

Arts program to expand into Choctaw County

Turning Point coalitions in Pushmataha and Choctaw counties will expand a successful summer arts program into Choctaw County this year.

The PUSH for the ARTS camp in Antlers grew from 89 children the first year to 323 the second year, 2004. Organizers are expecting 400 students this year and will expand the program to Hugo.

Gina Barnett, a state Health Department health educator for Choctaw, Bryan and McCurtain counties, volunteered for the camp the first year and has since worked at the camp through her job.

“A lot of these kids don’t have anywhere to go in the summer,” Barnett said. “We’ve given them a safe place to express themselves creatively. You can really see them begin to open up.”

The two-week day camp serves children 5 to 18 in late July and early August, first with a week of visual arts. The second week focuses on performing arts.

The camp is free and the coalition provides transportation, she said.

This year the camps will be in Hugo for Choctaw County children and in Antlers for youngsters living in Pushmataha County.

The arts program focuses on one of the biggest areas of Turning Point coalitions youth said Arlinda Copeland, southeast Turning Point field consultant.

Risky behaviors the youth may be involved in, including truancy, drinking and driving or lack of supervised recreation, all contribute to public health, she said.

The coalitions in the two counties are starting to share other successful programs, Copeland said.

One program, through a partnership with the Choctaw Nation, uses curriculum developed by 16-year-old Claire Richard, of Oklahoma City.

Richard, a Choctaw member, designed the violence prevention program that takes older students into classrooms to mentor younger students, said Joyce Wells, Choctaw Nation Healthy Lifestyles director.

The program, Project Falummichechi, means “to reclaim” in Choctaw, Wells said.

Students in communities such as Hugo, Atoka and Wright city go into second-grade classrooms once a month for 45 minute session on topics such as bullying, domestic violence and taking up for friends, Wells said.

The coalitions have other projects, including seeking tobacco free parks through the Students Working Against Tobacco organization and teaching about drinking and driving with the PUSH County Chopper, which simulates drinking and driving with a gold cart and special goggles.

PUSH for the ARTS camp

What: a two-week day camp that focuses on visual and performing arts for children 5 to 18

When: late July and early August

Where: Hugo for Choctaw County children; Antlers for Pushmataha County children