

Raffle to help raise funds for NeahCasa's Emergency Housing arm

By Glenna Gray
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Usually you find out through the grapevine - Jane's family is being evicted again; John is sleeping on a friend's couch; Mary's father was arrested last night. There are many sad and difficult stories the Family Resource Coordinators (FRCs) of the Neah-Kah-Nie School District hear. Thanks to the efforts of the Emergency Housing arm of NeahCasa, the local affordable housing nonprofit organization, there is, for the first time in rural Oregon, a program which actually helps families stay in the housing they have (always the better alternative) or assists with securing new housing when things fall apart in the homes of children.

In the two-and-one-half years since it started, the Emergency Housing Program has helped 92 children from 49 families. Eighteen were from the middle and high schools, 43 from the two grade schools in the district, and seven from kindergarten or Head Start. This last group is especially vulnerable as recent research proves that children who move at least three times between the ages of 4 and 7 are 13 percent less likely to graduate from high school. The effects of inadequate housing on children's educational success means the growing crisis in housing nationwide will have grave effects for society as a whole now and in the future.

Started by Mike Cook, an assistance to the Neah-Kah-Nie School District's FRCs, the program is now on its own financially with grants from Meyer Memorial Trust, the Windermere Foundation, and private donors and support from CARE. The goal of stable housing for children is met through rental assistance of up to \$500 per year per family, utility assistance through the PUD's CAP program, reinstating utilities, rental training, landlord support, food, clothing, and caseworker support.

Louise Christiansen has joined Cook to work on this program and has taken on the fund-raising part of the program. She contacts the FRCs at the first of the school year to find out what they need, and then meets those needs through donations. She has partnerships in place with the Hope Chest, Rite Aid, Costco, and Fred Meyer, as well as private individuals.

A new fund-raiser is a raffle, with all proceeds going to family housing support. Only \$2,000 worth of tickets will be sold. At a drawing on Sept. 1, at the end of the Labor Day picnic in the Pine Grove parking lot, the winning tickets will be drawn. First prize is a choice of one of three gorgeous photographs by Linda Cook. Linda is said to, "take the ordinary and make it extraordinary." Second prize is a \$50 dollar gift certificate at Rite Aid, and third and fourth prizes are a series of yoga or callinetics classes at Parinamah, in Manzanita. Christiansen will be selling tickets throughout the area at \$1 each or six for \$5, helping raise funds to help children in need.

"The school district expresses sincere appreciation for the commitment of NeahCasa to the district's Family Resource Program and our families," said Jay Kosik, Neah-Kah-Nie School District superintendent. "Their effectiveness has been remarkable. Affordable housing and emergency housing support are so critical to educational development."

"This program feels good," said Christiansen. "When I can write a check to help someone ... my heart sings."

For more information or to purchase raffle tickets, contact Christiansen at (503) 368-4252.



Louise Christensen spearheads raffle ticket sales. Photo by Glenna Gray