

Nate's Place gets \$200,000 state grant to help more youth

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A new center for at-risk teens and young adults announced on May 23 a significant grant award from the state of California.

Nate's Place, a wellness and recovery center inspired by Nordhoff High School graduate Nate Rhoades, is the recipient of a \$200,000 grant from the California Department of Health Care Services (DHCS).

The state is providing the grants to help peer-recovery organizations such as Nate's Place get credentialed by DHCS, ultimately allowing the center to get reimbursed by Medi-Cal for the support services it offers, most of them free of charge.

"What the state is recognizing is that peer-support recovery coaching is extremely effective with people who have mental-health and or substance-use issues," said Heidi Rhoades, Nate's mother, who, along with husband Larry, opened the youth center on Feb. 23.

In order to be credentialed, DHCS requires coaches to complete state training and take an exam before they can be certified as a peer-support specialist. "The grants are helping all these emerging peer-recovery agencies get up and running and do what they have to do so ultimately you can bill Medi-Cal," Heidi told the Ojai Valley News. Nate's Place currently employs four coaches, one of whom is already certified by the state. The grant will help fund training for the other three coaches.

Established in memory of Nate, who beat drug addiction but died at the age of 21 following a traffic accident in Oxnard in January 2022, the nonprofit center helps youth struggling with substance-abuse and mental-health issues by offering them peer support and healthy, recreational activities.

Since its grand opening, Nate's Place has enrolled approximately 30 young people, with four or five more joining each week, according to Heidi.

Four of Nate's friends are working there, and three of the staff are bilingual.

The center applied for the DHCS grant in April and found out approximately two weeks ago about the award. The grant money becomes available on July 1 and stays available for a year and a half.

The grant is the eighth that Nate's Place has received, including a grant for \$30,000 from Ventura County Behavioral Health that will allow the agency to run a summer outdoor program that started this week.

The program offers exercise and fitness on the beach, yoga, surfing, fishing, hiking and rock climbing. "The whole idea of the program is to get young people outdoors," Heidi said. There's even a class in juggling, which research shows helps rewire the brain, she added.

The Rhoades are working to partner with Nordhoff and Legacy high schools to shuttle Ojai teens to Nate's Place, Heidi said.

Since obtaining nonprofit status in May 2022, Nate's Place has received approximately \$300,000 in grants.

Opening Nate's Place has been an eye-opener, according to Heidi. "Just how much these teens and young adults need someone their age who's been there and come out the other side to talk to," she said. "I knew peer-recovery coaching works because it worked so well with Nate, but we're just seeing it before our eyes every day."

Heidi and Larry have also seen the impact of the pandemic on young people suffering from feelings of isolation and depression. "Nate's Place is offering a sense of community," she said.

"I'm particularly happy with the way things have gone," said Larry. "It's almost unbelievable how fast things have grown and I think Nate would be proud of what we've done."

Once a month, Nate's Place holds an open house where people can meet the specialists and the coaches, learn about the services and activities, and get enrolled. The next open house is set for Thursday, June 28 at 6 p.m. at Nate's Place, 3840 Channel Islands Boulevard in Oxnard.

For more information, visit natesplacewellnesscenter.org.
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