



December 14, 2009

Nonprofit Hands in the Community seeks to aid people in need

BY MARIA G. ORTIZ-BRIONES

mortizbrio@visalia.gannett.com

For 11 months, the organization Hands in the Community has lived up to its motto: "Uniting the hand of the helper to the hand of those in need."

The faith-based, nonprofit organization connects services and resources with those who need them, working with existing organizations as well as volunteers, said Lester Moon, founder and executive director.

"There is always going to be people in need," Moon said. "We meet the needs the best we can."

Moon said he came up with the concept in February 2008. It took him about 10 months to develop a business plan.

When Hands in the Community opened its doors Jan. 5, Moon said, there was only one volunteer — him. By the end of February, the nonprofit organization had 259. It now has more than 700 volunteers, including office workers.

One of the volunteers is Nick Klapp, who started two weeks after the organization opened its doors.

"I always felt it was a good ministry to be involved with," said Klapp, who volunteers once a week for three hours.

The nonprofit held a Tuesday open house celebration as a way to thank those who donate their time to help those in need.

Audrey Rocha donates three hours a week answering phones. She has been volunteering for six months.

"I feel like I am doing something for the Lord," Rocha said. "I don't have a lot of resources, so I volunteer my time."

Among those benefiting from the program is Kris Watson, 58, of Visalia. In October, Hands in the Community connected her with a First Christian Reform Church youth group that helped her finish a 35-by-70-foot space that will be used for a vegetable and fruit garden.

The volunteers took out some trees, dug out the stumps and cleaned up the leaves and small branches.

"They came and did more than what I was expecting," Watson said. "It was a demonstration of God's love."

The act of kindness motivated Watson to volunteering her own time to the organization.

"Sometimes you don't get a lot of money to help people. The best thing you have is your time," Watson said. "What I get from it is a chance to help other people."

Since the organization receives no grants or federal funding, Moon said, it subsists on donations from individuals, businesses, churches and service clubs.

"This is my community and your community. What are we doing to make it better?" Moon said. "That is what Hands in Community is about."

Additional Facts

How to help

To volunteer or learn more about Hands in the Community, visit www.hnconline.org or send e-mail to HNCVisalia@yahoo.com.
