

HELPING THOSE IN NEED

**Annual Project Homeless event has large turnout****By Andy Barrand**

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HILLSDALE — Pushing a double stroller through the crowd at the Hillsdale Free Methodist Church, Angela Burger took advantage of the Hillsdale County Project Homeless Connect. Burger was one of several mothers who attended the annual event along with other county residents.

The event, which is in its fifth year, brings together non-profit Hillsdale County agencies that assist those who are homeless or are in danger of becoming homeless. Burger, a proud mother, said this was the first time she had come to the event. She came to the event to help her family get by. She said her husband just recently started a job in Jackson and hasn't gotten paid yet. "This is a big help," she said. "It helps with the little things."

Burger took advantage of the children's clothes that were being given away by the Salvation Army. She chose to pick up an outfit or two for her children and a new coat for each. Burger's story could have been duplicated by any one of the families or individuals that attended. Kathy French, another mother of three, also took advantage of the free clothes. She has attended the event the last three years. Living on one income, she said the event helps her family. "With my husband being the only one working it is hard financially," said French. "It is a big help for us."

Hillsdale County residents began to line up at the church before noon Wednesday afternoon. The event normally draws around 200 people. Maxine Vanlerberg, Hillsdale County director of the Community Action Agency, said the event was well-attended. She said it was easy to tell how big of a need there is in the community by the amount of people waiting in line at the event.

Along with the ability to meet with a variety of different agencies, those in attendance had the opportunity for a free meal, haircut and free clothing. Representatives from King's Kupboard were also giving away laundry detergent and other necessities. The Hillsdale County Health Department offered free flu shots to children.

After receiving a free haircut, Gary Bumpus said he was grateful for the event. "Living on a fixed income it can be hard to make ends meet," he said. "It feels pretty good to have a haircut." Members of the Pittsford High School National Honor Society helped out with the event this year. Fourteen students took part. "It feels good to help, but at the same time it is an eye-opener," said Katie Saunders, a Pittsford High School junior. "Taking part in the event helps me appreciate what I have." She said she encouraged other National Honor Society members to take part in the event after attending last year.



**Kathy French and Raven Smoke look through piles of children's clothing during the fifth annual Hillsdale County Project Homeless Connect at the Hillsdale Free United Methodist Church Wednesday.**