

# Nonprofits help Jackson kids prep for school year

By Beth Lawrence

Some Jackson County students will start the school year off on the right foot thanks to the efforts of Mountain Projects and other local nonprofit organizations.

On Monday, Mountain Projects hosted a resource fair at its Sylva Office on Medical Park Loop for families of school-aged children. This is the first year the organization has held its own resource fair.

The organizations provided hygiene items, food, services, information and education that families might need to help their children have a healthy happy school year.

The event is important, especially this year, to help families.

"I see how families struggle sometimes, the price of gas, the price of food and paychecks are not keeping up with it," said Patsy Davis, director of Mountain Projects. "And we know from firsthand experience with some of the families that we serve that a lot of times children don't have the ability to get the things that they need to have a great start to the school year. So, we want to help families any way we can to help those children have a great start." Organizations that participated were Legal Aid, Center for Domestic Peace, United Christian Ministries and others.

UCM brought its mobile food pantry to assist those who may be struggling with food insecurity.

Balsam Mountain Preserve collected funds to purchase toothbrushes, hairbrushes, combs, soap and other personal care items to give to kids.

Appalachian Mountain Community Health Center was also on hand.

"We invited every nonprofit I could think of in Jackson County," Davis said.

Jackson County Public Schools participated by referring families in need to event organizers.

Several hairdressers and barbers offered free haircuts.

However, the most important thing the event might have had to offer was shoes.

Mountain Projects worked with N.C. Community Action Association and the international nonprofit Samaritans Feet to obtain shoes for children whose families might not have been able to afford a new pair of shoes for the school year.

Last Thursday, Samaritan's Feet delivered a truckload with 420 pounds, or 300 pairs of sneakers, to Mountain Projects.

The reserve is needed, Davis said, because she regularly hears from local kindergarten teachers who see children starting school without proper shoes.

Cris Weatherford, director of Jackson County Department of Social Services, arranged for a donation of socks to go along with the children's new shoes.



**United Christian Ministries volunteer Lara Hartley (left) was one of the members of local nonprofit organizations that turned out Monday for a resource fair hosted by Mountain Projects that offered supplies, services and advice to families with children ready to begin the new school year across Jackson County. Above, a volunteer tries new shoes on a young lady.**

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