



Cindy Kelly, Donna Swanstrom (secretary), Matthew Fields, Sharon Burns, Barb Dean (back row), Jodi Miller and Meghan Garnhart (front) make up the staff at the Rosecrance School.

Life lessons

Rosecrance makes education a vital part of substance abuse treatment

At first glance, classes at the Rosecrance School look typical for a high school. They're not. For one thing, while both boys and girls attend the school, the classes aren't co-ed. Students in the same classroom likely are not studying the same subject. And, most importantly, when the school day is over, the pupils don't go home.

They're not just students; they're also clients at Rosecrance's Griffin Williamson Campus, a Rockford treatment facility for young people dealing with substance abuse. And, as part of their treatment, they attend school four hours each day.

"Treatment comes first, but education is a close second," says Jason Gorham, Administrator of Residential Services at the Rosecrance Griffin Williamson Campus.

"Students need to know how to cope in a school environment. If they don't know how to adapt, they will go back to old habits."

Students at the Griffin Williamson Campus follow the Rockford School District calendar, and the district assigns six certified teachers to the school. Two to three hours daily are spent on core academics, the rest on art, gym or life

skills. Books come from the students' home districts; Rosecrance provides the space, furniture and equipment. Each class has a maximum of 14 students, and each student brings unique challenges. They get assignments, they get homework, and some of them get diplomas. They all have one thing in common: The biggest lessons they learn often have little to do with reading, writing and arithmetic.

Cindy Kelly is the lead teacher at Rosecrance, where she's taught for more than 24 years. She supervises the teachers at Griffin Williamson and says her work with the students combines education and encouragement.

"All I try to do is plant the seed and the desire within each kid," Kelly says. "Let them know they are important and they are worthwhile no matter what they have done in the past. 'You made bad choices, but you aren't a bad kid. You have to change your choices.' Hopefully, here at Rosecrance, they will learn how."

She has to constantly adapt to what the students need. Having a flexible style and positive outlook are critical.

"Everything changes from minute to minute," Kelly says. "It's never black and white. It can't be."

Teachers at the Griffin Williamson campus work with educators and counselors in the students' home schools to coordinate lessons, and regular progress reports are provided.

Students arrive on campus with a wide range of educational needs. Some are in Advanced Placement classes, and others are not attending school at all. When necessary, tutors are brought in, and sometimes, the home school has to put in extra time and effort. That goes for the students, too: Most students devote four hours to school, but those with heavy course loads spend more time on their work.

Even teens who aren't enrolled in school or have been expelled take part in school activities at Rosecrance. Some districts provide programs for students to contin-



Cindy Kelly gets ready for the day in her classroom at the Rosecrance School. Each of the seven classrooms offers a view of the Healing Garden.

About lead teacher Cindy Kelly

Experience: 24 years teaching. Has taught at Guilford High School, Alternative High School and Rosecrance

Degrees: Bachelor of Science, Masters in Education, degree in Special Education Behavior and Emotional Disorders

About the school

Six certified teachers, with a 1:14 teacher-student ratio

Four-hour school day five days a week, with two to three academic hours and rest of the time devoted to life skills, art and fitness.

Seven classrooms, including an art room and a life skills lab. Experiential therapy includes art, horticulture, music, fitness and life skills.

ue their education, and the teens can also take a prep course for the GED exam.

The teachers at Rosecrance Griffin Wil-

liamson instruct students in all subjects, sometimes covering several topics and grade levels in a single class. And that's not all they do.

"We probably, at some point, play all roles," Kelly says. "Sometimes (the students) need to be told they are OK. Sometimes we need to be the teacher and be in their faces and strong with education. Other times, they need a friend to sit there and let them vent."

Rules are rules at Rosecrance – students can't skip classes, and they can't be tardy – but, Kelly says discipline isn't a problem. That's because their achievements in this school represent the most success many students have had in a long time.

"Usually they come in very resistant, not wanting to be here," Kelly says, "but by the time they leave, the tears are coming, and they don't want to leave. You get the call or the card saying 'thank you,' or you receive a graduation announcement: 'I did it. I'm going to graduate.'"

"That's your payoff. The success stories."



Written by Alexi Bown and Will Pfeifer