

CHARLEVOIX

Workshop connects families with services and support

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News-Review writer

Families from all over Northern Michigan gathered recently in Charlevoix for a free workshop titled "Follow the yellow brick road, the road to great parenting."

Sponsored by the local Great Start Collaborative and Child Care Connections, the workshop took place Saturday, March 12, at the Community Reformed Church in Charlevoix.

"The primary goal of the workshop was to expose families to knowledge regarding resources that are available in their areas," said Sommer Poquette, director of the collaborative.

"Many people are unaware of many really great resources they could be taking advantage of in their towns."

The keynote speaker at the conference was Matt Jones, whose topic "If I only had a heart" was one of nine different classes offered throughout the day. The event also offered an expo

featuring several local area family-related businesses as well as a free lunch between classes.

In addition, the Northwest Michigan Health Department offered free on-site vaccinations for flu, pneumonia, HPV and tetanus/diphtheria/pertussis.

"We really want to let people know that we can be a one-stop shop for parents across the region for all their early childhood and family needs," said Poquette.

"We work to connect families with similar needs to each other for support as well as linking them with area providers that may be able to assist them."

Shawn-Dell Stenson attended the workshop with her daughter, Zoey, and sons, Aiden and Kaiden.

"My family has been very involved with the resources Great Start offers," she said. "The collaborative offers assistance with everything from learning about becoming a better parent to help with credit and assistance buying a home."

"The people at Great Start will sit down with you and identify your needs, whether

it's budgeting help or home weatherization or even credit repair," Stenson said. "They truly help people out of the situation they're in and give them the tools to improve further on their own."

The Great Start Collaborative works with families having children from birth to 5 years of age and acts in a support capacity for basic needs.

"Our primary goals are to care for early childhood physical, social and emotional health as well as assisting with basic family needs when possible," Poquette said.

Great Start works with children and their families from birth to school age to support them in growth and preparation for education.

There are 55 different collaboratives across Michigan covering all of the counties. This region encompasses Charlevoix, Emmet and northern Antrim county.

Another workshop attendee, Beth Watts, also volunteers with the Great Start Parent Coalition. Watts expressed how important it is for workshops like this



COURTESY PHOTO/MARK LINDSAY

Shawn Dell Stenson and her children, Aiden, Kaiden and Zoey, attend the parenting workshop in Charlevoix on Saturday.

one to be supported to open the eyes of local families to the resources around them in their community.

"I think that some families might overlook some great opportunities just because they don't know they exist," she said.

The Great Start Parent Coalition is made up of parents, grandparents and caregivers throughout the region. They work to build public support and good will and host activities locally to encourage families and providers to connect.

For more information on Michigan's Great Start Collaboratives visit www.greatstartforkids.com, visit on Facebook, or call (231) 582-8070. For information on immunizations, contact the health department at (231) 547-0295.