

Tempe steps up for the homeless

The first two employees in the Tempe Works pilot program are on the job, and the city hopes they'll pioneer a way out of homelessness.

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Vanessa Eley and Austin Webber panhandle on a sidewalk in downtown Tempe. The city has launched Tempe Works, a program focused on jobs and housing. MICHAEL CHOW/THE REPUBLIC

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Program helps build bridges to high school



Your Turn
Shelby Pedersen
Guest columnist

Many parents know that middle school can be a nerve-racking few years. So much growth and change occur with youths as they transition to high school — they transform into young adults right before your eyes.

At ICAN, we see this transition among youths in our after-school program all the time. We also see the struggles that their parents face with this transition. Our program team works with our parents in a variety of ways each month, focusing on positive parenting skills and communication with youths.

They decided to tackle this transition to high school with youths and parents through the "Bridges" program. This curriculum was introduced to ICAN through Arizona State University and the work of Dr. Nancy Gonzales and Dr. Larry Dumka.

Bridges is a program for middle-school students and their parents to attend together. It is designed to increase school engagement and achievement, strengthen family-school linkages and prevent adolescents' social, emotional, and behavioral challenges.

The skills presented through the Bridges program are important for any parent facing the middle-school years. ICAN is the first to offer the Bridges program through a non-profit agency. Students work together to explore their aspirations and the role of education in reaching them. They learn strategies to achieve long-term personal goals and practice life skills to manage problems and challenges.

Parents work together to increase awareness and understanding of adolescents' changing emotional and educational needs. They learn skills to strengthen communication and positive bonds with their students, structure and monitor their students' activities and opportunities and manage adolescents' emotional problems and risky behavior.

What skills can you utilize on your own from the Bridges program? Here are some of the skills that parents who attended the Bridges program report using the most:

Checkup

Do a "checkup" on some of these skills — most parents use these skills already, but middle school is a new challenging stage for the teens:

■ **CONNECT** skills, to help you keep a strong and positive relationship with your teen so they trust that you care about them

■ **WATCH** skills, to keep an eye out on your teen so you know what is going on

■ **LIMIT** skills, to have rules and consequences so your teen can learn to be focused, responsible, and organized

■ **FOCUS** skills, help you stay calm and keep your attention on doing what is best for your teen

Listen

It sounds simple, but parents are

swift to offer quick solutions to their kids' problems. Middle school is the time when youth need to start figuring things out on their own.

■ Avoid "Praise with a Kick" — this is when you praise your child for something they did good, but then follow that up with something critical. An example might be: "Great job getting an 'A' on that test! But remember that you still have a 'B' in the class, so you have some work to do still."

■ Practice "Catch 'em doing Good" — another CONNECT skill that parents can use to give their teens encouragement. Paying special attention to things they do well will increase their motivation to more good things, helping with their confidence and showing them how to be more positive towards others.

ICAN is offering the Bridges program to all of our sixth- and seventh-graders this spring.

You can learn more about the Bridges program at <http://icanaz.org/>.

Shelby Pedersen is CEO of ICAN: Positive Programs for Youth, based in Chandler.

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