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POST YOUTH

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The last laugh

Seniors Stephanie Ragsdale, Cassidy Hendrickson, Kim Tzoc, Trenton Armintrout, Hayden Harris, Ethan Shaw, Amber Padgett and Devyn Rummel gather around the Volkswagen "Bug" that they brought into the school for their senior prank, a school tradition that differs each year. (Photo by Kathryn Westcott)



Middle school drama

Norwood School's eighth-graders perform "Perfect" by Alan Haehnel. In the performance, Cassidy Petersen stars as Bethany, the lead character. Here, she is surrounded by castmates Jenna Baugh, Kaitlyn Spor, Chris Wolf, Zane Truelock, Mariposa Boyd, Annaleigh Dabal and Leslie Camacho. (Photo by Kathryn Westcott)

MENTAL HEALTH

Tele-therapy pilots in Norwood, Telluride schools

Tri-County Health Network makes distance services possible

By **KATIE SINGER**
Telluride Foundation

Tri-County Health Network is working to increase behavioral health services through technology. Now, Tri-County Health has launched a tele-therapy program in the Telluride and Norwood schools for students in grades six through 12.

Officials from Tri-County Health said the local region has a severe shortage of behavioral health specialists. Currently, there is only one mental health provider for every 6,000 individuals and a staggering one psychiatrist for every 20,000 individuals. They said there is a real need to increase access to behavioral health services in Ouray, San Miguel and West Montrose counties.

Now, they are making tele-therapy possible.

Tele-therapy uses videoconferencing communication to allow patients to receive mental health treatment services without seeing a therapist in-person. This is done through secure video hookups that ensure a patient's privacy is secure.

Live-stream tele-therapy works similar to "video chat" services, but uses software that meets the most stringent privacy

standards mandated by federal legislation.

Officials said that every student that has signed-up to receive treatment has decided to continue therapy after their initial visit. Officials said students all commented how comfortable the therapy interface was; several students even remarked that they actually felt more comfortable in this setting versus being physically present in a therapist's office.

Tri-County Health representatives said they hope to reduce the stigma associated with mental illness, and to teach young adults that it is healthy to share their emotions and seek help when they need it.

Deborah Westervelt is a licensed clinical social worker who lives in Colorado and one of the participating therapist in the tele-therapy program. She has worked more than 30 years in different settings, including schools. She is trained in a number of evidence-based therapies and believes it is important to match the best approach with the client.

"Teens and their families have busy lives. In areas like Western Colorado that offer scenic beauty, challenging geography and weather, seeing a licensed therapist online at school makes

sense," she said. "The student accesses the therapist during the school day where often they need the support most."

She said licensed online therapists are being added to school support teams in states such as Alaska, New Mexico and Texas, places that share rugged natural features similar to Western Colorado and that can make accessing services difficult.

Westervelt also said adolescence is a time when peer relationships are important, and that time can be challenging.

"Young people are also beginning to explore the bigger questions in life such as 'Where am I going?' 'How do I get there in life?'" she said. "I love being able to be part of this new frontier of tele-therapy so more young people and their families can access healthcare."

Tri-County representatives said they believe that tele-medicine is changing the way rural, frontier and even urban communities are accessing affordable and good healthcare.

To learn more about our tele-therapy services, or to sign up for services at one of our participating schools, contact Paul Reich, Tri-County Health Network Behavioral Health program manager, at 970-708-1012.



Celebrating moms

Cooper Andrews works on mom's (Kate Andrews) nails for the Mother's Day celebration. (Photo by Kathryn Westcott)



All Norwood's kindergartners and first-graders gathered at the Livery last week for the annual Mommy Make-Over party. (Photo by Kathryn Westcott)