

Middle School Coalition offers after-school program support

Group forms to help youth engage in meaningful activities

Courtesy of the Community Foundation of Southern New Mexico

Nema Rivers LeCuyer, founder of Rivers Academy and former middle school teacher, said she thinks middle school students need more quality after-school programs. She has joined with other nonprofits and the Community Foundation of Southern New Mexico (CFSNM) to create the Middle School Coalition – an initiative designed to make a positive impact on local youth before it is too late.

“At the middle school age, the children can go either way,” LeCuyer said. “Temptation and outside forces can have an impact, but you can turn the tide on a middle school student who might turn toward delinquent behavior.”

Rivers Academy has joined forces with representatives from the Boys & Girls Club of Las Cruces, Court Youth Center, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Southwestern New Mexico and the Asombro Institute to provide a workable plan for the community that will bridge middle school students into a strong afterschool program. So far, the group has met twice.

“I have seen a lot of after-school initiatives come and go, but this one is unique,” LeCuyer said. “We are now collaborating together and bringing the strengths of our organizations to meet the needs.”

The Middle School Coalition was created within the CFSNM. During a series of nonprofit workshops hosted by the

CFSNM, the group began to notice a flaw in the transition from school to after-school programs for middle school students. Once the concern was raised, the group committed to find a solution.

As part of the research stage, the Middle School Coalition has discovered there are many obstacles for middle school students as far as after-school opportunities go. While elementary students generally have good after-school programs and high school students are able to participate more because of increased transportation, middle school students often face transportation and funding issues when it comes to after-school activities. With fewer opportunities, middle school students often go home to an empty household.

“After school, they are left alone with nothing to do,” said LeCuyer, who started Rivers Academy in 1997, a school that works with system-served youth who have been expelled or suspended from school. “As a group, we want to create a model of services that work within our nonprofits

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The Community Foundation of Southern New Mexico is dedicated to helping the southern New Mexico community now, and in the future. Founded in 2000, the CFSNM offers opportunities for local people who want to give back locally. The beauty of the foundation is that you need not be wealthy to make a positive difference in the lives of people in our area. Through the establishment of permanent funds, you can sustain local charitable organizations, provide scholarships to area students and fulfill wishes that are close to your heart. Through our planned giving programs, you can honor loved ones or leave a legacy that benefits the people of southern New Mexico for generations to come. The CFSNM can advise you on how best to maximize contributions, no matter what size. For more information, visit www.cfsnm.org or call Luan Wagner Burn at 521-4794.

