

Multnomah CourtCare Providing Child Care When Parents Can't

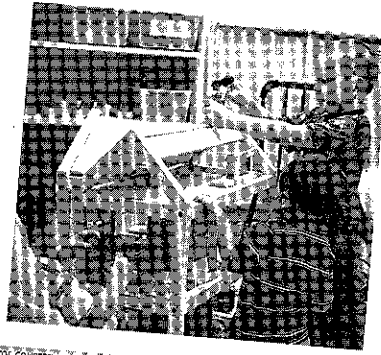
Susan has been a stay-at-home mother in Gresham since her daughter, Maddie, was born three years ago. Lately, Susan's husband, Ron, has been drinking heavily. When he drinks, he yells at Susan. Twice in the past week, Ron has hit Susan. Last night, while Maddie watched, Ron punched Susan in the face and knocked her unconscious. When she awoke, Maddie was kneeling over her, kissing her cheek, crying, "Mommy, don't die." This morning, Susan went to the Multnomah County Courthouse to obtain a restraining order.

Unfortunately, Susan didn't have childcare, and was forced to take Maddie with her. When Susan learned that she would have to testify about the abuse in front of a judge to obtain the restraining order, she panicked. She knew Maddie should not be forced to hear her retell the story. She also knew she could not leave 3-year-old Maddie sitting, alone, in the courthouse hallways. To her relief, she learned about Multnomah CourtCare. This program provides free childcare to parents who do not have access to childcare when they must go to court with their children.

Multnomah CourtCare opened its doors in December 2001 as a program of the Volunteers of America Oregon, in partnership with the Multnomah Bar Association, Multnomah County and the State of Oregon. The program has provided care to over 4,400 children, improved access to justice for their families, and smoothed courthouse operations. Multnomah CourtCare is Oregon's only full-time drop-in childcare program in a court building.



Multnomah CourtCare offers nurturing care to kids whose parents need to be in court.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF MULTNOMAH COURT CARE

Before Multnomah CourtCare opened, on any given day, as many as 80 children were in the halls of the Multnomah County Courthouse. Multnomah County Circuit Court Judge Janice Wilson, who was involved in planning the program, recalls, "I've had to stop a court proceeding to ask a parent to take a child outside." Since Multnomah CourtCare opened in December 2001, these problems have been greatly reduced.

The CourtCare staff is the heart of the program. They provide nurturing, developmentally appropriate care on a daily basis to young children, many of whom are from families who are struggling with violence or poverty or other challenges. In addition to providing childcare services, the staff provides referrals for domestic violence and childcare resources, chemical and alcohol dependency treatment, mental health treatment, low cost housing, legal aid, food and clothing, and utility assistance, among others.

Multnomah CourtCare depends primarily on private contributions for its operational expenses. To make a tax-deductible contribution to the Multnomah CourtCare Program, send your donation to: CourtCare, c/o Multnomah Bar Foundation, 620 SW Fifth Avenue, Suite 1220, Portland, OR 97204.

For more information about the Multnomah CourtCare Program, call Kristin Winnie Eaton (503-224-7077) or Melissa Gritz (503-988-4334) or visit www.mbabar.org and click on "CourtCare."

(The story in this article is based on actual events from several families, but the names have been changed for safety reasons).

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