

RCYS teaches life skills to local students

Kristy Sturgill | Posted: Tuesday, January 19, 2016 6:56 am

Rogers County Youth Services representative and retired Verdigris elementary principal Jim Anderson, and counselor Michele Rosdahl, visit area schools to host Botvin LifeSkills Training programs for fourth through seventh grade students.

The program aims to help students with personal development, including self image and self improvement, decision-making, anxiety and assertiveness, conflict resolution, listening skills, communication and social skills. The program also works to raise awareness on the dangers of smoking and drugs.

Currently, Verdigris Public Schools and Foyil Public Schools host the program.

Anderson said Rogers County Youth Services would like to reach more school campuses if they had the staffing.

“The reason I am doing this is because kids have a need to hear from someone who is not a parent or teacher in a non-threatening environment. This whole program is supposed to touch a nerve inside of a person and give them information so they can make better choices,” said Anderson.

The mission is to break cycles, provide information and encourage students to think differently and ask questions.

“In the classroom it is ‘this is what the book says, this is what the chapter says and on the test you should give this back because that is successful.’ Why? At some point they need someone to challenge them to think a little deeper than that,” Anderson said.

Students are referred to the program and receive parent permission to participate. The program is designed to target at-risk youth, but it is universal and open to other students who may not be officially considered at-risk. The students are assured the conversations and questions that occur in the program are confidential.

“That helps the students open up and ask questions,” said Anderson.

The curriculum varies based on grade level and class structure. Each session begins with a survey and ends with a survey to measure how much awareness and understanding was gained through the program.

“I teach them just because they may be a quiet person or a shy student it is not necessarily a bad thing,” said Anderson. “Kids also didn’t know that anger is a natural emotion. They felt guilt when they were angry, and they cannot express themselves when they are angry. We teach it’s okay to be

angry, and it's just what you do with it.”

Anderson said the hardest part of the program is gauging the classroom culture of each school campus, which can vary drastically, and then designing the curriculum so it best fits the needs of the students enrolled in the program.

“Not every class is the same — they do not always need the same information. You have to listen to what is important to them. For example some schools have a very good red ribbon week so I do not need to focus as strongly on drug and smoking prevention,” he said.

He said he really believes the program is effective and he knows participants enjoy it.

“I got a standing ovation from the kids who just loved the information, and it was just heartfelt,” said Anderson. “I really love it — it is great. I get to walk into a classroom make a presentation, do a session with a group of kids and they normally get something out of it.”

While Anderson does the presentation, the program partners with licensed counselors to help with difficult situations he is not trained to handle.

“Some kids have pretty adult questions. Little kids will share things they are confused about and it is ugly and shocking. So we refer to people who are trained to handle those,” he said.

Overall, Anderson said he really enjoys all the energy the students bring into the classroom and during discussions.

Anderson retired from the Verdigris schools after 39 years. For many of those years, Anderson volunteered his time to Rogers County Youth Services to help with events such as the Me and My Guy Dance.

Anderson joined Rogers County Youth Services in 2013.