



A Room of Their Own

When parents and teachers at Winnetka's Carleton Washburne Middle School noticed a need for a safe, fun place for students to hang out after school, they didn't just talk about it. They took action and worked with the community to find a way to get it done.

Every day when school dismisses, you can watch as kids pour into cars or school buses, or walk off in "packs." Most head off to hang out with friends, are part of a team, participate in a club, or are involved in some type of after-school activity.

But for the kids who aren't — or for those who participate in a sport or activity that does not begin until next season — there hasn't been anywhere to go. There was a void, one that was noticed by the staff at Carleton Washburne Middle School. However, thanks to an innovative new partnership between students, parents, staff, and the Haven Youth and Family Services, that void will soon be filled.

Our mission was to create a safe, fun place for kids to go after school. By working together, we are doing just that.

The Drop-In Center will be located in a former classroom at the east end of Washburne school. With the support of our school PTO and donations from the community, we are furnishing the room with all the comforts of an at-home hangout room — beanbag chairs; art supplies; basketball and air hockey games; a TV equipped with a Wii system; Dance, Dance Revolution; as well as various other programs requested by kids. And students have even volunteered to create murals for the room in an effort to give it the right "touch" and make it their own.

The new space will be supervised and led by Haven Outreach worker Jackie Grzymala and her staff. Already a familiar face to our students,

Jackie is present during our lunch periods each day — connecting with our students, checking in with them, and providing fun and engaging activities during lunch. Now that engagement will continue, after school in the drop-in center.

In addition to being a great place to hang out after school, the center will be a great place to go while waiting to attend the volleyball or basketball home games.

Through Jackie's guidance, it allows students to develop a sort of kinship with common purpose and connections. As students met this summer to create a "wish list" of items for the room, they also discussed their desire to organize fundraisers for various community groups such as the New Trier Food Pantry and Erika's Lighthouse.

These students are passionate about "causes" and thrive when helping others, so the work they do through our drop-in center will complement the projects they participate in with their advisory throughout the year.

We are fortunate to have the support of a very active group of parents who are busy shopping and acquiring the items from their "wish list." Our intent is to have the room open for use by the time this article appears.

As we plan for the future, since the room is located in an area of the building that can be closed off from the rest of the school, we hope to be able to have this center available on weekends and perhaps during the summer. Stay tuned for more.

