

# OPINION

## GUEST VIEWPOINT

# Being a parent is a tough job, but help can bring success

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** *Fourth in a four-part series.*

By MEGAN SHULTZ

Some of most successful people I know are ecstatic if they have money in their bank account at the end of the month. You probably have never heard their names or their stories.

Some might not consider such people successes, but I guess it would depend on how you define success.

My definition is a personal one that is not found in Merriam Webster. I define success as "the achievement of an extraordinary goal."

I consider the 206 Lane County children whose parents last year fought against all odds to change their lives, change their habits and learn new skills so that their children could be returned to their care as successful people.

They are fortunate to live in a community that cares about children and understands that parenting is a tough job — one that does not come naturally.

Our community is blessed to have agencies such as the Relief

Nurseries, the Family Resource Centers, Birth To Three, Willamette Family Treatment and Healthy Start, to name a few, that have the exceptional staff and programs to intervene when parents reach out for help.

Success — which can involve acknowledging the isolation of parenting, understanding when the stress is overwhelming, facing a drug addiction, finding the strength to leave an abusive relationship or embracing new skills by accepting the help of others — takes an extraordinary effort.

Maya is a successful person. This 23-year-old mother of twins found herself caught in the chains of a meth addiction. She never knew her father.

Her mother was an addict, and Maya spent six years of her childhood moving in and out of foster care. By the time she was 17, she was pregnant and on a fast track toward a downward spiral.

Her newborn babies tested positive for meth, and a state caseworker was called to place the twins in foster care. This was a wake-up call for Maya, and she answered it.

The "troops" — that is, the

court, the state Department of Human Services' Child Welfare division, treatment providers, parent educators, a Court Appointed Special Advocates volunteer, medical providers and a dedicated set of foster parents — rallied around Maya and her twins.

This was not an easy journey. There were setbacks, tears and frustrations for all involved, but Maya persevered and kept focused. She beat all the odds and achieved her extraordinary goals.

Her children were returned to her care. She has been clean for three years and is now enrolled in college.

Success stories such as Maya's require the achievement of extraordinary goals by more people than the parent alone.

Service organizations such as our local Rotary clubs, the Eugene Active 20-30 Club and the Junior League of Eugene have raised money and volunteered countless hours to support programs such as the ones Maya and her daughters accessed.

Year after year, the business community has stepped up to the plate to ensure local

programs such as CASA, Kids' FIRST, Relief Nursery and Healthy Start can work towards meeting the high demand for their services.

Local family foundations are helping to open more classroom slots, treatment beds and counseling services.

Thousands of people from our community have volunteered countless hours to lend a hand.

There are also many ways to help. Prevent Child Abuse America suggests:

- ◆ Be a nurturing parent. Children need to know that they are special, loved and capable of following their dreams.

- ◆ Help a friend, neighbor or relative. Being a parent isn't easy. Offer a helping hand to give parents a much-needed break.

- ◆ Help yourself. When the big and little problems of your everyday life pile up to the point you feel overwhelmed or out of control, take a break.

- ◆ Learn what to do when your baby cries. It can be frustrating when your baby won't stop crying. Never shake a baby. Shaking a child may result in severe injury or death. Call the

Parent Helpline at 541-485-521.

- ◆ Get involved. Ask community leaders, clergy, library and schools to develop and invest in services to meet the needs of children and families.

- ◆ Volunteer with a local child abuse prevention program. For information about local volunteer opportunities, go to [www.211Lane.org](http://www.211Lane.org) or call United Way 541-741-6000.

- ◆ Report suspected abuse or neglect. If you have reason to believe a child has been, or may be, harmed call the local Child Welfare Office at 541-686-7555 or your local law enforcement unit.

Be a part of the solution. Be a part of the success. We can all do something. Our children are counting on us. Please choose to do something today.

*Megan Shultz, has been the executive director of Court Appointed Special Advocates since 2000. She is the former president of the Oregon CASA Director's Network and recently chaired the Foster Care Safety Team for the Child Welfare Division of the Oregon Department of Human Services.*