

Battling health risks



WILL PINKSTON | The Sun

Joshua Williams (right), Graves County Agency for Substance Abuse Prevention board coordinator, leads a roundtable discussion next to Jennifer Morris, director of Farmington-Symsonia Family Resource Centers, and the Rev. Joe Hansen, pastor of Mayfield First United Methodist Church, on how to tackle substance abuse and smoking throughout the county during a health forum in Mayfield on Thursday. Multiple county education, advocacy and health groups coordinated to develop health task force groups.

Partnerships form to tackle Graves County health issues

BY WILL PINKSTON

wpinkston@paducahsun.com

MAYFIELD — The message from one community's health forum might be as simple as "choose your battles wisely."

While tackling every nega-

tive community health risk at one time can be insurmountable alone, a coalition of medical and community-based organizations hopes to focus on bringing down Graves County's top detrimental contenders.

Reviewing the findings of a Graves County Health Department community health needs assessment on Thursday, representatives from advocacy groups,

Please see **FORUM** | 3A

CONTINUED FROM 1A

educational leaders and health agencies gathered to discuss how the entities could pool resources to combat the worst community health risks.

The workshop-style atmosphere — led by Angela Carman, facilitator from the University of Kentucky College of Public Health, and Kentucky and Appalachia Public Health Training Center — highlighted concerns from the community health needs survey of 504 county residents in November.

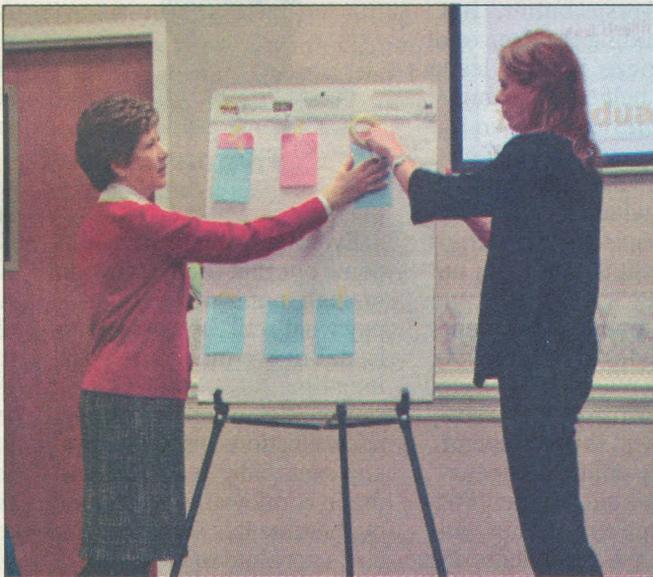
In the survey, residents chose obesity and substance abuse/tobacco use among the top risky behaviors across the county, and the health coalition agreed during the forum.

The survey also underscored the varying opinions people have on what is considered healthy.

More than a third of respondents rated Graves County as unhealthy, while 10 percent considered it generally healthy. That's compared with half of respondents reporting individually considering themselves to be healthy while only 5 percent considered themselves unhealthy.

"It's a picture of what you think is healthy," Carman said. "There's a disconnect in what we all know about what is healthy and what is not, so that's an area we must discuss."

Although several organizations were distantly related to the specific health risks at hand, the coalition hopes that pooling manpower and resources toward the common goals of fighting obesity and



WILL PINKSTON | The Sun

Angela Carman (left), trainer/facilitator from Kentucky Appalachia Public Health Training Center, and Erin Louie, also of KAPHTC, assemble a health assessment chart using notes from the assembled Graves County advocacy, education and health groups during a health forum in Mayfield on Thursday. The forum discussed coordinating efforts among agencies to improve the health of the county.

substance abuse creates a greater likelihood of improving health.

The workshop encouraged representatives to form a countywide reporting structure of advocacy groups to help reach health goals.

Stephanie Floyd, health department special project coordinator, said the two groups formed at Thursday's meeting will likely reconvene periodically to ensure the project stays on track.

"It's not often that you get this many people that are willing to come together and are committed to making a change," Floyd said.

"I really think this is an investment by the community and these particular group members that's going to make a difference."

Health agencies in Mar-

shall and Calloway counties and more than 20 other counties across the state have also discussed the realignment of resources with the help of Carman's training program.

The consultation encourages each county to highlight its individual needs — be it teen pregnancy, access to health care or child abuse, among others — but most counties find obesity and substance abuse ranking highest or of utmost concern, Carman said.

"We have to rally them around what the community is willing and able, and has the resources to do," she said.

Call Will Pinkston, a Paducah Sun staff writer, at 270-575-8676 or follow @WCPinkston on Twitter.