

Resource fair turnout highlights caring community

2-1-1 links helpers to those in need

By **JULIE RAEFIELD-GOBBO**
News staff writer

Hood River may appear tiny in population, but its small size apparently does not translate into small thinking.

On March 8 more than 160 community members joined together with more than 40 organization representatives for a resource fair — designed to create a more effective safety net of help for the community.

If that isn't thinking big it would be hard to know what else might qualify.

"It's an important thing to know the resources of a community if you are helping people," said Kathy Smith, program specialist with the Hood River County Commission on Children and Families, which sponsored the half-day event.

Joella Dethman, HRCCCF director, exceeded the day which was held in the youth center at Hood River Alliance Church. The 200-plus attendees were given a chance to meet each other and exchange information on available community resources and where to find them.

As a portion of the day geared to fill in information gaps, the crowd was treated to a live role-play of the new 2-1-1 phone resource and referral system now operational in the county.

Not everyone in the room was yet aware that the service is free and already up and running.

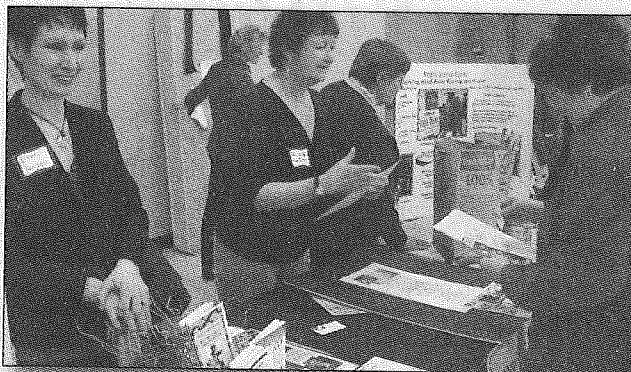


Photo by Julie Raefield-Gobbo

MARSA ROUTSON (right) of Columbia Gorge Pregnancy Resource Center gathers pamphlets and asks questions about the Hood River-based "Life Skills" program. Pamela Hughes (left) and Adi Hodges (center) provide guidance and information to Routson and many other Resource Fair event attendees.

By dialing the help-line or visiting the 2-1-1 website, individuals and families can speak with a live operator who assesses the needs of the caller and provides referrals to local agencies and nonprofits who can help.

The phone service will soon be available statewide, but Hood River is one of the early subscribers and test areas.

"We had a goal to have local human services people learn about the 2-1-1 system, and to connect face-to-face with the diversity of services available in the county," Smith said.

"It was an amazing turnout," she added. "Normally you can expect 10-20 percent no-shows from your registrations. We have more people show up than registered. We had 100 percent attendance."

In fact, there were representatives from law enforce-

ment, fire and emergency services, the school district, the hospital, medical clinics, child care providers, food and shelter organizations, doctors, dentists, counselors, the library and many others. It would be hard to find anyone in the helping professions who were not in attendance.

The event also gave the numerous nonprofit organizations a chance to add their name and help services to the 2-1-1 system operators if they were not yet on the database.

This year's resource fair was the first in the county since 2008.

"People really stepped up and got the information out," Smith said. "Alliance Church was an awesome partner by sharing their meeting space with us."

"Overall, it was an amazing turnout, which says a lot about Hood River."