

HUB 360 delivers full- court support for local kids

By Mary Anne Ruddis

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The HUB 360 program, one of several community outreach programs at the HUB Sports Center in Liberty Lake, is planting seeds of hope for local students with rows of potential.

The program began five years ago and serves sixth-to-eighth graders from five Central Valley Middle Schools as well as East Valley Middle School. Participants gather at three locations – the HUB, Opportunity Presbyterian Church and East Valley Middle School. The program begins Oct. 1 and ends the first week of June.

The name of the program describes the all-encompassing goal of the program to provide a safe place for students to be a part of a community and help build a well-rounded person through enrichment, physical activity and academic study. There is no fee for students to attend.

Designed to address “at risk” students, HUB 360 collaborates with area schools to identify students who would benefit from structured afterschool activities. The designation is kept intentionally broad to allow all students who might benefit from the program to attend. Research shows that middle school years can be a crucial developmental time. Phil Champlin, Executive Director of the HUB puts it another way, “Every kid in middle school is at risk.”

The hours between 3 and 6 p.m. have been identified in nationwide studies as peak hours for juvenile crime.

“The program takes kids off the streets and gives them something to do,” said Spokane County Sheriff Ozzie Knezovich.

CVSD Superintendent Ben Small echoed the sheriff’s endorsement of the program as well. After school, unsupervised middle school students can get into trouble. There is a “greater propensity that good things will happen when they are here at the HUB,” Small said.

Students are referred from single-parent households, often latchkey kids who might otherwise

go home to an empty house. The program supports those kids who may be on the lower end of the socio-economic spectrum, as well as kids who might be struggling with homework, or having trouble fitting in, athletes between seasons and kids hoping to meet new friends.

The program emphasizes that every student has value and that there are many paths to building a successful life. The goal is to show them that they can be a contributing member of society through a variety of avenues, that there are many ways to succeed in life. “We plant seeds of opportunity,” Champlin said.

Program Director Ryan Barbieri described the three components of the program:

The first centers around academics with an opportunity for kids to get their homework done before going home and to get help from mentors.

The second component is physical education/activity where kids can learn about healthy living. They are provided with snacks and have an opportunity to try out a variety of sports. Alex, who is 12, said his favorite activity is dodge ball.

Lastly, an enrichment element features local businesses and individuals who share their expertise in skills, trades and industries. The students are provided with possibilities for their lives that they may have never considered before. Michael, 14, has been in the program for three years and says his favorite speakers have been the sheriff and representatives from the fire department. A list of the community wide advocates can be found on the HUB website (www.hubsportscenter.org/about-the-hub/hub360/). The kids also have the opportunity to earn “HUB bucks” to bid on fun items several times throughout the year.

Students from local high schools and colleges also volunteer to mentor the students. Who better to help a middle school student than someone who is not too far removed from the experience themselves? Mentors are a powerful force that can have a long-term positive impact for these kids.

As a section in the HUB website points out: “The combination of food, caring, mentoring and rigorous physical exercise has proven to be a powerful healer in a troubled student’s life. Such programs are viewed as crucial to improving

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The HUB Sports Center in Liberty Lake is one of three local sites that hosts HUB 360, an afterschool program that teaches life skills to middle school students from the Central Valley and East Valley school districts. File photo

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the high school graduation rates for this group. Strong data show that middle school is the last, best chance to reach these kids.”

HUB Administrative Assistant Laura Fitzgerald has been with the program for two years, first as a volunteer and then as an employee to assist Barbieri. Fitzgerald can relate to the kids and finds it rewarding to be able to see them make positive changes.

“My school years were awkward,” Fitzgerald said, “The kids are happy and excited to be here.”

The program can register up to 40 kids and they can drop in or out as their schedules allow. “We don’t want to replace activities that kids might already be involved in, we are another option, along with homework club, sports, debate, etc.,” said Barbieri.

There is a tremendous socialization aspect to the program as well. Kids are not grouped by any set definitions of who they are – athlete, good student, poor student, etc. but can join together and make new friends without any pressure. John, 11, likes the games, snacks and earning HUB bucks to buy auction items.

“The HUB is a really great place to make new friends like I have in the last four or five weeks,” he said. They can meet kids from

other schools before meeting them in high school. This can make the transition from middle school to high school smoother.”

Jessica, 12, has been attending the program for two years and encouraged her friend, Lauren, since the grade, to join. Jessica likes the fact that you don’t have to know everyone and can “just be yourself.”

Lauren’s favorite part of the program is the exercise. Both friends enjoy the opportunity to complete their homework before going home and both have enjoyed the wide variety of speakers, especially the National Guard representative and police officer. The speakers broadened their view of possibilities. Jessica plans to go into catering and Lauren has her sights set to be a forensic scientist or an engineer.

Danielle, Jessica’s mom, is grateful for the program. “Jess loves it,” she said, “She gets her homework done and she gets to hang out with her friends after school.”

After five years, the program will see some of its early participants graduating from high school. Champlin is working with the high schools to follow up with those kids and invite them back to mentor the new kids. “They’ve been there and survived middle school,” he said. “It provides them with another reason to give back and serve in our community.”