

Clackamas County groups push for Children's Safety Levy

 pamplinmedia.com/ocn/56-news/482326-388897-clackamas-county-groups-push-for-childrens-safety-levy

Sam Stites

Coalition: Wildfires highlight need to increase funding for local youth services

A coalition of nonprofit groups is highlighting how crucial it is for voters to approve a levy that would lead to increased services for Clackamas County's most vulnerable youth, especially in light of the destructive wildfires that have plagued the region over the past two weeks.

Parrott Creek Child & Family Services, Children's Center of Clackamas County, Clackamas Women's Service, Northwest Family Services, Court Appointed Special Advocates of Clackamas County and dozens of other local groups are backing Measure 3-546 on the Nov. 3 general election ballot.

The measure, also known as the Children's Safety Levy, would raise about \$8 million annually over the next five years to help local kids dealing with abuse, neglect, domestic violence, sexual exploitation, human trafficking and homelessness, as well as those in the foster system or with incarcerated parents.

The coalition — which calls itself "Yes for Clackamas Kids" — is calling attention to all the work done by organizations helping children in Clackamas County in recent weeks and how they've adapted to changing conditions to continue providing services.

In a press release, the coalition outlined a number of ways in which each of these organizations pitched in to continue providing their regular services while also going above and beyond to react to the emergency at hand.

For example, Parrot Creek had to act fast when evacuation orders forced the group to relocate residents from their youth treatment ranch located south of Oregon City.

According to Simon Fulford, executive director at Parrot Creek, the organization was able to partner with True Housing to quickly find temporary shelter for its youth residents.

"Now that our residents are safely back at our program location, we've continued to work with True Housing and other local organizations to provide critical wrap-around services as our clients continue on their paths to recovery while processing the trauma of the fires and evacuation," Fulford said.

The Children's Center of Clackamas County also jumped into action when the fires began to displace families throughout the area. They reacted quickly to continue providing care packages filled with food, other essentials and items for kids and families within their network.

"We also dispatched our Therapy Program team to connect all families we serve to provide support and referrals to needed services," said Rebecca Nickels, interim executive director at the Children's Center.

Staff members of Clackamas Women's Services helped problem solve with families by helping identify ways to filter air as smoke created hazardous air-quality issues. They also pitched in by helping identify temporary shelter for evacuees.

"Many families who didn't have to evacuate – but were stressed about dealing with the poor air quality – were very grateful to receive a call from our team," said Executive Director Melissa Erlbaum. "We also made hotel vouchers available to evacuated participants in our agency programs as well as continued to provide emergency shelter to those also fleeing abuse."

Northwest Family Services did its part to help the community by supporting those who had to evacuate, as well as those who had to stay in their homes due to poor air quality.

Executive director Rose Fuller said her organization was able to use its institutional knowledge of its clientele to deliver tailored food and supply packages, as well as connect people to local relief resources. They also provided emotional support to those struggling with the traumatic impact of the wildfires.

For CASA of Clackamas County, immediately making contact with foster families was a priority when the fires broke out. Executive Director Robin Christian said her team of special advocates wanted to ensure the foster youth they serve were safe and evacuated if they lived in an affected area.

"Efforts like this go a long way for the kids who depend on the persistence and consistency of our volunteer advocates in their lives," Christian said.

Should the Children's Safety Levy be approved by voters, it would raise local property taxes over the next five years by \$0.15 per \$1,000 of assessed value beginning in 2021.

According to proponents of the measure, a Clackamas County homeowner would pay just \$3.78 per month on a home with an average assessed value of \$302,000 if the levy passes.

All revenue raised by the levy would be used to serve youth in Clackamas County. The distribution of funds would be handled by a citizen advisory and oversight committee, and only agencies with a proven track record of delivering services in Clackamas County would

be eligible.

"The Clackamas Children's Safety Levy is a small investment with a big return," Fuller said. "We can invest in our county's children and families and ensure that all children reach their full potential. This measure leverages the trust and experience that Clackamas County based nonprofits have established in our community, to best serve our most vulnerable residents."
