



RECREATION



FAMILY FUN



EVENT CALENDAR



BUSINESS INSIGHT

# It's a Boise Thing! Green

**HEY THERE**

## **HAUTE SHOT**

**Golf gets gorgeous**

## **HELPING HIGH**

**Boise teacher Jess Hawley rallies the community for at-risk teens**

## **REUSEUM**

**Garden City gets its geek on**

## **ECHELON**

**Upscale furnishings move in to downtown Boise**

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PRSR7 STD  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
Boise, Idaho  
Permit No. 220

clutch

35. Complexity  
36. Composure  
37. Conservative

63. Defensiveness  
64. Defiance  
65. Dehumanization  
66. Deliberation  
67. Delusion  
68. Depression  
69. Desire  
70. Despair  
71. Determination  
72. Devotion  
73. Dignity  
74. Diligence

100. Fearless  
101. Fixated  
102. Flexibility  
103. Focus  
104. Forceful  
105. Foreboding  
106. Foresight  
107. Forgiving  
108. Fragility  
109. Frailty  
110. Freedom  
111. Friendliness

137. Indifference  
138. Indifference  
139. Indignation  
140. Indiscretion  
141. Induction  
142. Inductive reasoning  
143. Indulgence  
144. Industrious  
145. Ingenuity  
146. Injustice  
147. Integrity



# helping high

One local teacher rallies the community, combats generational poverty with compassion and provides incentives for at-risk teens to succeed in school and life.

By Jamie Dillon  
Photography by Copper Chadwick

**P**overty. Hunger. Homelessness. Mental illness. Depression. Teen pregnancy. Sexual abuse. A mom addicted to meth. A dad in prison.

When Frank Church high school teacher Jess Hawley looks at the kids who comprise his class, he typically can count at least a half a dozen of these and other risk factors in each student.

Although they're only teens, their daily experiences are complicated, sobering and dire. They come to class – if they manage to make it at all – with frustration, fear, anger and heart-wrenching stories that make Hawley understand why getting good grades drops off their list of priorities.

Nearly every student in Hawley's room has dropped out or has been kicked out of public school. Right now, one in every three is homeless.



“Show them someone cares, and it changes their perspective of school. Then beyond that, what if we can actually do something about it?”  
 – Jess Hawley

“You can tell them they need to get good grades, but it’s just not going to happen if their other basic needs aren’t being met – and I mean what many of us would consider simple things like a winter coat or a new pair of shoes,” Hawley said. “It can make for a difficult classroom. What they’re faced with would be overwhelming even for an adult. How is a kid supposed to make sense of it all? I’d be angry, too.”

Hawley quickly learned that compassion and simply taking the time to ask each student what was going on in their lives set in motion a more enriching school atmosphere. But the helplessness he felt by learning of these realities sparked an idea that’s now become what he calls “Helping High.”

“Show them someone cares, and it changes their perspective of school. Then beyond that, what if we can actually do something about it? If you have a kid who has a cavity that hurts, what happens if you can get him to the dentist? I’m facing these kids – all of whom have the potential to wind up as adults in poverty or in prison, and they’re all in one place – they’re right here in front of me. I thought to myself, ‘if you want to make a difference, you’re looking at a pot of gold.’”

Hawley taps the community for donations and with the help of the Boise Public Schools Education Foundation has received small grants (\$12,200 through the first four years) to found and help fund Helping High, an incentives-based program to meet the basic needs of his students.

The concept is simple: Students sign contracts that require good attendance,



grades and behavior in exchange for incentives they identify, be it a bike, a new pair of shoes, fresh bedding or groceries.

The result? Kids stay in school. They develop connections. Basic needs of students and their families are met.

“I believe we can transition these kids into college instead of prison or poverty,” Hawley said.

Before Hawley implemented his incentive-based contracts, his classroom dropout rate was nearly 50 percent. By the program’s second year, he had cut the rate by a third.

Now in its fifth year, Helping High continues to gain community support from the likes of the Idaho Foodbank, Bogus Basin, Robie Creek Committee, BSU, Boise Rescue Mission, Albertsons, Dakine, Play it Again Sports and others, but Hawley said there’s still plenty of need that remains.

A men’s group from Eastwind Community Church is currently reaching out to Treasure Valley residents, asking them to establish a recurring donation of \$10 a month through an automatic payment system. They hope to have 100 people signed up by June.

They’re halfway there.

In the program’s first three years, Hawley raised nearly \$22,000 and was able to turn that into \$46,000 worth of incentives distributed utilizing discounts and in-kind donations, positively impacting the lives of hundreds of kids.

“I have one blanket, and it’s really thin, so I wake up really cold at night and it’s hard to sleep,” writes one of Hawley’s students in a thank-you note. “Since I got the last blanket, I haven’t been as grumpy and tired at school, and my work performance has improved.”

Each success story lights up Hawley’s eyes.

“These incentives ease tension and inspire these kids to keep going and succeed despite the difficulty surrounding them,” Hawley said. “You read their thank-you notes and see how important it is. We’re helping. Teenagers love more than anything to stand on their own two feet, and that’s the first step.” ■

*To donate to Helping High, including establishing a \$10 recurring payment as part of the Eastwind fundraising outreach, visit <https://boiseschoolsfoundation49704.thankyou4caring.org>, and designate “Helping High.”*

*Helpinghigh.com will launch later this spring and will include a list of possible donation items and other ways to help.*