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Mentors aim to help youth

Nonprofit group expands to Southern Oregon, bringing with it resources to guide local youngsters, develop community

BY SARAH LEMON
Mail Tribune

Expansion of a Portland nonprofit group to Medford brings free training, recruiting and networking to local youth programs and volunteers.

The Southern Oregon office of Oregon Mentors is the first phase of a multi-year plan to increase the depth of services statewide. With offices at 100 E. Main St., it will serve Jackson, Josephine, Klamath, Douglas, Coos and Curry counties. Oregon Mentors represents 130 youth programs in the state.

"It's really community development for youth in the area," said Lori Warfield, Oregon Mentors' new Southern Oregon manager.

Locally, adult and teen meth use and the area's large number of low-income families warrant more programs that mentor youth, Warfield said. The rising retiree population makes for a large recruitment pool, she added. Oregon Mentors' grant applications have cited these trends, she said.

A grant of \$142,000 from M.J. Murdock Charitable Trust of Vancouver, Wash., initially funds the Medford office of Oregon Mentors. Asante Health System donated office space and utilities.

Maintaining a satellite office is just one way Oregon Mentors streamlines the volunteer process, said Tom Cole, executive director of Kids Unlimited.

"I'm hoping this will be sort of a clearinghouse and make it easier for us," Cole said.

Oregon Mentors not only eases the time crunch small nonprofits suffer when recruiting volunteers but also ensures volunteers meet certain standards and pass criminal background checks, Warfield said. The 6-year-old organization aims to double the number of mentors in the state to 40,000 by 2010, said Executive Director Carolyn Becic.

The nuts and bolts of running a youth organization is the topic of Oregon Mentors' numerous free or low-cost training sessions, said Sandy Calta, volunteer services director for Girl Scouts of Winema Council. The online

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directory at www.ormentors.org routes would-be volunteers directly to member groups like Girl Scouts, Calta said.

Oregon Mentors also certifies members that attain certain standards, including: a statement of purpose and long-range plan, recruitment and monitoring process, ongoing training curriculum and program evaluation, plan for retention, system to screen mentor applicants and formal closure process.

In addition to Kids Unlimited and Girl Scouts, eight other local groups are certified with Oregon Mentors. They are: SMART, Boys to Men Northwest, Rogue Valley Manor's foster grandparent and lunch buddies programs, Youth for Christ's juvenile justice mentor program and ASPIRE chapters at South Medford, Ashland and Eagle Point high schools. AARP Money Management program and SODA Teens are uncertified, affiliate members.

Oregon Mentors partners with Mentor, a national group with a similar mission. Volunteers and nonprofit representatives can call the Southern Oregon office at 282-6223 for more information or e-mail lori@ormentors.org.

Reach reporter Sarah Lemon at 776-4487, or e-mail slemon@mailtribune.com.

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