

High Mountain Youth Project

By Laurie Benavides

High Mountain Youth Project of Lincoln County, New Mexico, opens its long-awaited and much-needed youth crisis shelter in 2024, the first facility of its kind in Lincoln County.

The shelter, located at 637 Sudderth Drive in Ruidoso, will offer a safe and comfortable temporary home to up to 14 young people ages 14 to 18 who find themselves unable to stay with their families for any number of reasons.

High Mountain Youth Project (HMYP) is a non-profit organization founded in 2015 by a group of local residents concerned about information circulating in the community regarding a significant number of teen-agers sleeping in cars, tents or on the sofas of friends or extended family members because they didn't feel safe or welcome in their own homes. Under federal law, children living in circumstances like these are considered to be experiencing homelessness.

It's difficult to determine how many such young people there are in Lincoln County. The number varies up or down continuously. Such children guard their situation and their privacy carefully. But official reports made each year by the Ruidoso Municipal School District with data gathered from the district's students place the number who attend RMSD schools at seven to eight dozen, sometimes more, sometimes less.

Social workers in the county's school systems do their best to support these kids with snacks from their food pantries, clothing, and referrals to other sources of aid. The primary goal is to do everything possible to keep such students in school, because it's a well-known fact that dropping out of school can be a first step toward bad outcomes including chronic homelessness, unemployment, substance abuse or becoming perpetrators or victims of crime.

Since 2018, HMYP has furthered the goal of helping kids from stressed or dysfunctional homes stay in school by offering numerous free and confidential services at an after-school drop-in center, first at Jira Plaza and starting in 2022 at its current address at 637 Sudderth.

There are laptops and study desks where students can do homework, tutors to help with math or other difficult assignments, fresh hot evening meals


served from the center's commercial kitchen, plus facilities for doing laundry and lots of comfy furniture for relaxing, socializing or watching TV. Youth are supervised and mentored by trained, caring adults.

But the main HMYP objective since its founding has been to offer a 24-hour shelter, and as 2023 came to an end, that mission was accomplished and HMYP was completing requirements for certification by the New Mexico Children Youth and Family Department (CYFD).

The dormitory is located in a separate building behind the main building. Renovations and furnishings were in the final stages in December 2023. Resident youths will occupy two-person bedrooms with in-room sinks and vanities and have access to fully equipped bathrooms, an infirmary, and areas for socializing and preparing drinks and snacks between regular meals in the main building dining room.

HMYP's shelter will open under CYFD oversight in compliance with all applicable statutes, rules, and regulations for staffing and operating children's crisis shelters. For more information on the Evening Drop-in Center or the 24-hour Youth Crisis Shelter call (575) 808-8633 or e-mail us at info@highmountain-youth.org.





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Middle School and High School Age Youth

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- Snack and Hot Meal
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24-HOUR YOUTH CRISIS SHELTER
Emergency Shelter for Youth Ages 14-17

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High Mountain Youth Project
637 Sudderth Drive, Ruidoso | www.HighMountainYouth.org
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