

Organizations team up to increase awareness

BY LOUIS MEDINA, staff writer for The Bakersfield Californian
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"There is a saying that when women and girls thrive, communities prosper," Judi McCarthy likes to say. "This is a saying that is common to a lot of women's funds throughout the U.S."

And the networking efforts this woman, who set out to improve the quality of life for women and girls in Kern County and, in her words, to "also teach women to be philanthropists where they live," are having an effect on the community's well-being.

McCarthy is the volunteer chairwoman of the Women's and Girls' Fund of Kern County, a growing special-interest endowment within the Kern Community Foundation. It will start awarding grants in 2008 to support Kern county nonprofits that serve women and girls.

The fund was established in 2005, McCarthy said, and "as I was talking to people to do community research, I kept hearing there are no mentoring programs for women." McCarthy didn't believe it.

So she started convening what she calls "mentoring round tables" to bring together organizations from throughout Kern that offer mentoring services primarily to women and girls -- although many of these agencies also serve children, families and men as well.

McCarthy organized the first such half-day networking event in Bakersfield in August and another in February. Each time, scores of representatives from social service organizations came together to share:

- Agencies offering certain services but lacking others started working together and referring clients to one another.
- Individuals who were trying to effect change by themselves in their communities realized they could accomplish more by working with already existing agencies.
- In a fast-moving ripple effect, round-table attendee Nancy Puckett, program coordinator for the Kern River Valley Collaborative/Family Resource Center, shared the mentoring round-table model among agencies in her part of the county that serves Lake Isabella, Kernville, Wofford Heights, Bodfish, Weldon and Onyx.

The spillover potential of McCarthy's brainchild is enormous. With an emphasis on mentoring and raising awareness about how many social service providers there are, the Vision Committee of the Women's and Girls' Fund has compiled a resource list. The list is not all-inclusive but it offers a broad range of mentoring services available in Kern County.

To learn more about the Women's and Girls' Fund, visit www.kernfoundation.org, write to judi@lightspeedsystems.com or info@kernfoundation.org or call 325-5346.