

## **HOMELESS YOUTH: TOMORROW'S BURDEN OR TOMORROW'S CITIZEN?**

The LWV of the Umpqua Valley (Douglas County) continues to work on behalf of homeless youth. We've interviewed/met/talked with more than three dozen organizations/people and stakeholders in this issue. Our position paper is available on our web site. Please take a moment to read it so you will understand that we must make this issue our own becoming proactive in ending homelessness for youth in our state and nation. ([http://www.lwvuv.org/lwvuv\\_study.html](http://www.lwvuv.org/lwvuv_study.html)). Our study can act as a blueprint for your local efforts.

We find our work is exciting rewarding, and (at times) exhilarating. As we were summarizing the results of our study, we became aware of other efforts in Oregon to solve this problem. Committee members began collaborating with other organizations who are addressing the issue. Three members of our study committee attending the Conference on Poverty in Seaside in November, 2004. We attended testimony at the Joint Committee on Human Services, and participated in Marion County's "Runaway and Homeless Youth Forum: Policies, Legislation, and Best Practices". We find that we are joining in a statewide effort to eradicate homelessness in the next five years and there are many opportunities to leverage for all Leagues in Oregon.

Currently the legislature is reviewing the issue of homeless youth and will place responsibility for the solution upon the Commission on Children and Families. The bill is currently in a draft form, number 1373, and has yet to be assigned to either house. Write to your representative asking them to support this worthwhile bill.

Locally we continue to advocate for positive action.

1. We are working with the school districts, through the ESD, to heighten their awareness of services available to these children and advocating for teacher workshops designed with the "oral learner" in mind. (Many children in poverty and those who are homeless are oral learners and many have learning disabilities.)
2. We partnered with our local Commission on Children and Families and will be holding a Summit in Douglas County, October 7, 2005, at the Umpqua Community College. (Our first Stakeholders' Meeting on November 30<sup>th</sup> demonstrated enthusiastic countywide interest and receptivity.) Outcomes for the Summit include action plans from the agencies to work collaboratively and a 5-year plan to solve the problem of homeless youth. Please consider attending.
3. We are attending meetings of the State Runaway and Homeless Policy Work Group, staying current on the most recent developments. At the December 16, 2005 meeting in Salem, many organizations expressed an interest in working with **you**. Multnomah, Washington, and Marion Counties have approached us asking if their Leagues are also working on this issue. They are anxious to partner with you and continue the forward momentum.

We are looking forward to a more expansive local grassroots movement, building into State action and ultimately in having our membership, coast-to-coast, examine this issue in Milwaukee 2006 at the national convention and decide to make tomorrow's burden into **tomorrow's citizen**.