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First Teachers @ Home new parental instruction program

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Last June, a program for parental instruction in Sumiton became a new, but similar program called First Teachers @ Home. Susan Swartz, president of the Rural Self Help (RUSH) Initiative, which heads First Teachers @ Home, said the group separated because of concerns with the curriculum of the former program, HIPPY (Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters).

“We had issues with the curriculum, which hadn’t been updated in a while,” she said. “Our biggest concern was the curriculum didn’t include parenting skills.”

Swartz said instruction in parenting skills is a large part of its mission in developing and teaching families with 3- to 4-year-old children. Also, the program has added new strategies for teaching preschool-age children.

“We’ve changed the curriculum,” Swartz said. “We’ve changed the types of books we use and the approach we’re taking.”

Parents that participated in the HIPPY program last year have been pleased with the changes that have taken place with First Teachers @ Home, she said.

“They like the material better,” she said. “Our families have an extremely positive view of the changes made.”

Swartz said the program, which covers Walker County, West Jefferson County and Birmingham, has tried to find better ways to meet with families and recruit them. Parent coaches are now meeting with families at home and at others’ Wednesday night church services.

Also, the program is planning on working in conjunction with Fresh



Air Farm in Bluff Park to offer a summer camp for 7- to 10-year-olds.

To accommodate these changes, Swartz found a new executive director, Mary Kathryn Taylor, who was a counselor at Sumiton Elementary and Middle School for 15 years.

Taylor said she had worked with Swartz previously when the Safe Harbor Clinic was located at Sumiton School, and was happy to join her for a job in the same area.

“I did miss the kids after I retired,” said Taylor.

Swartz said Taylor was the best candidate for the job because of her experience, and because she knows many the families from her years at Sumiton School.

“Mary Kathryn has visited the homes of almost all the families who are participating in our program,” Swartz said. “Part of the job is making an assessment of what’s going on. We believe what happens in the home determines what goes on with those children. Sometimes they’re things that need to be addressed. Mary Kathryn has a lot of years experience working with families and she has certainly spent considerable time referring families for services that are available.”

Swartz said First Teachers @ Home focuses on the concept that parents should be responsible for their child’s education.

“(By going into the homes), you get to understand how hard things are for these kids,” she said. “We have expectations that schools are going to be able to adjust everything, but they can’t. Our primary focus is to work with them, to teach them how to teach their children what they need. We also work on showing families how to integrate learning into their everyday life.”

For more information on enrolling a child in the First Teachers @ Home program, call Taylor at 648-0658.

On the Net:

www.rushinitiative.org



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