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Northwest Youth and Family Services prepares for the future

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What with wildly tearing open brightly colored packages before the sun has risen; gorging on sweets — cookies, candies and potentially the accidental fruit; cartoon television specials about elves and reindeer, it's clear the majority of the holiday season is for children and families.

It should come as no surprise then, that the Northwest Youth and Family Service center, chose the start of the holiday season to begin its crusade for support of, not only their family services that are offered year round, but its new Discovery Center.

Last week, Kay Andrews, executive director of Northwest

Youth and Family Services, and Jerry Hromatka, the associate director and soon-to-be replacement for Andrews, stood before the Arden Hills City Council and presented information on an initiative that will impact not only that city, but the cities of Falcon Heights, Lauderdale, Little Canada, Mounds View, New Brighton, North Oaks, Roseville, Shoreview, and St. Anthony.

"One reason we're here tonight is to give you an update on what's happening at Northwest and to thank you for the years of partnership that I have had working with you," Andrews said before handing the floor over to Hromatka.

Hromatka gave a presentation

before the council about what the organization does, what they're about and what they're working toward.

"It's about partnership, it's about collaboration," he said.

Since 1976, Northwest Youth and Family Services has served these 10 cities. Initially they were asked to work with "kids that were in trouble with the law," but realized early on how important it was to work with the families in addition to the children.

"The board really struggled with who should be our main population," Hromatka said.

In the end they decided that while there were many worthwhile

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projects in the area, children and young adults aged 5 to 21 and their families would be the organization's focal point.

Standing before a screen listing the amounts spent on the city of Arden Hills in 2007 and so far in 2008, Hromatka explained the cost of working with residents.

"We try to find the best way and the most cost effective way to work with families," he said.

The figures listed were nearly \$75,000 spent in 2007 at a cost of just under \$14,000 to the city and upwards of \$103,000 spent so far in 2008 at a cost of just over \$14,000.

Hromatka noted that 41 people were served in 2007 compared to the 46 in 2008

and that those numbers didn't take into account the fact that the organization tries to work not only with the individual, but with their family as well. So 46 is closer to the number of households, he explained.

He said aid provided by the Northwest Youth and Family services are available to residents of any of the cities they cover at no cost. This comes from the cities' partnership with the organization.

The benefits he listed included a lower property crime, fewer domestic incidents, fewer at risk children, higher educational attainment and more productive employees.

"We're talking about kids that are having a hard time developing," he said. "Our jobs

are more sophisticated ... we get kids ready so they're able to learn."

The end of his presentation brought him to the changes the communities will see regarding the Northwest Youth and Family Services organization, most notably the construction of the new discovery center at their current headquarters in Shoreview.

The building will be 10,000 square feet and cost \$2.3 million, and serve a multitude of purposes for the various communities, Hromatka explained.

The facility will be open not just during the day, but after hours for general community use and available for public events. It's expected to get around 14 hours of use per day and serve 10,000 people each year.

"Children and young

adults need to know that their community supports them; mind, body and spirit," Suburban Ramsey Family Collaborative Executive Mary Sue Hansen said. "The Discovery Center will give youth the space they need to express their whole selves. It will give youth workers and therapist another venue in which to connect with children and youth."

In the end, the council voted to support the organization in their further endeavors, because it's more than just erecting a building.

"This is more than bricks and mortar," Hromatka noted. "It is a tool that will help staff have greater impact with youth, many of whom are hard to reach."

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