



Help For Parents

Skamania Klickitat network offers many resources as guides to raising a family

By Jeanie Senior

It's hard to find anyone who thinks parenting is easy. Information and support for parents can help, which is the role of the Skamania Klickitat Community Network (SKCN).

Brightly colored flyers headlined "Parent Help," distributed by Johanna Roe—the network's parent program coordinator—include the toll-free number (866) 631-1997 to call for information about local classes, support groups, activities and resources.

The help is there, the flyer says, for "Moms & Dads, Grandparents, Relatives, Foster Parents, Teen Parents, Single Parents, Divorced

and Step Parents."

Johanna is an independent contractor who has held her position with SKCN since October.

"I'm kind of the conduit, sending out stuff, looking to see if there's more participation in classes and training," she says.

The Washington Legislature established community public health and safety networks across the state in the early 1990s. Neighboring Klickitat and Skamania counties joined forces to avoid duplication, says Johanna. The community group is affiliated with the Family Policy Council of Washington and Community Mobilization Against Substance Abuse.

Directed by its 23-member board of directors, the network's focus is on reducing child abuse and neglect, domestic violence and teen substance abuse.

Johanna says its mission "is to support and encourage the communities of Skamania and Klickitat counties to strengthen, educate and

empower children and families."

Charged with looking at all the related programs in place in the two counties and identifying where they're falling short, Johanna launched a study asking parents what issues they want to see addressed, and how they prefer to access the information, classes or programs.

"How can we help you—that's what we want to know," says Johanna. "There are so many different ways. Say you're up there in Centerville and you have no local place to go for information. So, how can we help you?"

Joking that her small station wagon is her traveling office—the back is crammed with brochures, books and pamphlets—Johanna tries to post information about the network in as many places as possible. This spring, she had a booth at the Hugs Fair, an annual community health and safety fair in White Salmon. Hugs stands for "Help Us Grow Safely."

Johanna has convinced local schools to cooperate by including information about the network in school bulletins “so more and more parents are becoming aware of what’s out there.”

The Klickitat County Health Department, which is the umbrella agency for SKCN, sponsors classes in Goldendale and White Salmon, including annual sessions of Make Parenting a Pleasure—a 12-week class focused on children up to 9 years old. It deals with subjects as relevant and diverse as stress management, how to communicate and what to expect as children age.

Johanna says that includes “the development marks they’re going to hit and how best to deal with them.”

“There’s a lot of information now on how young brains develop, how the development increases through nutrition, turning off the TV for more positive education stuff,” she says. “So when kids start school they’re ready. There are opportunities for health care and new early-learning programs. The earlier we start working with kids and parents, the less problems later on as the kid goes through school.”

The network’s assistance is offered, not ordered.

“For many people there’s still kind of the assumption, ‘I don’t need anybody to tell me how to raise kids. I’m going to raise the child the way I was raised and I turned out OK,’” Johanna says.

“But there are more pressures now. So many more opportunities for negative stuff happening. And rural areas have as many negative opportunities as inner cities do. I think parents sometimes get overwhelmed. The media feeds fears. Every stranger is a bad guy, every person you see is going to harm kids.”

Johanna says parents can find a lot of re-



Above, Coordinator Johanna Roe, left, meets with Jyl Bosone, center, and Deidre Duffy in a planning session for the Skamania Klickitat Community Network parenting program. Below, Johanna packs boxes of brochures and other information into her “traveling office.” Opposite page, Johanna refers to a parenting book, one of many resources available through the network.

sources at local libraries and online.

The network’s Web site—<http://community.gorge.net/skcn-parentsupport/>—is designed for both parents and providers of parenting resources in the two counties. It lists classes and support groups, the information available in the SKFN’s own library, and includes ideas for inexpensive family outings in the Gorge.

“I don’t think there’s a real lack of information,” Johanna says. “What I think is happening is the message somehow isn’t getting out. Somehow, working through that perception that ‘I don’t need any help,’ or ‘I can’t access help because I don’t have technology’ seems to be a barrier for a lot of parents.”

“There’s a big upswing in different parental units. We’ve got a lot

of grandparents raising grandchildren, for example. There are a lot of resources available for grandparents that grandparents may not know about, and courts are finding that it’s better for kids to be placed with relatives instead of going to strangers.”

Johanna urges people interested in the network to call the Klickitat County Health Department and talk to Deidre Duffy or Jyl Bosone about becoming a board member.

“We’re hoping to get more members who aren’t associated with providers or programs,” she says. “We would love to have more folks from the community be more active.”

Johanna, a longtime Gorge resident, knows about the demands of parenting. She and her husband, Bob—a landscaping and irrigation contractor—have three sons: Kisdon, Cabot and Coulter.

Johanna earned a degree in horticulture from the University of Maine. Before taking her current position, she spent 10 years as the nursery manager at the Columbia Gorge Center in Hood River.

Her new job with the Skamania Klickitat Community Network “is a different kind of nurturing,” she says with a smile. ■

