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**EAST COUNTY NEWS**

LETTERS

*Letters to the Editor, Dec. 19*

, Dec 19, 2007

**Reacting to Clackamas County's gang problems**

To the Editor:

As a long-time resident of Milwaukie and involved community member, I know there many are positive things going on in Clackamas County — many excellent schools, many caring and effective county and school district staff, and many families who are committed to the success of their children.

There are however, some disquieting realities. A recently completed Clackamas County Gang Assessment report identified more than a dozen separate gangs operating in the county. Recent reports in the paper on graffiti and related gang violence in Clackamas County underscore this report. Free and reduced lunch data from the public schools show an increasing level of poverty, especially in the north part of the County. And the number of reported cases of child abuse in Clackamas County is on the rise.

In response to these disquieting trends and at the request of concerned school district staff, Metropolitan Family Service (MFS), a non-profit agency, has worked in partnership with local representatives from the public and private sector to expand services to Clackamas County. As a member of the MFS Board of Directors, I am proud of the programs Metropolitan Family Service now offers in Clackamas County, which are getting good results. Two after-school programs, one at Lot Whitcomb Elementary School and one at Rowe Middle School, are serving hundreds of students each year with exciting and fun activities that promote academic excellence, help engage parents in their child's learning and offer a safe after-school environment.

The MFS intergenerational programs, Experience Corps and Foster Grandparent, connect older adult volunteers with youth in schools, touching the lives of nearly 100 children. MFS Parenting Classes have served nearly 75 families, helping families learn to more appropriately and effectively relate to and guide their children. The MFS kindergarten readiness program serves 50 families in English and Spanish, and parents are reporting an increase in positive interaction with their children.

All of these services are the result of a broad-based coalition of non-profit, school district, county, private and neighborhood partners who intentionally are working together to help prevent problems, and not just respond to them. We all believe prevention is the most effective and efficient way to support youth in our community.

I encourage you to become part of the coalition, visit an MFS after-school program, volunteer as a mentor, or support funding for programs for children, families and older adults. There are many wonderful things happening in your community — come see for yourself! Contact Tricia Harding, Metropolitan Family Service Program Manager, at 503.232.0007 ext. 150.

Yves Lefranc

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