guests learned that Oregon is one of only a handful of states that does not provide state support for school food in addition to federal funding. Schools have a total food budget of \$1.10 to \$1.18 per student for *all* the food on the plate. Even without state funding, Portland Public Schools is leading the way in improving school food and teaching students where their food comes from. Both the Harvest of the Month and Local Flavors programs are enhanced by dedicated educators who integrate garden-based educational activities for PPS students. Passionate teachers, parents, and community agencies have helped create and maintain school/community gardens to give students hands-on learning experiences.

Portland Public Schools Nutrition Services is a leader in Farm to School and local purchasing and participates in a national initiative that helps large school districts (those with 40,000 or more students) procure more healthful, more sustainably produced and regionally sourced food such as grass fed beef and local chicken.

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Parents involved in the Duniway Elementary School's Green Team have been instrumental in eliminating the use of styrofoam, plastic utensils and plastic straws. They recently switched to using silverware that required an industrial dishwasher for their kitchen/cafeteria, which Portland Public Schools purchased. Duniway is proud to have recently won the green school certification status.

Naturally, parents are concerned about how to nourish young minds and bodies, and how to get kids engaged in their own health. Guests discussed their desire to establish a community garden at Duniway. Creating a community school garden is an opportunity to support student health and wellness, encourage students' social and emotional development and enhance academic achievement. School-community gardens offer opportunities for kids to genuinely engage in lifelong learning. Michelle Ratcliffe noted that gardens have been shown to contribute to the development of the whole child.

Foods grown in the garden can also be used to supplement school lunch offerings in the cafeteria, create tasting tables that feature a certain harvest, and can be incorporated into classroom curricula. Beyond the borders of their school, they are envisioning donating a portion of their bounty to food banks and partnering with a sister garden. Conversation leader Caitlin Blethen noted, "Research shows that students who participate in growing food are more likely to eat those foods than those who don't participate in the process." Over 40 Portland Public Schools now have school gardens. Amidst concerns about losing financial support for arts and physical education classes, the parents who attended this agog discussion are optimistic: "If we build it, they will come!"

Metropolitan Family Service offers SUN and CAFE (Child and Family Enrichment) after school programs at 24 low-income school sites in the greater Portland area. The percentage of children who participate in the Free and Reduced Lunch Program is as high as 93% at some schools MFS serves. Six of these sites feature community gardens which kids and community members have helped build and continue to nurture.

To read the full summary about school provided food, school-community gardens and ways you can support healthy habits in our schools, as well as other discussions in the agog dinner & discussion series, please visit www.agatheringofgood.org.

On Saturday, October 16, 2010, the signature fundraiser for Metropolitan Family Service, ***A Gathering of Good***, will take place at the Portland Hilton Grand Ballroom. The theme is Building Healthy Communities. **Dr. Larry Wallack**, the Dean of the College of Urban and Public Affairs at Portland State University, is the featured keynote speaker. He is

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known for his work in ‘media advocacy,’ working with mass media and communities to advance social and public health issues. The second annual *Provocateur* award will be presented to **Eileen Brady**, the co-founder of New Seasons Market. 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.

Proceeds support Metropolitan Family Service programs that help people facing cultural and economic barriers such as inadequate education, health issues, isolation and poverty. Metropolitan Family Service helps more than 37,000 children, families and older adults each year. Please visit www.metfamily.org to learn more.

Background Information

About **Metropolitan Family Service (MFS)**: For sixty years, Metropolitan Family Service been building healthy communities to support children, families, and older adults. We provide services at more than 145 sites, including more than 70 schools. Metropolitan Family Service makes connections that strengthen the lives of 37,000 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.

Through agog, Metropolitan Family Service promotes face-to-face conversation, civic engagement and social change. 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. For more information about agog please contact Monica Wirtz, Special Events Coordinator, at 503.232.0007 ext. 201.

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