

New Program For Families Is Sponsored By Four Organizations



Richard Cornish

Richard Cornish with the County Health Department, told us last week about the “Strengthening Families” program which presently is helping six area families.

The program is sponsored by a “Community Partnership of the Health Department, McAlester Public Schools, the Youth Emergency Shelter and the First Baptist Church

of McAlester.

Using a slide presentation, Cornish said the program was begun here because of the following reasons: An increasing focus on prevention rather than treatment, a large prevalence of behavior problems, a large need for adolescent mental health treatment, the growing number of children on medication, the high rate of involvement with juvenile justice, the prevalence of child abuse and neglect, the large number of substance-abusing parents, and the need to address the whole family, not just children.

The project began, Cornish said, with a sub-committee of the Local Service Coalition chaired by Mary Greene of the Health Department Guidance Center. Representatives of the four sponsors “searched for an evidence-based, prevention program.” They are attempting to address children and entire families who are “in danger of taking a wrong turn in their lives,” and catching them “before it is too late.”

Cornish called “Strengthening Families” a “parenting program,” a children’s program, a family skills training, a prevention program that is “nationally renowned and scientifically based.” He said it is designed to prevent problem behaviors and strengthen families.

The program is presented to whole families, two and one-half to three hours, in 14 weekly sessions.

A family meal is provided. Presentations are for parents, children, and family groups, and there are supervised activities for older and younger children.

The program was originally developed for families affected by substance abuse and addiction. The only requirements are a desire to improve the family and increase family harmony.

See Strengthening Families on Page 2

Shelter Was Short On Experience, ‘Long’ On Volunteers

There wasn’t much prior organization among the leaders, but fortunately there were lots of volunteers, during “Ice Storm 2007,” according to Wayne Hicks, the speaker at our Feb. 6 meeting.

Hicks was in charge of the shelter at the First Baptist Church. He is an “Employee Assistance Program Director” at the McAlester Army Ammunition Plant.

Hicks said he had no training or background as a “Shelter Director.” But a winter storm was in the forecast.

Asked how he became director, he said he called Pastor John Fream at the First Baptist Church, to ask if a storm developed and a “shelter” were needed, would the McAlester church at First and Washington be available. “Yes,” Hicks was told, if he would be in charge of it.

Hicks is a member of the First Baptist Church, and knew “Brother John.”

That Friday, there was no snow on the ground, and Hicks said he was planning to go to Durant the next day, where he and his wife were to visit. However, he called someone who had several

generators about using one, if needed.

“Saturday it was raining,” he said. He decided not to go to Durant, and let his wife go alone.

The ammo depot official said he cleared the idea with AAP officials, as long as he took annual leave.

He talked to someone about getting 220 wiring for the church, and 20 cots. However, he said he still thought he was “going to read a book” and help make the shelter available, still presuming it would not be needed.

“Then the lights started blinking,” Hicks said.

That is when Hicks realized the church had an electric kitchen. “That was our first setback,” he said.

But Hicks sent some of the gathering volunteers to Allen’s

See Shelter on Page 2



Wayne Hicks

Attendance, Visitors, and Handshakers



Victoria Hodell

Last week we had 39 Rotarians present and no visitors.

On Feb. 6 we had 46 present. Our "Students of the Month" from McAlester High school were Michael Leibfried and Victoria Hodell. Michael is in the choir and has been in most of the musicals at the high school. He plans to attend Oklahoma State

University. Victoria helps after school at Emerson Elementary, and wants to be a teacher.

HANDSHAKERS-Last week, Lucy Smith shared the dollar with the men. Jim Thompson was the recipient.

On Feb. 6, Wayne Hanway tried to get the money laundering straightened out, by awarding the \$1 to Judge Jim Bland.

It may take a judge and a grand jury to figure out what Fred did with his notes on the Jan. 30 meeting.



Michael Leibfried

Strengthening Families form Page 1

Designers of the program have found it is more cost effective than treatment.

It also has greater, longer-lasting results than treatment and it "builds protective factors for the children and their families."

The program focuses on resiliency, after finding that one child in a family or one family in a community does well despite adversity. It has also found that resilient youth do well despite family and personal problems or setbacks; that resilient youth learn from failures and they bounce back; and that resilient youth are capable of positive change after life stressors.

So the training teaches social skills; speaking and listening; planning and organizing, problem solving, peer resistance, restoring self-esteem, identifying feelings, taking criticism,

coping with anger and emotional management.

He said the program also stresses the "importance of one caring adult," increases opportunities to help others, increases social skills at home and outside the home, increases self-discipline, and stresses that parents should help children with "critical life decisions."

The sessions involve 25 people and six families. They are held at the Payne Adult Learning Center. The staff is provided by McAlester Public Schools, the Youth Shelter, and the Health Department. Meals are donated by the First Baptist Church.

There are eight more weeks in the present program. It will be taught again next summer or fall. Up to 12 families can be included in the training at one time.

Shelter form Page 1

Grocery for cold food, if nothing else. Then someone saw the lights on at the Grand Avenue United Methodist Church. Then they found that the Methodist Church had a gas stove, and that was designated their kitchen.

Hicks, backed up by Carey Selmon, ran the shelter, and "we all got along without rules," Hicks said.

Eventually they fed 3,000 and "slept 147 one night." But they "didn't keep real good records," Hicks admitted.

"There were people coming and going...." "Some were in wheel chairs....We just treated them as people."

Six people arrived by ambulance, and they obtained 20 more cots. The First Baptist men volunteered to set up the kitchen and cook the food. The Southern Baptist Convention provided crews to cook and trim off limbs.

The Boy Scouts of Troop 2 at the First Presbyterian Church brought in more cots.

"We did survive well," Hicks told the Rotary Club members. "People came in and organized shifts."

One night someone was plugging in a coffee pot and blew a fuse. Then "someone showed us where to plug what in," explained Hicks.

"Every night" there were reports of "some kind of crisis" in the area, he added.

FEMA, (well publicized in Louisiana, during their flooding,) brought a generator, and then brought the gasoline for it three days later. "Then they ran out," (of gasoline.)

But the shelter effort "got a lot of support from the community," Hicks said. "I want to thank everybody."

Money came in, "from across the United States."

"We learned a lot," the volunteer director said.

Hicks said he was interviewed by the press 11 times. Hicks took 30 hours of annual leave, to conduct the shelter activity.

He concluded that he was happy to see "church members stand up and take the lead."

(Editor's Note-His report did not include activities of the Red Cross or the Salvation Army, or other shelters.)