

Wings over Roswell

Nonprofit keeps city covered

VANESSA KAHIN
VISTAS EDITOR
COURTESY PHOTOS

With programs that range from parenting skills to outreach in jails, from helping youth build assets to hosting community dinners, this nonprofit helps the people of Roswell spread their wings.

Aptly called Wings for L.I.F.E. — Life-skills Imparted to Families through Education — there are nearly 20 no-cost programs that fall under its umbrella. Wings for L.I.F.E. administers to members of the community wherever they may be, and at whatever point of their life they may be.

Established in Roswell in late 2005, Wings for L.I.F.E. began with just one activity — a community outreach program that invites all to receive education, fellowship, and a homemade dinner.

Wings for L.I.F.E. has grown since its inception. Once a United Way of Chaves County affiliate, it is now a bona fide member. Despite its growth, Wings for L.I.F.E.'s original program is still going strong. It is a bi-monthly meeting that takes place on Sundays from 6-7:30 p.m. at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, 505 N. Pennsylvania Ave.

The Sunday program has two parts. First, the program invites a "community stakeholder" to give a presentation on a subject that affects the people of Roswell.

"Everyone who lives in this community is a stakeholder in this community," said Shelly Currier, executive director of Wings for L.I.F.E. All have a stake in the community in which they live, she noted. There is an educational component to the Sunday program; one that seeks to connect people with the resources they need, but may not know how to access, or even that such resources exist.

To this end, the Sunday program has featured presentations given by judges, representatives of the Department of Health, social workers and anti-bullying activists, just to name a few examples.

"People are educated not only in different topics, but they also know where to go for help," Currier said. The second part of the program, she said, is a home-cooked dinner, which helps create an environment that welcomes social interaction.

Acknowledging that a strong community involves all its members — even its youngest representatives — Wings for L.I.F.E. also heads programs that target elementary school-aged children, as well as teenagers.

What makes kids resilient?

Currier asked the question rhetorically, not so much because she was expecting a concrete answer. She noted that too often, adults concentrate on why children and youth fail.

But what is it that makes them succeed?

The Search Institute wanted to know. Through a series of surveys and research, the Search Institute found that there are 40 developmental assets that help children and youth succeed. Of these, 20 are external factors, such as receiving support and having a caring school environment.

These external factors influence 20 internal factors, which include things as the youth's self-esteem.

With the Search Institute's findings in mind, Wings for L.I.F.E. created Building Assets — a program for elementary school-aged children. An after-school program, Building Assets is designed to support and enhance youth development.

There is also a weekly Teen Assets program. Based also on the developmental assets, this program provides teens with the opportunity to not only enhance their lives but also become involved in the community through volunteerism.

"Many people tend to see our teens as teen problems," Currier said. "We want them to be teen problem-solvers."

Anyone who would like more information about Teen Assets is encouraged to contact Ted Allen, who leads the program, at (575) 975-5951.

Much like its work during the Sunday program and in the schools, Wings for L.I.F.E. gathers community stakeholders — in the form of trained, caring professionals — to help with its outreach in area jails.

Detention Center outreach

Wings for L.I.F.E. has four running weekly outreach programs that serve those who have been incarcerated in the Chaves County Detention Center or in the Chaves County Juvenile Detention Center, Currier said. One is the men's program, which focuses on such ideals as relapse prevention, corrective thinking and anger management.

The women's program tends to focus more on relationships as well as on issues of health. Although the programs in the jails may differ slightly depending on gender, their purpose is, at its core, the same.

"It's (about) utilizing this time to give people who want to redirect their lives the opportunity to do so," Currier said. For youth who happen to be incarcerated, Currier said the focus is to "give them the skills they need so they don't make a career (out of crime)."

The future of incarcerated youth has not been set into stone; and, much like the youth served in Building Assets and Teen Assets, there is one expectation: that they grow up to be, as Currier put it, principled young men and women.

"When people feel valued by the community, they want to give back to the community," she said.

There is also a separate parenting component in the jails, Currier said. Wings for L.I.F.E. is also committed to providing parenting skills to those throughout the community.

Parenting classes free of charge, free of a time frame

Other programs provided through Wings for L.I.F.E. include a parenting skills class, which also takes place at St. Andrew's. The class is ongoing, said Currier; it has no set "start" or "end" date and accepts new students at any time.

Parenting classes take place Tuesdays from 6-7 p.m.

Currier said nothing that Wings for L.I.F.E. provides to the community is faith-based. It is, however, all free.

For more information about the programs provided through Wings for L.I.F.E., call Shelly Currier at 317-2042.

vistas@rdnews.com

