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Residents urged to "Speak Out for Kids"



Maureen Adams speaks about children's health, safety and education. MIKE DIRKS/TIMES-NEWS

By Jennie Giles

Times-News Staff Writer

Political, educational and health leaders gathered Thursday to urge residents of Henderson County to attend a day in October to "Speak Out for Kids." "A community is measured by the health, safety and education of its children," said Maureen Adams, project director for the United Agenda for Children and director of the Children and Family Resource Center.

Residents from all geographic regions of the county, of every age, ethnic group and socio-economic class are needed to compile the needs of the county's children and work on ways to address those needs, Adams said.

A panel of community leaders and health officials announced the upcoming day to set community priorities concerning children and teens.

The Speak Out for Kids day of the United Agenda for Children will be from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Oct. 20 at North Henderson High School.

Developing strategy

All agencies in the county have completed needs assessments and studies in anticipation of the community conference, Adams said.

Now, input is needed from the community at large.

"We want to engage a broader spectrum of the community," Adams said. "Our goal is to have 300

people representing every geographic region, age, ethnic group and socio-economic class at the gathering.

"Ordinary people giving good information can make good decisions about themselves and their families," she said.

After the conference, teams will be formed to develop strategies and implement the recommendations.

Improving lives

"We need a plan that looks at children's issues," County Commissioner Chuck McGrady said. "We need a unified plan, developed by the citizens of Henderson County, that they buy into, to direct our resources toward those needs."

A lot needs to be done in the county to improve children's health, safety and education, he said.

"We hope Oct. 20 will give us a real tangible starting point," McGrady said.

"We will never regret what we do for our children," said Stephen Page, the Henderson County Schools superintendent. "I look forward to all the people in the community, from the grassroots level, coming forward. And, if we're smart, we will listen to what they have to say."

Everybody's input matters, said Joe Johnson, public information officer with the Henderson County Sheriff's Office.

"We need input to make a positive change in Henderson County," Johnson said.

Dr. Paul Trani, pediatrician with Blue Ridge Community Health Center, called the event "a great opportunity to get families in to be heard."

Community gathering

Leaders of agencies and other community leaders will be observers at the conference. Participants are the people of the community, said Shea Henson, executive director of Smart Start in Henderson County.

"These folks (leaders) are coming to listen to the people talk," she said.

Child care will be provided Oct. 20 at the conference, as will meals. Tables will be set up providing bilingual interpretation.

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