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Plan to promote youths' interests

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September 21, 2007 12:15 am

Henderson County residents are invited to voice their opinions about how to best address the safety, health and education of the county's children.

Next month, the county plans to hold Speak Out for Kids, an all-day event to plan how to address the needs of the area's children. Organizers want to recruit more than 300 people from different geographic, ethnic, age and socio-economic backgrounds to contribute ideas.

"Measuring the health, safety and education of children can tell you how well and how successful and how vibrant your community is," said Maureen Adams, executive director of the Children and Family Resource Center.

The event is put on by the United Agenda for Children, a coalition of more than 40 civic leaders, businesses and government and community agencies in Henderson County.

The Speak Out event is part of a three-year process to address children's issues. Organizers say the project is the most comprehensive and synchronized child-focused initiative attempted in Henderson County.

"Aside from good data, which had been happening before, it really engages a broader spectrum of the community," Adams said.

She said recommendations for improving children's well-being had been made in the past but lacked the resources to make any real changes.

"This needs to be a plan that is developed by the citizens of Henderson County, that the citizens of Henderson County buy into and then helps me and my

colleagues to direct the resources of the county and the community,” said Henderson County Commissioner Chuck McGrady.

Participants will be asked to address questions about county children’s well-being, based on their own experiences and data collected by the coalition. Keypads and large television screens will allow the group to see participants’ reactions and ideas immediately.

After the meeting, action teams will develop ways to implement the recommendations and measure their results.

Organizers said the event is the first of its kind in Western North Carolina.

“I hope that it will become a part of the way we check the health of our community every few years,” Adams said.