



News Coverage

Mohawk Trail and Hawlemont Regional School Districts
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[Mary Lyon Foundation connects students, families with resources](#)

By [MADISON SCHOFIELD](#), Staff Writer Published: 11-5-2024 1:26 PM

SHELBURNE FALLS — Living in Franklin County, a helping hand is never far from reach, and to highlight just how close some of those hands are, the Mary Lyon Foundation held its second annual West County Community Resource Fair on Wednesday.

There are so many great organizations in the region offering help with housing, food security, health care and more, according to Kristen Tillona-Baker, the foundation's executive director. The Mary Lyon Foundation was created in 1990 with goal of supporting students so they can thrive academically. Connecting students and their families with resources that can meet their needs helps ensure students are set up for success in the classroom.

Tillona-Baker said the resource fair was a way to connect students, parents and community members with resources in an environment they already knew and felt comfortable with: Mohawk Trail Regional School. Resources ranged from food pantries, to free legal aid, even a traveling van of doctors.

Trailside Health is a non-profit health center based in Shelburne Falls, but its nurses and doctors travel and make house calls upon request.

"We love doing it. We're here for the patients that hate doctors," said Summer Silverman. Services include family medicine, mental health and substance abuse services, specialty medicine and limited surgeries.

The goal is to get health care to people who need it, but cannot afford it, cannot reach it or just find doctors' offices sterile and unwelcoming, said Dr. Stefan Topolski.

The Mary Lyon Foundation's very own Caring is Sharing Clothing Closet, which is located in the school, was open and offering access to clothing and toiletries.

The Hilltown Churches Food Pantry in Ashfield and the Shelburne Falls community fridge and pantry were on display, highlighting efforts to fight food insecurity and providing the community with access to fresh, local food.

Supporting that work is also the Franklin Community Co-op, which has stores in Greenfield and Shelburne Falls, and offers affordable foods from local farms.

"Money spent here stays here," said Mary McClintock, the co-op's outreach coordinator. The co-op also offers a number of discount programs, like the working-member program that gives shoppers up to a 15% discount for volunteering with nonprofits in the area.

In addition to the hyper-local organizations, the resource fair highlighted groups that work regionally across Franklin County and western Massachusetts.

Community Legal Aid serves low-income and elderly residents in Worcester County and all four western counties (Hampden, Hampshire, Franklin and Berkshire). According to staff attorney Julia Popkin, Community Legal Aid has a pro-bono program where private attorneys volunteer their time, as well as paid staff attorneys.

The organization can offer advice and potentially as much as full legal representation on a range of legal topics, including navigating the world of government benefits, eviction and housing discrimination, harassment prevention orders and more. As long as it is a civil matter and not a criminal case, the group has a lawyer who can help.

The organization has offices across western and central Massachusetts, and plans to open one in Greenfield.

The Franklin Regional Housing & Redevelopment Authority offers a variety of housing aid, including counseling and workshops for first-time home buyers and 0% loan programs to help homeowners modify their homes and add ramps, accessible showers and whatever is needed to make the home accessible for people with disabilities.

The housing authority also manages the Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT) Program, which can pay up to \$7,000 in emergency bills such as utilities, rent or mortgage payments before a power shut off, eviction or foreclosure.

“We want to prevent the crisis before it happens,” said Victoria Martin, senior RAFT administrator.

Other organizations present included Learn to Cope, the Shelburne Police and Emergency Management departments, the West County Council on Aging, The Literacy Project, the Center for Human Development, representatives from the Mohawk Trail and Hawlemont Regional school districts, 2 District 8 Town Steering Committee, the Mohawk Trail Regional School Student Council, the Arms Library, Big Brothers Big Sisters, Trinity Church, the Children’s Advocacy Center, Color of Joy Productions, the WIC (Women, Infants and Children) nutrition program, the Community Clothes Closet, the Communities That Care Coalition, the Franklin Regional Council of Governments, the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts, the Franklin Regional Transit Authority, the Greenfield Court Service Center, LifePath, the Opioid Task Force, Stone Soup Café, Greenfield Community College, and the office of state Rep. Natalie Blais.

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This article has been updated to accurately describe the services offered by Community Legal Aid and to share the full list of attending organizations.

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