



SHS students continue to make change for the better

Kristen Leffler

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In March, residents of the Isle at Ledgewood, an assisted-living center in Milford, walked the red carpet, snacked on popcorn and sat to watch themselves star in a movie.

The event was run by Souhegan High School juniors Tamanna Gandhi and Alyssa Peterson, who produced a film of the residents' talents and organized a movie night to premiere it.

"The problem that we felt our community was facing was bridging the generation gap between our generation and the older generation," Gandhi said. "After addressing the problem, we decided that we couldn't just stop there."

Gandhi and Peterson are part of the movement of young volunteers who take action to make a difference in their communities. The local faction of United Way-Youth Venture, in partnership with Nashua Community College, encourages youths to create and sustain community-benefiting organizations.

After their action plans are reviewed by a panel of United Way of Greater Nashua volunteers, teams may be granted up to \$1,000 to start their organization. Their plans must show how they'll sustain themselves after the seed funding is depleted.

As of June, United Way-Youth Venture had a total of 18 teams launch in Greater Nashua. Since its introduction to Souhegan in 2006, the partnership has proved to be a popular outlet for Souhegan students to channel their community-serving desires.

"It has reaffirmed my belief that kids really are an untapped resource in terms of making a difference in the community," said Mike Facques, social studies teacher and United Way-Youth Venture champion at Souhegan. "It's great to see students be excited about their ability to impact peoples' lives."

Since 2006, Souhegan has launched multiple teams, including Rubber Ducky Studios, Birthday Wish, Little Leaf Lawn Care, Ethics Forum and Gandhi and Peterson's Nursing House Party. This fall, more than 20 students attended information sessions to learn about starting a team, and nine students attended an action plan workshop.

"Students at Souhegan High School have jumped at the chance to make a difference in their community and have dreamed big, truly changing the lives of many people within their community," said Alyssa Johnson, partnership specialist with United Way-Youth Venture. "While other area schools have also successfully launched and maintained teams through this program, Souhegan has worked to encode it in their culture."

Groups of underclassmen interested in starting teams have been working alongside Johnson to formulate their ideas. Souhegan currently has six teams in the making.

Freshmen Mike Rego and Tanner Kent are working on their idea for Urban ABCs, a group dedicated to spreading an appropriate use and appreciation for graffiti art culture.

"We want kids to be able to have as much fun 'writing' as we do, and to teach them how to respect the community, not vandalize it," Kent said.

The group will present at a future United Way-Youth Venture panel after completing their action plan.

"We've seen a continued interest in current ninth-graders to continue the legacy of other United Way-Youth Venture teams," Facques said.

Kristin Leffler is a senior at Souhegan High School in Amherst.

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