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Resource center helps callers find 'needle in the haystack'

By David Brown
Of the Emerald

Switchboard is Eugene's information center, says Marie Fink, the non-profit organization's director.

To support her claim, she points to the 34,000 requests for information that Switchboard answered last year.

"We send people to the right place to look without running around town," Fink says.

Each Switchboard volunteer devotes four hours per week to answering the phones and searching Switchboard's resources to help people find the best music playing in town, a place to live, a job, an alternative school for the kids, legal assistance, or "just plain old community information," Fink says.

Switchboard volunteers often look for "the needle in the haystack," she adds, estimating that the organization answers

as many as 200 calls per day. "You're talking to a real person on the end of the phone... that's what makes Switchboard different..."

Mary Keenan, resource developer for Switchboard, recalls one case in which a woman was worried that her wood stove was a fire hazard. She was also distraught that their water and electricity had been turned off, and explained she was in need of a prescription which she could not afford.

Through three hours of phone calls, Keenan traced down someone who would clean the stove pipe free of charge, a minister who would donate \$90 to have the utilities restored, and a pharmacy which would donate the prescription, she says.

Switchboard offers other services, including a free ride share program for University students. They publish the Lane County

Human Service Directory and a phone directory of 865 small community groups operating in Lane County.

Three to five ESCAPE students each term receive University credits for working with Switchboard to update and develop their referral resources, train volunteers, write and design public service announcements and coordinate community projects.

Last summer's project was a downtown appearance of the Pickle Family Circus and a circus midway of fund-raising booths operated by non-profit organizations.

For its current fund raiser on Oct. 12, Switchboard will raffle off an unlimited-mileage airline ticket for two. The ticket is good within the continental United States for any 21-day period.


Switchboard's number is 686-8453. The Ride Share line is 345-7600.



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