

Eagles' Haven center offers free help to Stoneman Douglas community a year after Parkland shooting



Mike Stocker/South Florida Sun Sentinel

Eagles' Haven wellness center opened in Coral Springs Monday to provide a safe haven for the Marjory Stoneman Douglas community still recovering from last year's mass shooting on Feb. 14.

Tell a teenager who survived a mass shooting to go to therapy, and they'll walk right out the door.

But give them a therapeutic place to try out kickboxing, yoga or drumming circles and maybe they'll come and stay awhile.

Enter Eagles' Haven, a special wellness center created just for the Marjory Stoneman Douglas community [still recovering](#) from the mass shooting that took 17 lives on Feb. 14 last year.

The center opened Monday, a month earlier than planned, in response to last week's [apparent suicides](#) of two teens who survived the Parkland school shooting.

Former Stoneman Douglas student Sydney Aiello, 19, was found dead on March 17. Calvin Desir, a 16-year-old sophomore at the school, died on March 23.

Out of respect for the family, the South Florida Sun Sentinel withheld Desir's name until police released it and the family addressed his death in a gofundme page seeking help with his funeral expenses.

The one-year anniversary of the Parkland school marks the passage of time, not the easing of pain, said Sarah Franco, executive director of JAFCO, the agency running Eagles' Haven.

The center, in a bustling Coral Springs shopping center at 5655 Coral Ridge Drive, will serve as a safe haven for former, current and future students at the Parkland school — along with teachers and parents.

Eagles' Haven will be a one-stop shop offering fun activities and guidance to those seeking help. And it will all be free, compliments of JAFCO and the Children's Services Council of Broward County.

"Eagles' Haven is not a therapy center," Franco said. "It's a wellness center. It's a place you can come and connect. The main purpose is to bring people together."

Some people may want to just stop in for coffee or tea, she said. Some may want to talk — and some may want to cry. Others, if they're ready, may need help finding a counselor or therapist.

"If they want to talk about their best friend, or not at all, that's OK," said Julie Gordon, program director at Eagles' Haven. "Everyone heals in their own way. When they're willing to talk, the healing begins."

Most experts recommend survivors of mass shootings seek therapy. But not everyone is receptive, Morgan said.

Coral Springs teen Annabel Claprood can vouch for that.

Claprood, now a junior at a private school, was in the [freshman building](#) when the [shooting broke out](#). When it ended, 14 fellow students and three staffers were dead in the three-story building.

Claprood, 18, says she and most other teens don't want to sit in a chair across from a therapist to talk about it.

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"I think [Eagles' Haven] can really help a lot of people," she said. "It's not, 'Let's go to therapy.' It's 'Let's relax and have fun.'"

Her salvation is volunteering, helping people, trying to make the world a better place, she said.

Some teens may open up after taking a yoga class or tai chi at Eagles' Haven. That may be just what helps them tap into emotions they've buried deep, she said.

"We have a long road ahead of us," she said. "And we're off to a great start."

Eagles' Haven, scheduled to open on April 30, opened Monday in an effort to reach [students in crisis](#) who may need assistance during Spring Break.

"We had to act quickly," said Cindy Arenberg Seltzer, president and CEO of the Children's Services Council of Broward County. "There's a safe space for them to come. They just have to walk in the door."

Eagles' Haven will be open seven days a week. The hours are 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Friday and 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on weekends.