

SHRINK RAP - No Refuge for Teens

By Jan Hittelman

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One of the biggest frustrations for parents of adolescents is the challenge of knowing where they are, what they're doing and trying to determine if it's a safe and healthy environment. When asked, teens typically respond, "We're going to be hanging out." When asked where specifically, the answer typically is "I don't know yet." This often leads to conflict and challenge.

This verbal dance is often less about secrecy or misdirection and more a function of the fact that there are very few teen-friendly activities and venues in our community. This is not a new problem. In years past the one refuge that teens had was the indoor mall. Regardless of what you might think about the new Twenty Ninth Street mall, it certainly is not a welcoming environment for teens to hang out. To Boulder's credit there have been several attempts to create "Teen Centers" in town, but none of them succeeded in attracting teenagers. The post-mortem analysis was that either teens were not sufficiently involved in their creation or they became cliquish, thus alienating various groups of youth.

This is no small problem as research has continued to demonstrate that, in addition to weekends, adolescents tend to engage in high-risk behavior between the hours of 3 and 6pm on weekdays. Often boredom leads to poor choices and unstructured/unsupervised activities leads to undesirable consequences.

In an effort to address this challenge, September High School and the YMCA's Break Thru Arts program have been collaborating to fill this gap and provide opportunities for youth in the Boulder community to access healthy extracurricular activities.

In partnership with the Jared Polis Foundation and the City of Boulder Youth Opportunity Fund, they have begun offering free classes in computer graphics, digital photography and breakdancing after school as part of September School's After Hour Arts program. They plan on expanding these offerings in their winter and spring terms. They are also working on a new program to offer sober alternative Friday night activities for teens that would include teen generated performance arts and other fun drug-free activities. In addition to utilizing the September School's Community Building, their vision is to partner with community businesses (e.g. coffee houses, music clubs, etc.) to host these events. Their plan is to start with a monthly event and then extend the program as interest and resources allow. As they begin to develop this innovative program, they are looking for adolescents to serve on an advisory group that will determine the specifics and ensure that it is attractive to teens, teen performers (e.g. musicians, poets, dancers, etc.), and community partners to provide funding support as well as venue space. With community awareness and support, these efforts will provide much-needed healthy prosocial alternatives for youth. For more information on either of these programs or to find out how you can help, please contact:

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or Josh Brancheau, Director of Break Thru Arts, at 303-443-4474x4650/bta@ymcabv.org

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