



## Oregon's Juvenile Firesetter Intervention Program success through partnership

**Program history** The Oregon State Legislature dedicated funding to establish a continuum of care for firesetters and their families in July of 1989. This funding allocation resulted from a proposal written by the Oregon Juvenile Firesetter Task Force under the guidance of the State Fire Marshal. The proposal sought to 1) develop and implement new prevention education programs and tools for children and their parents/caregivers; 2) develop treatment models and facilitate community intervention programs for problem firesetters and their families; and 3) develop socialization program packages for “at risk” children.

The wisdom of the Oregon legislature in dedicating personnel at the state level to address the child and adolescent firesetter problem has served the citizens of Oregon well. Leadership provided at the state level resulted in cost-effective intervention resources for local fire departments, the establishment of social service and public safety agency partnerships, service-oriented public safety strategies to meet the changing needs of communities and the ability to identify trends in juvenile arson.

**We frequently get asked to describe the Oregon program.** The Office of State Fire Marshal (OSFM) has followed a community-based fire prevention model. Each county defines their unique child-set fire problem and develops their own mission statement and short and long term goals to solve the problem. Multi-disciplinary teams have been established to work with firesetters in twenty-four of Oregon's thirty-six counties in the last decade. These teams are composed of fire service personnel, law enforcement officers, district attorneys, juvenile court counselors, child welfare workers, mental health providers, educators and members of the insurance industry.

**What specific services does the Office of State Fire Marshal provide to local community programs?** In Oregon, state services fall into five broad categories:

- information services
- technical assistance/partnering
- training
- research and development
- communication.

**Information Services** OSFM maintains a statewide fire reporting system which was expanded to include information about juvenile-set fires. The data help local communities address the extent of their fire problem, helping policy makers, social service and public safety agencies direct resources to serve child firesetters and their families more efficiently.

OSFM serves as a clearinghouse for the latest literature and program materials related to juvenile firesetter prevention and intervention. In an era of shrinking public resources, OSFM's centralized lending library allows local communities to access materials without impacting their own limited budgets.

OSFM provides a referral service which links parents of children at risk for firesetting with interventionists and mental health professionals in their local area. OSFM is dedicated to bringing customers and the agency whose services are most appropriate to their needs together.

**Technical Assistance and Partnering** Local groups seeking to organize multi-disciplinary networks benefit from OSFM staffs' expertise in facilitation and outreach. By developing a better understanding among agencies of their roles and responsibilities, more standardized protocols have been formulated which have increased the consistency and quality of firesetter intervention. Through partnering, our state fire marshal deputies have been involved in local firesetter problems, bringing with them professional tools and skills to identify the juvenile firesetter and direct them into appropriate intervention programs.

Staff also provide clerical support, graphic design and publishing skills to the networks to help them implement their short term projects, including the distribution of directories. OSFM staff provide trainings to community partners. Staff uses focus groups to develop training programs to identify, screen and assess the severity of a child's or adolescent's firesetting behavior. Training programs have been delivered to the fire service, foster parent organizations, juvenile departments and treatment providers in cost-effective ways.

OSFM works cooperatively with other organizations to sponsor statewide juvenile firesetter trainings and participates in training on the national level.

**Research and Development** OSFM chairs a treatment strategies task force which develops assessment and treatment models for troubled firesetters and youth referred or adjudicated on arson charges. This group has served to expand placement opportunities for firesetters in residential treatment and foster care homes.

OSFM supports the development of new prevention education programs and intervention tools through its public education grant program. Firesetter interventionists in the field have been a fertile source for new ideas and, with help from the staff at OSFM, the ideas have been packaged and distributed to other networks. Gaps in services to juvenile firesetters have been reduced due to the sharing of prevention and intervention resources.

**Communication** OSFM establishes links with local, state and national programs dealing with at-risk youth involved with firesetting through the publication of its national newsletter, Hot Issues and its monthly communique, NET.Works. This linkage between state and national groups gives local communities access to the latest resources in prevention, intervention and treatment programs from across the country.

OSFM coordinates the activities of networks across the state through a Juvenile Firesetter Advisory Group. This group helps write the strategic plan for firesetter intervention in Oregon. OSFM supports federal initiatives regarding child-resistant lighters and keeps groups informed of federal and local initiatives that impact services for children and families.

In the past ten years the Office of State Fire Marshal has brought together leaders in juvenile issues and helped guide them to statewide solutions that, in the end, help local communities in their battle against juvenile-set fires. To celebrate this achievement, OSFM hosted a national conference which showcased the best practices in juvenile firesetter intervention from Oregon and across the country.