

Program helping adults

Learning easier for many without language barrier

By Daniel Iverson
The Morning News
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BLACKFOOT — The Catholic Charities of Idaho and the Mexican Department of Education are teaming up to bring Plazas Comunitarias, a program through which Hispanic adults can gain a primary and secondary education and prepare for GED testing, to Blackfoot.

Classes cover a spectrum of subjects, from math to language arts and the social sciences, taught in Spanish. Graduates finish with the equivalent of an eighth-grade education and receive a certificate from Mexico's University of Monterrey.

CCI Regional Director Kathleen Hall said by removing the language barrier, students can improve their learning experience.

"This new program will fill in knowledge gaps that facilitate assimilation of English at a much more rapid rate," she said.

But program organizers said they hope students don't stop there.

"We've found a lot of people haven't had a chance to finish their education," Hall said. "Once you get people back to learning and realizing they can go back, they tend to move on."

The program seeks to prepare students for GED testing, which can be taken in English or Spanish to earn high-school equivalency.

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PROGRAM, conti

The national program already is available to several Idaho communities.

CCI is a sponsor of programs for Boise, Jerome and Nampa, while a non-affiliated program is available at Mountain Home. Another new site is planned for Coeur d'Alene.

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The program locally is a collaboration between Blackfoot School District 55 and CCI, which began planning together years ago. ESL teacher Clinton Andrus will be teaching the classes, and district personnel will be helping to administer diagnostic and progress assessments.

According to the program online directory, students can attend their current classes where to be. The Mexican Department of Education curriculum is printed and

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CCI provides English language classes, which Hall said focus on enculturation by teaching the language through discussing current events such as elections and holidays.

For more information or to register for classes, call Clinton Andrus at 782-0027 or visit CCI at 34 Louella St. Plazas Comunitarias classes will be offered Wednesday evenings from 5 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. and from 6:30 p.m. to 8 p.m. Classes start Jan. 12.

"We hope people will take advantage of this," Hall said. "It's a cool opportunity."

one of which is why the program can be offered for free.

Although it is sponsored by the Mexican government, the program is open to anyone from a Spanish-speaking country who wishes to finish his or her education, Hall said. "There is a need for services that target that population," she said.

Catholic Charities of Idaho is a nonprofit community-based organization affiliated with but separate from the Catholic Church. It facilitates a variety of service programs and provides classes about financial literacy, parenting and other relevant topics.