

The Oregon Child Abuse Prevalence Study (OCAPS): High School Pilot Study Summary Report February 2019

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**HOW MANY OREGON CHILDREN EXPERIENCE CHILD ABUSE, NEGLECT, & EXPOSURE TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?
HAVE WE MADE HEADWAY IN DECREASING CHILD ABUSE & NEGLECT IN THE PAST 20 YEARS?**

OREGONIANS CANNOT ACCURATELY ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS.

The Oregon Child Abuse Prevalence Study (OCAPS) was designed to much more accurately measure the rates of child abuse and neglect in Oregon. Until now, Oregon has relied almost exclusively on a handful of questions in surveys and on reports to child protective services to estimate abuse and neglect rates. Policymakers, funders, advocates and people working to support children and families overwhelmingly agree that the best existing measurement significantly under-reports the actual abuse and neglect experienced by Oregon children and youth. There is a need for a better, more accurate approach. The UO Center for the Prevention of Abuse and Neglect (CPAN) spent two years researching how other states and countries measure child abuse prevalence rates and then another year in developing and implementing a pilot study to determine whether a safe and more accurate method could work in Oregon. The Ford Family Foundation and Meyer Memorial Trust supported the research, development, and piloting stages of OCAPS. The CPAN research team has now completed an OCAPS pilot study and we are now before the Oregon Legislature, partnering with the Department of Human Services and Oregon Department of Education to fund OCAPS statewide. To investigate whether such a study is viable, several legislators in 2017 recommended that CPAN pilot the study and bring those results to the Legislature. This report is the result of those efforts.

This report briefly summarizes the findings of the OCAPS high school pilot. The pilot study, a collaboration with Oregon youth, Lane County schools¹, and CPAN, is the first time U.S. youth have been asked comprehensive abuse/neglect questions in a school environment. The pilot was designed to test and refine study procedures in preparation for going statewide. With legislative support, we plan to implement the first-ever statewide representative survey of 1,500 -1,800 Oregon youth in the 2019-2020 school year. OCAPS will serve as a more accurate way to assess the long-term effectiveness of prevention and intervention efforts in Oregon communities than report rates are able to do.

OCAPS, a 167-question survey for students 16 years and older, measures social support, physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, child exposure to intimate partner violence (domestic violence), adverse childhood experiences (ACE), dating violence, weapons use and exposure, and school and health outcomes. The survey is sensitive and extensive. For example, it includes 10 sexual assault questions, 19 physical abuse questions, 31 neglect questions, and many questions about domestic violence and household climate. All Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study questions are included in OCAPS.

¹ This research was made possible, in part, by the support of 5 Lane County school districts. Opinions and recommendations contained in this report reflect those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the participating districts.

OCAPS Premises

- √ Child abuse and neglect prevention is an urgent public health need.
- √ Current child abuse prevalence measurement underestimate actual rates.
- √ Report rates to child welfare represent a small proportion of child abuse and neglect incidence.
- √ Tracking rates/trends across time are vital tools for policy-making, putting decision-makers in a much better position to gauge the effectiveness of intervention and prevention programs.
- √ Local data inspire local action.

We believe asking youth directly about abuse they may have experienced can be done safely, ethically, and in a manner that youth find to be supportive and validating. This is based on our own decades of work in schools as well as several years of our own preparatory work with adults and youth that was verified with this pilot. Additionally, we believe that youth are the best source for accurate information about their own experiences.

OCAPS Addresses the Following Questions, Among Others

- How do child abuse and neglect prevalence rates compare to child welfare report rates statewide?
- How many Oregon children experience physical abuse, sexual abuse, and emotional neglect and witness or hear intimate partner violence?
- How does childhood abuse impact health among Oregon children? How does this vary for children in the foster care system and by income, gender, race, and Oregon region? What impact does social support have on health, behavior, and school performance for youth who have experienced abuse and/or neglect?
- How does childhood abuse impact school attendance, grades and behavioral choices? How do these differences vary for students in the foster care system and by household income, gender, race and Oregon region?
- What impact do intervention (e.g., Oregon’s Early Learning System) and prevention efforts (e.g., Healthy Families Oregon) have on child abuse rates over time and across generations?

The OCAPS Pilot – Safety and Support for Student Participants

In spring and fall 2018, 216 youth from 12 classrooms in six schools and five Lane County districts participated in the OCAPS pilot. The questions are direct and sensitive, e.g., *“Have you seen adults in your home hurt each other physically, such as hitting, slapping, and kicking?”* and *“Has anyone ever forced you to have sex when you did not want them to?”* These are difficult questions. For many people, naturally, it is upsetting to respond to questions like this and can be triggering for abuse survivors. We² took many steps to reduce risk for students and to create a trauma-informed, safe and validating experience for survey participants. These steps included:

² Among CPAN lead researchers, we have 30+ years of survivor support, advocacy, high school prevention implementation, counseling and state and federal abuse prevention policy development (e.g., Phyllis Barkhurst, Co-Founder, Oregon Attorney General’s Sexual Assault Task Force) and 15+ years of survey research experience with adult survivors of abuse (e.g., Todahl, Walters, & Olson, 2017).

Development of Questionnaire and Safety Protocols.

- Development of the survey and safety steps in consultation with national and international research colleagues and based on our own direct experience with conducting adult-based survivor survey research.
- Shared the first draft of the questionnaire and survey plan in feedback sessions with multiple youth leadership groups, including Juventud Faceta, Trauma Healing Project youth leaders, and youth educator workgroups.
- Piloted the survey 1st draft with 30 UO graduate students, the 2nd draft with 420 UO undergraduate students, and the 3rd draft with 205 UO undergraduate students.

School-Specific Preparation.

- The first contact with schools is in person. The CPAN research team met with principal, counselor(s), and classroom teacher(s) at each school. There the student support plan was agreed on, and school and community-specific resources for students were identified for during and after the survey.
- From this meeting, we developed, with each school, a timeline for implementation, specific roles and responsibilities for school research team, and the detailed student support plan. We then signed a Memorandum of Understanding with each school that clearly outlined all of these steps.
- The consent form is then sent to all parents/guardians 2 weeks prior to study.
- The Study description was read to students by the classroom teacher one week prior to the study – including study purpose, confidentiality, optional participation, and how to opt out.
- For each school, we worked with the school to develop a school and region-tailored resource list (delivered to students and school on day of the study and posted in the school for 2 months after).

School-Specific Implementation (Day of the Survey).

- The CPAN research team introduced themselves to the class – reminded students about study purpose, acknowledged its sensitivity, acknowledged that it may be upsetting and that this is natural, and reminded students that their participation is optional, they can skip questions, can stop at any time, and described privacy and limits of confidentiality.
- The Resource list was distributed to students before taking the survey. Each CPAN research team included a student support staff who, prior to distributing the survey, introduced themselves to the class, explained they were there with the sole purpose of student support, explained which private room they would be in during the study and at least one hour following class.
- There was a Post-survey debrief with the students after each class. This debrief again acknowledged the types of response and feelings that are common when thinking about abuse and neglect, re-iterated available support, and led a brief discussion of students' overall experience with taking the survey, questions they may have, and their recommendations for conducting the OCAPS statewide.
- The survey is completed on an I-Pad with a security screen.

Fewer than 3% of parents/guardians opted out of the survey. And, with one school exception, fewer than 5% of students opted out.

Student Experience.

Most students expressed strong support for the study. In feedback sessions and in anonymous open-ended questions on the I-pad, students overwhelmingly encouraged our team to conduct the study statewide. Many students felt validated, urged us to share the findings widely, and appreciated that people were working to draw attention to child abuse. One student reflected the sentiment of many:

“Thank you. Childhood abuse and trauma will likely affect me and a lot of adolescents I know for the rest of our lives. It is nice to be validated and to know people are taking steps to help prevent this.”

Students anonymously rated how they felt while taking the survey:

- 43% felt ‘neutral,’ which suggests they did not have a strong emotional response during the survey.
- 11% felt uncomfortable; 15% felt upset or sad, and under 2% felt discouraged and confused.
- 15% felt inspired; 26% felt hopeful, and 39% felt “supported or validated because people are learning about child abuse.”

Pilot Study Participants

- 45% identified as male, 52% as female, and 3% as gender non-binary.
- 19% were 16 years old, 53% were 17 years old, and 28% were 18 years old or older.
- Most identified as white (67%); 19% identified as mixed race, and 9% as Latino. 92% spoke English as the primary language in their home.
- During the past 12 months, 44% of students missed 0-5 days of school for any reason; 19% missed 6-10 days, and 33% missed 11 days or more.
- 69% of participants indicated they receive mostly A’s and B’s; 20% mostly C’s; and 5% mostly D’s and F’s.
- 29% of students’ parent(s) earned a bachelor’s degree or higher; 50% receive free/reduced lunch.
- 13% (n=27) of participants have ever been placed in foster care.

A SAMPLE OF PRELIMINARY FINDINGS³

Social Support, Connection and Household Climate.

Because of the importance of social connection for health and well-being, OCAPS asks several questions about neighborhood climate and overall social support. Nearly 92% of student participants reported feeling safe in their neighborhood and 65% agreed that they received the emotional support that they need from their family. Many student participants (53%) reported they never or rarely feel tense or stressed out at home, 85% believed that they are well taken care of when they are sick or injured, and 74% believed that they sometimes or often receive the comfort they need when they are upset.

Among those who had an abuse experience, 47% had never talked with anyone about their experience.

Those who had shared their experience at some point in time most often shared it with a friend, parent or sibling – and the majority of those who shared their experience reported that people were understanding and compassionate.

³ This is a convenience sample. The statewide study will include at least 1,500 stratified and randomly selected schools and school districts and will closely represent Oregon youth.

Household Climate & Fear.

Many student participants (53%) reported they never or rarely feel tense or stressed out at home, while 26% said they sometimes feel tense/stressed at home and 20% often or very often do. **The vast majority of students always or usually feel safe at home.** At the same time, many student participants reported they feel frightened due to adult behavior, at least some of the time:

<i>Item</i>	No	Yes
Has anyone in your home used alcohol and/or drugs and then behaved in a way that frightened you?	65.6% (n=141)	30.2% (n=65)
Have you seen adults in your home shouting and screaming in a way that frightened you?	50.7% (n=109)	45.1% (n=97)

Sexual Abuse.

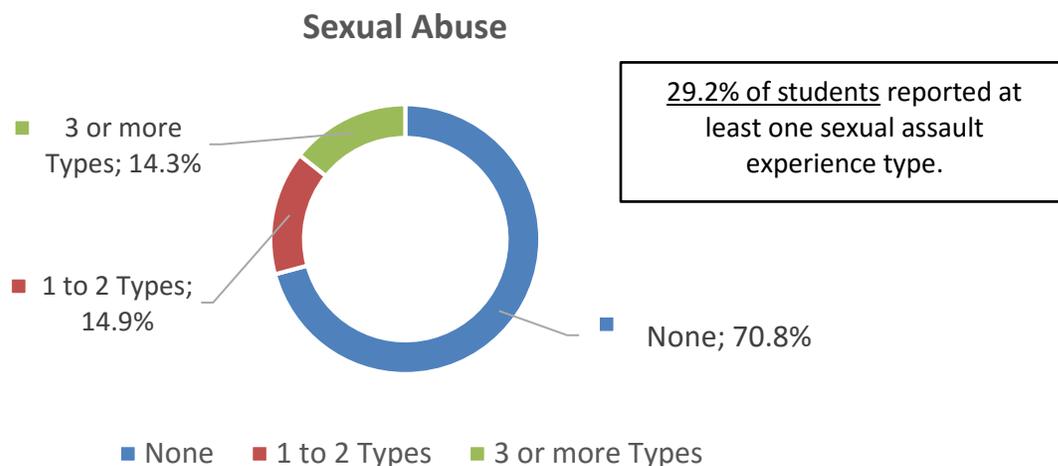
In this report – for sexual abuse, physical abuse, and intimate partner violence exposure – we compare OCAPS pilot study findings with the well-known original ACE study findings and with the National Survey of Children’s Exposure to Violence (NatSCEV). These are among the closest research comparisons to OCAPS and provide a frame of reference for prevalence rates among Lane County youth in this pilot study. For example, the original ACE study reported a child sexual abuse rate of 20.7%, while 29.2% of students in the OCAPS pilot identified at least one sexual abuse experience.

The type of sexual abuse participants experienced (e.g., forced touch, forced intercourse) varied by gender. For example, 19% of participants (71.1% female; 18.4% male) answered yes to this question: “Has anyone ever touched your private parts in a sexual way, or made you touch theirs when you didn’t want them to?” Participants who ever lived in foster care reported 3 or more sexual abuse types at a rate 2 times higher than those never in foster care.

Sexual assault and sadness were highly correlated. Among participants who had no history of sexual abuse, 26% reported being profoundly and persistently sad or hopeless at some point during the past 12 months. For participants with 3 or more sexual abuse experience types, reports of sadness or hopelessness⁴ jumped to 79%.

Participants with three or more sexual abuse experience types were 2.1 times more likely to be persistently sad or hopeless than all other student participants.

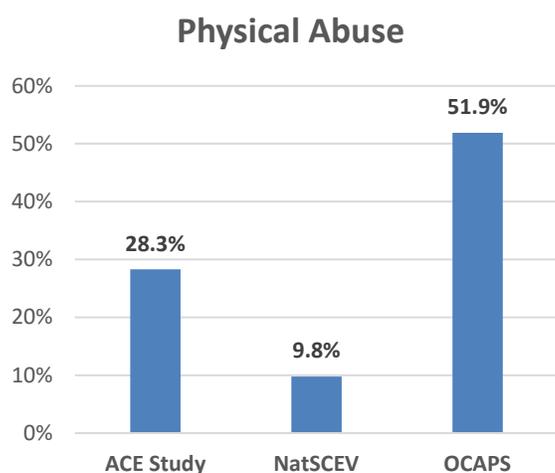
⁴ Among all participants, 37% reported feeling sad or hopeless every day for two weeks or more in the past 12 months.



Physical Abuse.

Participants were asked 19 separate physical abuse questions. The questions focused on several abuse types, including for example being choked or being “beaten up.” We also ask *who* perpetrated the act, i.e., adult male or female, adolescent or peer male or female. The rates of physical abuse in this report only include abuse by adults to youth participants.

Among all participants, 52% personally experienced at least one type of physical abuse by an adult – and many experienced multiple forms of physical abuse. For example, among all participants, 18% reported they had been often or very often pushed, grabbed, slapped, or had something thrown at them – or were hit so hard it left marks or injuries by a parent or other adult in their home. Also among all participants, 19% were hit, beat, kicked, or physically hurt in some way one or more times by a parent or adult in their home. For students who ever lived in foster care, this rate jumped to 41%. Additionally, among all participants, 39% experienced 4 or more types of physical abuse; 56% for participants who ever lived in foster care. Overall rates of physical abuse reported by students in this pilot significantly exceed rates previously reported by NatSCEV⁵ and the ACE study.



Physical abuse experience types include questions like: 1) “Has anyone ever choked you and prevented you from breathing?” and 2) “Has anyone ever hit you over and over again with an object or fist (beat-up)?”

52% of students reported at least one type of physical abuse by adults; 39% experienced four or more types of physical abuse.

⁵ National Survey of Children’s Exposure to Violence.

Intimate Partner Violence by Adults in Household.

Seventy-seven percent of youth participants experienced at least one intimate partner violence type in their household. For example, 47% of youth answered yes to this question: “At any time in your life did any of your parents or another adult in your home, because of an argument, break or ruin anything in the house, or punch the wall or throw something?” This included for many participants dangerous acts that led to injuries. For instance, 19% of participants said they have observed a parent get pushed, slapped, hit, punched, or beat up by another parent. Many participants also witnessed acts of verbal aggression. For example:

At any time in your life, did one of your parents or another adult in your home swear at, call names, or say things that put another parent down?

To this question, 27% of participants indicated this has never occurred in their household; 40% reported this occurs sometimes, and 29% reported it occurs often or very often. Twenty-five percent of participants “feel afraid because of behavior by an adult in my home” sometimes, often, or very often.

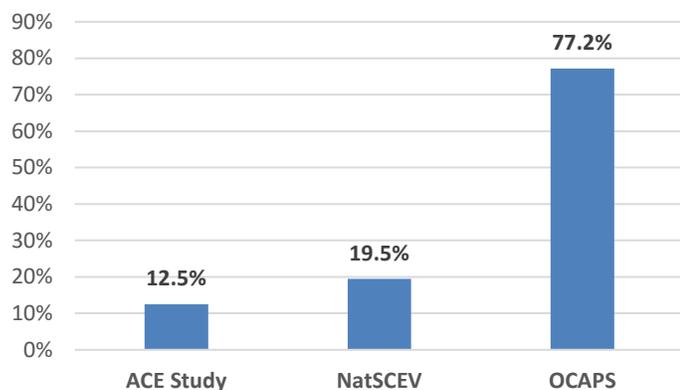
Exposure to acts of physical aggression by adults that included breaking, throwing and ruining things – experienced by many participants – was significantly correlated with sadness/hopelessness, grades, and school attendance. For example, 47% of students who earn A’s and B’s answered yes to this question: “At any time in your life did any of your parents or another adult in your home, because of an argument, break or ruin anything in the house, or punch the wall or throw something?” Fifty-two percent of students who earn C’s answered yes to this question – and a full 82% of students earning D’s and F’s answered yes.

Seeing/hearing things being punched, thrown and broken was significantly correlated with school attendance. Among students who missed 0-5 days, 39% said they saw/heard these things, while a full 63% of students who missed 11 or more days experienced this type of violence exposure.

Seeing or hearing adult physical abuse at home was highly related to sadness. A full 70% of participants who observed adults hurt each other physically in their home reported being sad or hopeless in a way that stopped them from doing regular activities – compared to 29% who did not observe this type of physical aggression.

Intimate partner violence types include questions like: 1) Did you see any of your parents or another adult in your home hit, beat, kick or physically hurt your brothers or sisters, not including spanking? and 2) was your mother or stepmother sometimes or often kicked, bitten, hit with a fist, or hit with something hard?

Intimate Partner Violence Exposure

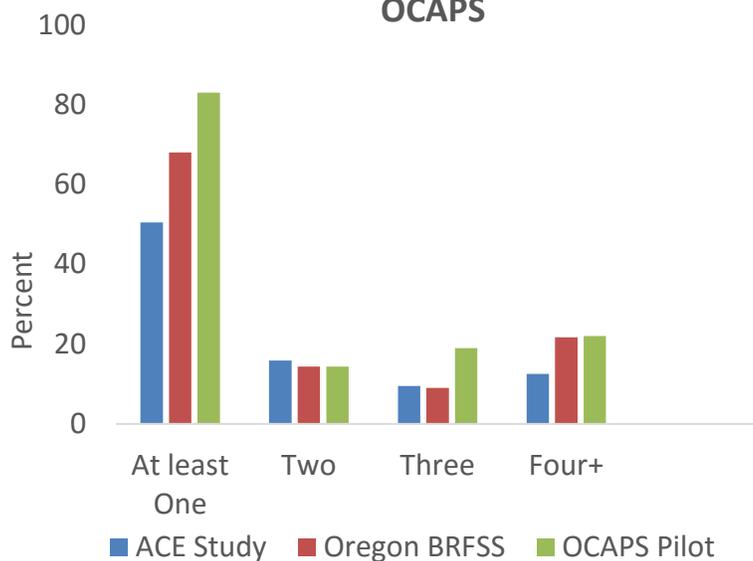


77% of students reported seeing or hearing at least one type of intimate partner violence; 47% experienced three or more types; 35% experienced four or more types.

ACE Study Questions.

The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study is widely known; OCAPS includes all ACE Study items. Overall, among students in this pilot study, ACE scores were significantly higher than both the original ACE study and Oregon's BRFSS. For example, in the original ACE study, 51% of participants experienced at least one adverse event in childhood (ACE score of 1). Among Oregon BRFSS participants, 68% of participants reported at least one ACE. In the OCAPS pilot, 83% of Oregon youth reported experiencing at least one adverse event. High rates were also reported for participants with multiple adverse events. For example, OCAPS participants reported ACE scores of 4 or more at rates nearly 2 times larger than the original ACE study and equivalent to Oregon BRFSS.

ACE Items – ACE Study, Oregon BRFSS, OCAPS



- 83% of students reported at least one ACE.
- 41% of students had an ACE score of three or more.

A Note on Income and Rates of Abuse: Income levels did not significantly correlate with abuse types – with one exception: Students who observed some forms of intimate partner violence were more likely to live in a household with lower income, though rates of this kind of violence exposure were also high for middle and high-income households. For example, 38% of participants in high or very-high income households observed an adult, because of an argument, break, ruin, punch a wall or throw something. Forty-one percent of middle-income participants observed this; this increased to 74% for students in low or very-low income households.

BRIEF SUMMARY AND NEXT STEPS

This pilot represents the first time U.S. youth have been asked comprehensive questions about their experience with abuse/neglect and with social support in this way in a school environment. The rates reported by Lane County youth overall exceed – and often far exceed – previous reports in phone surveys with youth and in retrospective questionnaires with adults. There are many possible explanations for this, including that OCAPS used more precise questions. Another explanation may be the impact on student participants being asked very sensitive questions in a relatively safe environment and in a supportive and validating manner that engaged students as partners in a process toward better understanding and reducing child abuse and neglect. Student participants appeared to take their participation seriously. With one school exception, very few students opted out.

These findings should be interpreted in context; this pilot used a convenience sample. Although it is the first time information at this level of detail has been asked of Oregon youth and it includes 216 participants, 6 schools and 5 Lane County School Districts, it is not fully representative of Lane County or Oregon youth. A statewide random and representative selection of Oregon youth is the best way to more accurately determine child abuse prevalence rates in Oregon.

The statewide study, which we plan to do during the 2019-2020 school year (pending legislative funding support), will include at least 1,500 students randomly selected and stratified from public and private schools and will closely represent Oregon youth. With that sample we will be able to share with Oregonians more complete, valid and reliable information – and our aim is to collect this information at routine intervals in order to track trends and changes over time. We will be able to newly answer many Oregon-specific questions, such as the degree to which social support reduces negative outcomes (e.g., health, school attendance, grades) among students who have experienced abuse, regional similarities/differences across Oregon, the use of weapons, weapon types and threats, and neighborhood social connection and belongingness and their relationship to abuse, neglect, health, and school outcomes.

“I feel like child abuse and neglect shouldn’t be taken lightly. Since we’re giving you the information I think it would be very useful if you used it to your max potential, and do as much as you can with the information as you possibly can, in every way that you can.” - *Student Participant*

For an electronic copy of this research report, the 6-page report, or the two-page summary, please visit: bit.ly/about-ocaps. For more information about OCAPS, please contact: Jeff Todahl (541) 346-0919; jtodahl@uoregon.edu

Please complete your answer to this statement: "I believe the best way to support children and reduce the negative experiences they have is to:"

Please just be willing to listen when they seek help.

Prevention and good counseling after it happens.

Have emotional outlets and people they can trust to talk to, TRUST is the most important part.

I feel like this survey is a really good place to start. First gather everything you can and once you have some statistics on the problem then you can start on fixing certain issues. I feel like it may be challenging to take it all down at once but if it's an organized approach and things are taken one by one then you can for sure "reduce the negative experiences they (children) have."

Thank you. Childhood abuse/trauma will likely affect me and a lot of adolescents I know, for the rest of our lives. It is nice to be validated and to know people are taking steps to help prevent this.

Is to talk about it often and to not make them feel as though they will be punished or looked down upon if they do have these experiences. Talking about it often and asking how children are doing outside of school and social activities will make them feel more open to the idea of talking about their emotions and troubles they have at home.

Be more aware of students' emotional health.

Have these surveys to help kids realize they need help. Having a less stressful environment for everyone.

I'm glad that we are being asked directly instead of getting this info from those older than us who might not fully understand our situations. Not to say that they don't, but getting it direct from the source is nice.

Is to make them feel normal and safe and having them know that they aren't alone. That they won't be treated differently just because they finally told the truth. We need to believe them, and work faster to get them out of these places.

I think this is a good start to better understanding what is going on in our community, and I hope it works.

Child abuse is all too normal ... if we can somehow make it normal to seek a therapist we could help support people in dealing with the negative effects of child abuse ... Kids that have been abused tend to grow up really fast. If you can help us understand that it's okay to be a kid and everything they've gone through isn't normal (let alone okay) then it could help.

Thank you for helping and caring for this cause, although I don't have to face any of these problems I know many people that do and I really appreciate what you guys are doing.

This was a good learning experience and really gets a person thinking about their life at home.

Thank you for all the go that you're trying to do for Oregon kids. You're needed and once again thank you.