

Oct 19, 2007

Children deserve our best efforts

If children are indeed our future, then the Speak Out for Kids event Saturday at North Henderson High School ought to be overflowing with eager participants. Sponsored by the United Agenda for Children, the event is an effort to receive a wide cross section of opinions, concerns and ideas from Henderson County residents. Its goal is to help the county set priorities for addressing issues that stand in the way of ensuring all children are safe, healthy, well-educated and productive. Speak Out for Kids will begin at 8 a.m. Saturday and continue until 4 p.m. There's plenty to talk about. A report the United Agenda group assembled for the county found that almost one in four children under 18 in the county live in poverty. The number: more than 4,600. "Children who grow up poor are more likely to lack adequate food and clothing, live in poor housing, become victims of crime and violence and lack basic health care. Child poverty can also contribute to social, emotional and behavioral problems," the report said. Some problems cut across economic and social lines. Obesity among children at all income levels has risen steadily since the 1980s. So has the number of children suffering because of drug use by adults. The number of children in the custody of the Department of Social Services increased 143 percent between 2001 and 2006. During 2005, 43 percent of those children came from homes where meth sales or use was occurring. "Our children can only learn well and live well when they live in a safe environment," Joe Johnson, director of public affairs for the Sheriff's Office and a Leadership Team member for the Speak out for Kids program, wrote in a recent guest column. "That safety must stretch from their homes to their schools to their places of worship, throughout their neighborhoods and indeed, throughout Henderson County." Figuring out how to ensure that safety is one goal of the

Speak Out session. Officials with United Agenda for Children have been asking people who want to participate to register. They said Thursday they are nearing their goal of 300 participants. That's good news, and an encouraging sign that Henderson County's compassion is combining with its can-do spirit to tackle a problem. But there is still room for more people. You can still register today by contacting the Children and Family Resource Center at 698-0674 or going by their office at 851 Case St. off Upward Road. Walk-ins Saturday morning will also be accepted. The more participants, the better the cross section and the better the final plan will be. This is not just a big committee meeting. Participants, including some teenagers, will identify problems, rank them by urgency and begin work on solutions. The better we are at rescuing at-risk children now, the better our whole community will be years from now.

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