

Circle of Friends brings out community partners

By Jodi Schneider McNamee
Correspondent

Circle of Friends hosted a packed clubhouse for their second annual open house January 28 at their headquarters on Hood Avenue.

Everyone in the community was invited to attend to learn about the mentoring program and about the ways that they can impact a child in Sisters community by becoming a mentor or friend.

"We just placed two new mentors with friends, which brings us up to around 24 mentors today. And we have eight to 10 children just waiting to be matched with a mentor," said Circle of Friends board vice-president Jan McGowan.

Board-member Ryan Moffat kicked off the special presentation at the open house:

"The heartbeat of this organization is to make a difference in the lives of kids, and the best asset to make that happen is people. The Circle of Friends slogan, which is the core of this organization, is now up on the wall, and was donated by mentor Victoria Graves, and put up by Beth Hanson."

"One person over time, can turn a life around."

Circle of Friends is in the midst of a new phase of growth surrounding the mentors and their friends. There are many opportunities within the community for partnerships between Circle and other groups.

Crystal Peaks Youth Ranch and the High Desert Museum are among the many partners that have teamed up with the organization to help it grow.

Sisters resident Debbie Newport had been a Circle of Friends board member for two years before stepping into the new position as part-time executive director to work alongside Beth Hanson.

"Coming into this role has been great," Newport said. "Kids have been the love of my entire life and my career as well, and finding work in this organization is just finding another way to keep moving in that direction. The different levels of relationships and these new strategic partnerships are part of what we'll be growing right along with the number of mentors and the number of kids we serve."

Hanson remembered when

Circle of Friends first started back in 2011.

"I'm excited about this new phase," she said. "We started with just a camping chair about four years ago. This has become my family, and I am glad Debbie has taken over a part of the work, so I can focus on our volunteers and our children and grow that. One year ago we moved here on Hood Avenue, and Victoria Graves helped bring our new space together with her painting the different rooms, and made our clubhouse look amazing."

Victoria Graves heard about Circle of Friends through her sister, Katy Yoder, Sisters Folk Festival development director. Graves became a mentor last May.

"This sounded like the type of organization that I wanted to be a part of," she said. "I am the mother of four boys so I've always dreamed of a granddaughter or a girl that I could mentor. And this was the perfect timing for me. I had a wonderful mentor when I was a kid, and I loved to garden, and so I gardened with my mentor every week. The lessons that I had learned from her, I still use and appreciate today, and that



PHOTO BY JODI SCHNEIDER MCNAMEE

Beth Hanson and Davina Luz of Circle of Friends in Sisters.

was decades ago. It was such a positive experience for me."

Rachel Shultz from Crystal Peaks was there in support of Circle of Friends as a community partner that provides learning activities for the mentors and their friends.

"There is such an opportunity to make an impact in our community, and we are making sure that these kids don't fall through the cracks," said Shultz. "Our hope at Crystal Peaks is that the kids will know that their value is not dependent on any of their

circumstances. My role is to do sessions with the kids, and we have open enrollment for any child. Some of the kids from Circle of Friends come here with their mentors and are paired with a Crystal Peaks leader. There are so many things they can get involved with, such as learning to garden or grooming a horse. We love to spend time with the kids and watch them come alive."

For more information, contact Circle of Friends at 541-588-6645.

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