

## Youth Services Features of the New Location

### **Summary: New space for expanded Youth Services programming**

Parent, youth and other group-based programming is an expanding area of need for Township Youth Services. Staff and volunteers are frequently requested to provide training, consultation, and large group facilitation. The 1<sup>st</sup> floor space will be available for group meetings on Monday-Thursday evenings and occasional Saturdays. Anticipated uses of the group space include: (1) Parent, youth and professional education to address the unique out-of-school needs of families in guiding youth development, such as communication skills, use of social media, job preparedness, and persistence in school; (2) Substance abuse prevention education and youth alternative service opportunities; and (3) Intergenerational programming with youth and adults – seniors as a special group – to address youth socialization and academic needs such as mentoring, tutoring, speech and music performance, and project displays.

### **Background**

The Oak Park River Forest Community Foundation, in a communitywide effort to identify funding areas for its *CommunityWorks* endowment, selected the “Success of all Youth” as one of its three priority goals. The recent needs assessment by the Township’s Community Mental Health Board lists “Reduction of youth substance abuse” as one of three population-based priorities for funding. Township Youth Services, especially its Interventionist Program, has the unique governmental responsibility to promote the success of at-risk youth in family and community life and to reduce youth substance abuse through individual guidance and prevention programs

Since 1996, the Youth Interventionists have guided at-risk youth toward better personal and social decision-making. The role of parents and families in this guidance process is well known and has grown as a focus for Interventionist services – the earlier the intervention, the greater the impact of prevention activities. Family-focused prevention means more group-based programming, both for mutual support among families and program efficiency. In addition to the Youth Interventionists continuing work in schools, parks, libraries and neighborhoods, the new location will provide a well located and equipped space for group programs that help parents and families deal with the many issues confronting youth outside of school influence and control.

The new space will support new initiatives, some already underway.

**(1) Parent, youth and professional education to address the unique out-of-school needs of families in guiding youth development.** Parents and youth need more education and support in dealing with the perennial challenges to youth development, such as substance abuse, appropriate adult supervision and communication, proper use and control of digital media, violent relationships, and the attraction of risky and unhealthy peer activities. Parents, school and community leaders and concerned citizens want a broad-based, community response to these challenges. Youth Services has a unique leadership role in this collaborative effort.

Recently, Youth Services staff and volunteers have provided technical support, facilitation and consultation for several parent groups that have evolved from the OPRFHS Citizens Council. The new 1<sup>st</sup>-floor meeting room will provide appropriate space for evening meetings such as Parent Cafés, retreats, planning meetings and the activities of several subcommittees. A reliable,

consistent venue would allow Youth Services to expand into additional partnerships with local colleges and universities to build literacy, mentoring, and other group and intergenerational programs.

Programs are needed to address social decision-making skills, drug and alcohol avoidance strategies, family relationship development, and persistence in schooling. Parents need help in communicating with youth and strategies to address the influence of social media and a youth culture where adult supervision is often limited. Current Township facilities are not adequate for the group level, ongoing programming needed.

Another area of youth education in need of larger, properly equipped space is training in job acquisition and job retention skills, now underway in the Township Board Room. Sessions involve on-line resume and application preparation and follow-through on job leads, interviewing skills with volunteer professional interviewers, and “Boss Talks” by business leaders on work-place culture and successful on-the-job behavior.

### **(2) Substance abuse prevention education and alternative service opportunities.**

When the Volunteer Center closed, Youth Services adopted the TIME (Teen Incentive to Meet Expectations) program for youth referred to community service as an alternative to court-mandated penalties. The program requires staff support and meetings with youth.

Youth Services is planning to pilot a larger prevention program for youth referred for first-time substance-use infractions to the school-discipline or Village-enforcement code. Called “Face-It” (Families Acting Collaboratively to Educate and Involve Teens), the highly structured group program requires parent and youth participation on eight evenings over eight weeks. It has a solid research base, national accreditation and a less than 5% recidivism rate. The need for the program is based on parent, school and youth testimonials and the Illinois Youth Survey\* where OPRFHS students report high levels of illegal substance use and related problems and violence.

### **(3) Intergenerational programming between youth and adults – seniors as a special group – to address youth socialization and academic needs.**

Providing more opportunity for intergenerational contact has long been an aspiration of Township senior and youth programs. Currently, Senior Services hosts visits by students with seniors for conversation and to share life experiences and personal history. High school students share art projects and, with additional space, could expand to performances and displays – sources of attention, motivation and reward for youth. The need for tutoring and mentoring contact is well known and requires a long-term commitment and appropriate space that can be relied upon for hosting and growth.

Youth community service, a requirement for some teens, could extend to activities with seniors in the new location. For example, youth could help seniors learn digital media applications that help the seniors find information, such as health related guidance, and to maintain important personal relationships with family and grand children in distant locations. A facility designed to be friendly to both seniors and youth will provide a base for creative programming of all kinds.

\* Illinois Youth Survey. (2010, May 12). 2010 individual school report Oak Park & River Forest High Sch. Retrieved July 30, 2010, from Oak Park and River Forest High School: [http://www.oprfhs.org/export/sites/oprf/school\\_news/Press\\_Releases/Spring\\_2010\\_IL\\_Youth\\_Survey.pdf](http://www.oprfhs.org/export/sites/oprf/school_news/Press_Releases/Spring_2010_IL_Youth_Survey.pdf).