

Groups offer benefits for Wallowa County families

Head Start, WIC and Healthy Families Oregon all there to help

By ANN BLOOM
For the Wallowa County Chieftain

ENTERPRISE — A trio of programs exist in Wallowa County to help families manage the hurdles of parenting without feeling as if they must go it alone, or know everything there is to know about being a parent.

Healthy Families

Linda Middaugh, family support specialist for Blue Mountain Healthy Families Oregon under the umbrella of Umatilla Morrow County Head Start, visits families with children prenatal to 3 years old. A referral is required and can come from a private individual, clinic, hospital, primary care provider, or other community partner. Middaugh explained that the screening helps families to identify what areas of parenting they would like to focus on during the home visits.

As a family support specialist, she can provide extra support to parents with day-to-day challenges and information about parenting and child development. She added that she answers all sorts of questions and wants parents to know, "It's OK to have questions."

The initial intake screening takes about 30-45 minutes and she said if the person decides the program isn't for them, then she can still refer them to other services.

With current coronavirus restrictions, Middaugh cannot do home visits, but she can meet families in an office or outside.

"If they decide the program isn't for them, we can still refer them for other services," she said.

The program is offered nationwide through Healthy Families, though not in every state. Healthy Families is a free and voluntary program.

During visits, Healthy Families promotes early learning through talking, singing, reading, and play-



Ann Bloom/For the Wallowa County Chieftain
From left to right are Noel Bayles, WIC certifier and family advocate for Wallowa and Union counties; Kris Fraser, head teacher for Umatilla-Morrow County Head Start; and Linda Middaugh, family support specialist for Healthy Families Oregon.

ing with your baby. Most of the activities require common household items and are at no extra cost for parents. If parents do not have the needed supplies for activities, Middaugh can provide parents with supplies. One of the primary goals with Healthy Families is to strengthen and cultivate positive parent-child relationships.

"If parents are curious at all and think they might benefit (from the program) give me a call. The purpose is to make sure we cover the things they're concerned about in parenting. We ask them what they want to focus on and what are their goals," she said.

To reach Middaugh, for more information, or to schedule an appointment, call 541-571-4968.

WIC

Women, Infants and Children is a federal program for pregnant women and children birth to 5 years old. Noel Bayles is the WIC certifier and family advocate for Wallowa and Union counties which includes Early Head Start. Early Head Start, through Building Healthy Families, is for ages six weeks to 3 years. Bayles has been in her position for eight months.

WIC provides nutritional education and supplemental food vouchers for pregnant and breastfeeding women, and children under the age of 5.

Screening for WIC, she said, involves, "a whole list of things." WIC considers "what family meal-time looks like, variety of foods, vitamins, smoke

in the home, whether the family has insurance, if family members are safe in the home. Most importantly, that families have continual support in all aspects of their family dynamics. My responsibility is to refer them to services and be a support person," she said.

WIC foods now include fresh, frozen and canned; there are fewer restrictions.

She said now it is more mainstream and there are "more options," and many more brands accepted. WIC is also accepted by some of the Wallowa County Farmer's Market vendors.

WIC participants get what is described as a "food package." It lists all the foods approved for their household which they can buy at the grocery store anywhere in the state of Oregon. A catalog style book exists which lists what is approved by WIC.

Bayles asks questions to best determine what the needs of the children and family members are to determine which foods would best support and supplement meals. She said a family's package can even be modified if a person in the qualifying family has a medical concern. She said there is also an app that can be downloaded to one's phone which will tell the person, simply by scanning a bar code, whether what they want to purchase is approved or not approved by WIC and will also tell them their remaining benefits.

WIC not only assists with nutrition counseling, but also breastfeeding education and assistance.

Referrals for WIC services come from a variety of sources including doctors, clinics and hospitals. She said it is easier to reach her on her office cell phone, or by text.

"It's important for families in Wallowa County to know that WIC days are Fridays," she said, from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. At this time people can come in, but most screenings are done over the phone due to COVID. The number to contact Bayles is 541-398-2397.

"I'm here to help, just give me a call," she said.

Head Start

The third program in the trio of services available to families is Umatilla-Morrow County Head Start. All programs are in the same building, off the Lewiston Highway, across the parking lot from Cloverleaf Hall.

Head Start is a federally funded program begun in 1961. It started in Wallowa County 31 years ago. There are two locations: Enterprise and Wallowa. According to Kris Fraser, head teacher, Head Start is a "free preschool program for children ages 3 to 5 years, who are low income or who have special needs."

Special needs can mean physical disabilities, mental, emotional or developmental challenges.

Head Start is quite interactive according to Fraser.

"We offer a lot of science, math, literacy, social studies, nutrition and social emotional activities. These are all hands-on learning, age-appropriate classroom activities," she said.

She added that Head Start works with parents to identify the strengths and needs of each child. Each child has his or her own goal to work on and the

goals are updated monthly.

The program works closely with parents on the education of their child.

"We work with parents to answer their questions about what's developmentally appropriate. We provide prosocial guidance," she said, which includes learning to take turns, lining up and following directions.

Head Start offers a hybrid model. This means there are two styles of classes to choose from — a half-day program or a longer day. The shorter day runs from 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. and is provided for younger children. Transportation is provided. The extended day program runs from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. and is intended for children 4 to 5 years old and is a program, "to prepare children for kindergarten," said Fraser.

Meals are included and are prepared using U.S. Department of Agriculture dietary guidelines. Head Start has a maximum of 10 students in each class. The program is currently accepting students for the 2021-22 school year.

"It's (Head Start) a great way for kids to start their in-school education," said Fraser.

For information on Head Start, call 541-426-4225.

Work crews do community service

By BILL BRADSHAW
Wallowa County Chieftain

JOSEPH — We often hear of people sentenced to "community service" for convictions of minor offenses. But just what does that look like?

On Saturday, Aug. 14, a crew of a half-dozen workers did their community service by helping clean up downtown Joseph and weeding the flower beds there.

"They're paying back the community," said Deputy Eric Madsen, of the Parole and Probation Division of Wallowa County Community Corrections, who was supervising the crew.

He said the work crew members aren't "hardened criminals," just people who "just made a bad choice" and the community service



Bill Bradshaw/Wallowa County Chieftain
Deputy Eric Madsen, of Wallowa County Parole and Probation, right, works alongside a work crew member doing community service Aug. 14, 2021, cleaning up downtown Joseph.

was their sentence.

Work crews help doing a variety of jobs around communities in the county. They can be found doing things like picking up trash along the highways and earlier this year helped rebuild the bleachers in the Wal-

lowa County Fairgrounds grandstand.

"We're not trying to demean them," Madsen said, as he got down on his knees working alongside a crew member.

Dennis Welch, Parks Department lead for Joseph,

said the labor of the work crew comes in particularly handy, as it's been difficult getting people to either volunteer or to take advantage of a paid job for which he has funds in his budget.

"We just can't get them" to come to work, he said. "Unemployment's just too good."

Welch said it's been about five years since he's had county work crews helping. At one point, several business owners complained about having "convicts" working outside their businesses, which he understands, but believes it shouldn't be a problem.

"I'm really glad they're back," Welch said. "I'm lacking employees and they really help."

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David Mildrexler, PhD
Systems Ecologist, Eastern Oregon Legacy Lands

David Mildrexler focuses on terrestrial systems science, global change biology, large landscape conservation, and the educational programs at Wallowa National History Discovery Center. He is a Wilburforce Fellow in Conservation Science and holds a PhD in Forest Ecosystems and Society from Oregon State University.

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