

The Minnetonka Rotary provides a grant in support of Teens Alone

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The Teens Alone staff will now prepare a meal each Wednesday with the youth they serve, giving them practice in independent living skills, and allowing them to connect with staff and other teens.

Submitted photo

The **Minnetonka Rotary** has given a \$1000 grant to the community-based nonprofit Teens Alone.

Located in downtown Hopkins at 915 Mainstreet and serving west suburban youth and their families, the new Teens Alone drop-in center opened just after Labor Day and has had over 100 young visitors since then. Staff is working to make sure the center is offering youth in crisis the things they need, and the rotary grant will go to support the center's expenses.

"This gift benefits these young people, and consequently, our neighbors. Young people, ages 12 to 21 find Teens Alone for various reasons. We exist to help them navigate a complicated world," said Teens Alone Executive Director Lydia Kihm.

Whether clients and their families learn about the organization through school counselors, teachers, friends, or a poster, they can most often meet with a counselor or case manager within one or two days of their initial call.

Some of the grant may also be allocated to moving expenses associated with Teens Alone's transitional living program. "We asked one of our young people what she needed, and she literally said, 'one fork, one spoon, one bowl, one plate, one cup.' Many times these young people are moving into apartments with absolutely nothing," Kihm said.

The gift is also timely as the center recently increased its walk-in hours, and is now open Monday through Thursday, 2:30-5:30 p.m. Youth do not need to make an appointment at the drop-in center, and staff works to make sure visitors have a short-term, safe place to stay while supporting them toward a long-term solution to homelessness. Transportation continues to be an issue in the suburbs, as many young people facing crisis or homelessness do not own cars, and public transportation is not as widespread as it is in urban areas.

"Do young people know about us? If they do, can they get here? We're trying to figure out ways that they know they can access our services," Kihm said.

"When the money stays local it's really a good thing, we like that," said Neal Enzenauer with the Minnetonka Rotary. "We serve both the Hopkins and Minnetonka communities, and we feel that our young people need to have someplace to go to where they're safe."

The rotary also provides scholarships to Hopkins and Minnetonka High Schools and Hennepin County Home School, and has a youth mentoring program, which helps young people develop reading skills and gives them an opportunity to connect with a caring adult.

"Teens Alone is in line with our goal of building responsible youth. Their location in downtown Hopkins in support of the youth of the Hopkins and Minnetonka communities means that it was absolutely the right thing for us to do," said Roger Johnson of the Minnetonka Rotary. "We believe Teens Alone fills a void in our community that would not be met in any other way. Thank you, Teens Alone, for your help and concern in working with our vulnerable youth."