



# Protect Our Children



February 2023

## Mobilizing Oregon Communities to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse: A 7-year Impact Report

### The Problem of Child Sexual Abuse in Oregon

Child sexual abuse is a common problem in all Oregon communities. Among high school students who participated in the Oregon Child Abuse Prevalence Study, 29% experienced at least one type of child sexual abuse, and 14% experienced three or more types. In fact, **among the 10,000+ Protect Our Children participants representing Oregonians from nearly every corner of our state, 33% identified as survivors of child sexual abuse.**

Consequently, as it stands today, many child and adult Oregon survivors silently endure trauma and its aftermath. Protect Our Children works to upend this cultural norm by directly discussing sexual trauma and by providing hopeful and practical strategies for protection and social change. The evidence-based, adult-focused curriculum available in both English and Spanish, Stewards of Children training by Darkness to Light, was used for training by Protect Our Children sites.

Beginning in 2015, The Ford Family Foundation invested in the movement to end child sexual abuse through Protect Our Children. Protect Our Children is a community-based training program aimed at increasing knowledge about child sexual abuse and promoting pro-prevention attitudes and prevention behaviors. A statewide coordinator overseeing program implementation, 17 partner sites and a coordinated learning community have championed this effort in rural Oregon and Siskiyou County, California. A developmental evaluation approach allowed the team to learn and adapt to needs identified by the collaborative of statewide partners. Protect Our Children is now at a pivotal point in its evolution as it grows into a standalone program.

This report details the overall impact of Protect Our Children's first seven years as a program of The Ford Family Foundation. In addition to measuring individual level impact, this evaluation documents systems-level changes in rural Oregon and Siskiyou County's movement to end child sexual abuse.

# Key Findings

These key findings include information drawn from over 10,000 pre- and post-surveys, follow-up surveys with 425 selected participants cross-compared with 457 randomly selected Oregonians, focus groups, and focus groups and surveys with partner site representatives. Data were between September 2015 and June 2022.

## Knowledge and Awareness Increases

- Participants show increased knowledge and awareness of child sexual abuse and how they can prevent it, even up to 18 months after their initial training.

### Hopefulness

**that child sexual abuse can be reduced** increased by more than two times.

### Belief

**that child abuse is preventable** increased by three times.

### Knowing what to do

**to prevent child sexual abuse** increased by more than five times.

### At least 66,000

**new child sexual abuse prevention actions** were taken in 12 months.

## Changes in Attitudes and Beliefs

- Protect Our Children participants are not only more aware of child sexual abuse, they are more hopeful about the possibility that it can be prevented.
- Changes in attitudes were persistent, enduring for at least 18 months following the training.
- Participants believe their community has a plan in place to prevent child sexual abuse
- Protect Our Children Participants Reported Increased Confidence for Action-Taking
- Both Protect Our Children participants and randomly selected Oregonians feel a person has a responsibility to contribute to solutions.

**It's a hard topic, a dark subject. But it has been brought to a new level of understanding. A lot of people want to get involved . . . figure out what they can do to keep children safe.**

**PROTECT OUR CHILDREN FACILITATOR**



**The issue of child sexual abuse prevention is so much bigger than The Ford Family Foundation or one individual community – this is a statewide movement to advocate for the most vulnerable children.**

**KEAVY COOK**, Director, Children, Youth and Families, The Ford Family Foundation



## Participants Take Action

- Participants were much more likely to look for signs of child sexual abuse and many additional protective behaviors – and these changes persisted for at least 18 months following the training.
- Protect Our Children participants take many more prevention actions than randomly selected Oregonians.
- Participants in qualitative interviews overwhelmingly encourage parents and community members to open up channels of conversation about sexual abuse and its prevention with kids.

## Organization and Community Change

- Protect Our Children bolsters rural organizational reputation, networks and opportunities
- Protect Our Children is impacting long-held community norms, including the “culture of silence.”
- Community building among partner sites resulted in a stronger statewide network of advocates and also positions Protect Our Children for growth and long-term sustainability.

**Protect Our Children is fostering community-level norms change,** including opening new conversations that counter the long-standing culture of silence.

**Every day I’m inspired and encouraged by the commitment, compassion, and determination of Protect Our Children partners. They’re relentless.**

**MARY RATLIFF**  
Project Director  
Protect Our Children



## The future of Oregon's child sexual abuse prevention movement

The state of child sexual abuse prevention in Oregon has substantively evolved since 2014 directly due to The Ford Family Foundation's leadership, the Protect Our Children system of prevention, and distributed site-level implementation. This work has generated a new level of enthusiasm and optimism for child abuse prevention across Oregon, a large body of community members eager to support its growth, new layers of infrastructure that allow for expansion, and evidence that child abuse prevention is effective. Nearly 40,000 Oregonians have been trained in Stewards of Children through Protect Our Children.

**Protect Our Children participating organizations have increased their profile in their communities** and, in many, the array of prevention services provided and organization identity.

In December of 2021, Protect Our Children began to take on new life when the program transitioned from The Ford Family Foundation to the Tides Center, an organization that serves as fiscal sponsor to a variety of projects for social good. Informed by deep listening with partner sites and in response their aspirations and needs, this transition came at a pivotal point in the program's development. Protect Our Children, as an independent project, continues to be led by the same trusted Oregon leader and is forming an advisory board, budget and governance structure that will allow the movement and the partner sites across the state to flourish. With the broad support of committed advocates across Oregon, Protect Our Children is positioned to expand its impact in the years to come. As you reflect on the powerful findings in this evaluation report, consider how you and your organization can join the movement to prevent child sexual abuse in Oregon.

The Protect Our Children co-learning network, supported by intentional infrastructure support, **has been instrumental in movement-building, growth, and the likelihood of long-term sustainability.**

**The statewide ecosystem of partners that now exist as a result of Protect Our Children is a powerful tool for advocacy and the protection of the most vulnerable residents of our state.**

**ANNE KUBISCH**

President, The Ford Family Foundation



See a full list of  
**Protect Our Children sites,  
resources and more at**  
[www.ProtectOurChildren.org](http://www.ProtectOurChildren.org)