

Future Foundations: Gateway to fun, resources – even education

Written by Story and Photos by Jeffrey Smith
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GRANTS – Vegetables and more are growing at Future Foundations in Grants. Founded 20 years ago as a response to a tragedy involving a local child, FF is a community center providing a vibrant mix of activities to children, youth and adults.

On top of a newly refurbished greenhouse filled with tomatoes, peas, chili peppers, okra and more, two newly constructed wooden raised bed gardens were recently built. Local Youth Conservation Corps members constructed the raised bed gardens which already house a future chili crop.

FF has a summer recreation program which brings in 90 children daily. The majority of the vegetables in the greenhouse are grown from seed at the center by the 15 children in the gardening club.

Another choice open for children is the Keep in Motion Sports program in which kids commit to completing at least an hour of sports activity daily. During the school year the center has an after school activity program.

Future Foundations coordinates the grant funding which makes the local Youth Conservation Corps summer job program possible.

YCC consists of three crews of teenagers doing projects in the community and the surrounding forest. The group totals 14 workers and they work in four to five person teams.

Each team has a supervisor. One team installs ATV cattle guards in the Zuni Mountain and Mt. Taylor forests. The two local teams rotate each day between supervising recreation groups at FF to outdoor based work or vice versa.

This past year Future Foundations secured a new administrative director, Sherri Kachirisky, who replaced long time director Laura Jaramillo, Grants new city manager.

“Our main mission is to focus on the future of our community, our children,” Kachirisky said.

Not just dependent on local tax dollars, FF has secured grant funding through New Mexico State University to provide an additional program, SWAG, to local teenagers. SWAG focuses on stimulating decision making skills for its middle school age participants.

SWAG is an evidence-based program, which has been found to have a positive impact by reducing teen pregnancy through education. The course runs 16-weeks through the school year and focuses on providing youth insight into the process of becoming an adult physically and emotionally. It also involves learning through service: the SWAG youth assisted with the refurbishing of the FF green house which allowed it to fully re-open.

“We get them to learn who they are ... and give them the tools to achieve their goals and encourage them to grow into their dreams,” Kachirisky said.

SWAG and other programs also benefit from the services of Kristin Montoya, the FF program coordinator. Montoya’s family background included growing up around a greenhouse which has been a plus for the center.

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Future Foundations also houses a mix of local agencies: Grants Recreation sponsors football, cheerleading, basketball and other sports. For outdoor enthusiasts the center has the NMSU cooperative extension office, which coordinates FH/Archery and also home economics activities. The state Veteran's Affairs local office recently moved into the center and is open during the work week.

A new computer lab is open and has nine new computers thanks to the assistance of Continental Divide and a Cooperative Bank known as CoBank. The lab is open to adults also and has a schedule totaling 8 hours each day.

This month, a two-day wilderness adventure class will be offered for a small fee, which will involve hiking in both the Zuni Mountains and Mt. Taylor.

With funding from the state Department of Health, FF provides assistance to local school children in making solid nutritional choices each day. Kachirisky presents a Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities curriculum to teachers at the elementary level which aims to emphasize the benefits of eating fruits and vegetables daily.

The program also works on increasing daily activity levels and is presented with study aid packets which teachers may utilize during the year. It aims to reduce childhood obesity.

The greenhouse is also popular with small lizards and rabbits in which the center's "children would be interested," according to Adelia Olivas, who worked at the center last growing season.

"We would use all the vegetables ... to prepare various vegetables in cooking classes" and this "gave them a sense of accomplishment," she said.

Future Foundations provides not only a safe place for children but fosters the creation of new interests for children and allows older youth opportunities to develop work skills and simultaneously benefit the community.