
True North Brings Community Together in Smith River — And Inspires a Young Voice

By Linda Sutter October 23, 2026

SMITH RIVER, CA (MPG) - Sometimes the smallest gatherings can produce meaningful conversations, new connections and unexpected opportunities.

Over the weekend, True North hosted a community listening event at the new Smith River Fire Station, inviting Del Norte County residents to share their experiences, concerns and ideas about local healthcare services.

True North is a nonprofit organization dedicated to building community and developing leadership throughout the rural and tribal regions of California's North Coast. Its mission centers on bringing people together, identifying common concerns and encouraging residents to participate in finding solutions to the challenges affecting their communities.

During the Smith River gathering, organizers provided information about healthcare networks and sought public input on two important questions: What is working well in Del Norte County's healthcare system, and what concerns do residents have about accessing medical services?

In rural communities, where healthcare resources can be limited and traveling long distances for specialized treatment is sometimes necessary, opportunities for residents to express their concerns are particularly important.

Although attendance was relatively small, the gathering provided an opportunity for community members to engage with organizers and participate in discussions about healthcare.

But amid the conversations about community services, another encouraging moment unfolded.

A young woman attending the event, a student at Del Norte High School, expressed an interest in writing articles for The Triplicate.

Recognizing an opportunity to encourage a future journalist, I provided her with my email address and telephone number and invited her to consider reporting on activities at her high school.

From Friday night football games and basketball competitions to school events, student accomplishments and other activities, there are countless stories waiting to be told.

More importantly, who better to tell those stories than the students experiencing them?

Young people represent the future of our communities, yet their perspectives are not always reflected in local news coverage. Giving students opportunities to write about their schools, classmates and experiences can help develop communication skills, confidence and a greater understanding of civic responsibility.

Journalism begins with curiosity — the willingness to ask questions, listen carefully and share information that matters to others.

While True North's gathering focused primarily on healthcare, the interest expressed by this young student served as a reminder that community involvement can take many forms.

Not every successful gathering requires a crowded room. Sometimes progress begins with a conversation, an exchange of ideas or a young person willing to step forward and try something new.

True North's effort to listen to the community and a student's interest in telling its stories share something in common: Both recognize the importance of giving people a voice.

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