

Church gives used van to agency

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First Baptist Church of Eugene has donated a used van to HIV Alliance for its outreach programs, including needle exchange, testing and counseling.

The 1996 Ford nine-passenger van replaces a decrepit 1990 Chevrolet van that finally died this spring, HIV Alliance spokeswoman Patricia Skipper said.

The agency has been using the old van since 1999. It had been used before that by CAHOOTS, the mobile crisis intervention team run by White Bird, the free clinic.

When leaders of First Baptist Church heard that the van had finally given up the ghost, they decided to help out. Associate Pastor Brett Gilchrist said he found the '96 Ford on craigslist, bought it with church proceeds and donated it to the Alliance. He declined to say how much the van cost.

HIV Alliance uses the van for mobile outreach, exchanging more than 10,000 dirty needles every week to prevent the spread of disease, and conducting its neighborhood needle cleanup program, which collects 150 to 200 used needles each week from parks and neighborhoods in Eugene and Springfield.

First Baptist, one of Eugene's largest congregations, has been working with HIV Alliance for about a year, donating supplies, assembling first-aid kits and providing meals for the nonprofit group that works to stop the spread of HIV.

Church leaders decided to get involved with the agency at the behest of a family in the congregation that thought it deserved support, Gilchrist said.

After meeting with Executive Director Diane Lang, church pastors "were really impressed with the purpose and vision of the Alliance, and felt it was definitely something we could partner with," he said.

Lang said there was some trepidation among the congregation about the agency's needle exchange program, but those concerns were eased by the program's results: dramatically reducing infections and the spread of disease.

Citing the agency's mission - to prevent new HIV infections and care for those living with HIV/AIDS - Gilchrist said, "Who can disagree with that?"

"If people can stay healthy and live long enough to get some spiritual help or other help to solve their addiction problems, then we've both won," he said.