

# Alternative high school taking off

By Arla Shephard  
Mason County Life

For some students, attending a typical high school is not an option.

Whether they have to support themselves on their own and must work full-time or they have children and need to have a flexible schedule, many Mason County students are turning to GRAVITY High School to obtain their GED and work on college and career goals.

"I'd like more people to be aware of what we do," said Donna Duke, an instructional assistant and case manager at the Shelton branch of GRAVITY High School, located in the new Mason Transit Authority Transit-Community Center. "This is not like ordinary school."

At Gravity High School, students between the ages of 16 and 21 come to the program because they either are behind in their credits or have dropped out of high school.

Teachers and instructional assistants work with students one-on-one at a minimum of two hours a month, working on one subject at a time.

The goal is to help students complete their GED high-school equivalency exam — which GRAVITY High School pays for — and then work with them to find a job, transition to college or find other resources to better their lives.

"We schedule around their schedule," Duke said. "We get them through the



PHOTOS BY ARLA SHEPHARD

Donna Duke, instructional assistant at GRAVITY High School, stands in front of the school's Hall of Fame, where names of more than 80 students who have obtained their GED are displayed.

GRAVITY works with students who have dropped out of high school so that they can complete their GED and continue onto college or on a career path.

dividualized Training for Youth and has four locations in Educational Service District No. 113: Aberteen, Chehalis, Olympia and Shelton.

The state-funded program started in Shelton in 2010, when Dale McDaniel, Ed Liedtke and oth-



GRAVITY recently moved to the new Mason Transit Authority Transit-Community Center at 601 West Franklin Street. The new space has room for students to take practice GED exams and work on homework.

ers at ESD No. 113 worked together to start a high school re-engagement program for kids who fall through the cracks, based on a state law that had recently passed, Duke said.

McDaniel became the first and only teacher at the time and worked with students out of the old armory building on Franklin Street.

By April 2011, six months after the Shelton GRAVITY opened, the program had enrolled 20

students, and so Duke was hired part-time as an instructional assistant.

"It grew really quickly," Duke said. "We were getting lots of kids in

and word-of-mouth was spreading, especially by the kids. We had one student graduate and after that he brought in his two cousins and his sister. That sort of thing kept happening."

GRAVITY thrived at the armory until April 2013, when the program had to move because of Mason Transit Authority's purchase of the building and intention to remodel the site as a new transit-community center.

For the next two years, GRAVITY and other Mason County youth programs operated out of a building on First Street in Shelton, across from Dairy Queen.

Once the new transit-community center opened April 1, GRAVITY High School moved into the new building, where they have a more professional-

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