

Teen AA coming to FHHS

By Ryan Winslett
Times Reporter

Fountain Hills Unified School District has adopted a Teen AA program for students struggling with addiction, which is planned to kick off after the Thanksgiving break.

Highlighted during the Nov. 7 Fountain Hills Coalition meeting, founder Susan Rothery explained how the program will handle sensitive topics, take strides to keep participants anonymous and fit into the regular school day for FHHS students.

Rothery said that, shortly before retirement from the world of teaching, some of her students came to her concerning a desire to combat teen addiction.

Before long, Rothery and her students had created a 12-step program similar to the one utilized by Alcoholics Anonymous, but with the needs of students in mind.

From there, retirement turned into a full-time gig working for Teen AA (Standing for Addiction Anonymous) for Rothery, expanding the program to 20 Phoenix schools and even garnering the attention of several out-of-state and even out-of-country

schools.

"My students said they wanted a 12-step program, but that the current program was geared at 'old people,'" Rothery told the coalition.

"Of course, you've got to understand that 21 and up is 'old' to them."

Rothery said her students respected the 12-step program and its ability to help addicts get through their problems, but they wanted to gear their own program toward the special needs and interests of teens.

Teen AA serves multiple purposes, including educating teens in positive coping skills, helping the community create transitional support and providing tools to accrue useful data for the program.

"One of the things that sets Teen AA apart is that they don't talk about what their personal addiction is," Rothery said.

Instead, students talk about their addictions in a general sense. Whether it be drug use, lying, shopping, etc., Teen AA is geared at finding ways to allow students to talk about their problems discreetly while simultaneously supporting each other on the road to recovery.

Meetings will be held

during school, but the schedule will constantly change. Even teachers won't know which students are involved.

Rothery said the goal is to eventually see the program expand outside of high schools, eventually becoming available at community centers, libraries, Boys & Girls Clubs and the like.

"My wish is to see Fountain Hills become a model for the program, implemented around town and supported by the community," she said.

"This program is all about empowering kids. You join Teen AA to help yourself or to help each other."

At FHHS, Jeanette Vogen and Paula Goblet have undergone training to facilitate Teen AA meetings locally.

One member of this duo will be present at every meeting to serve as a facilitator, only taking part to provide insight and make sure students keep from talking about their addiction in specific terms.

Goblet, for one, said she is looking forward to bringing Teen AA to FHHS and possibly finding ways to implement the program into the school's disciplinary program.

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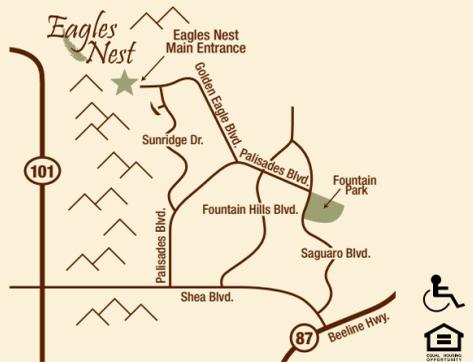
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