

# Clubs enhance student sense of belonging

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Finding one's self and feeling comfortable can promote a sense of belonging and fuel enjoyment of high school. Whether it is trying out for a team or auditioning for the play, students look for ways to get involved. However, some struggle to find activities that represent their passion.

Students who get cut from a cast or team often look to clubs for a way to get involved.

"With all of these clubs, everybody's invited. There is no cut policy," Mr. David Berendt, Maine South's Assistant Principal for Students, said.

If none of the activities fit a student's interests, he or she may start their own club.

Mr. Berendt believes that student passion is not just what establishes clubs but what drives them.

"Certain clubs flourish because they have this great leadership and they are really excited about it," Mr. Berendt said. "Then they graduate and nobody is there to replace them. That's part of the challenge of clubs."

Sophomores Juliana Parisi and Amy Gusewelle, co-presidents and founders of the new Donation Nation Association Club (DNA), created their club to donate items to people and animals in need.

With the slogan "It's in your DNA to help others," both Parisi and Gusewelle wanted to create a club that addressed the need they saw in the community.

"It's a great way to do something nice and give back to your community," Gusewelle said.

Parisi and Gusewelle hoped to create a space for students similarly interested in donating.

"This club has a good purpose and it is special because it is not based solely around you. It is based around helping others," Parisi said.

Parisi and Gusewelle hope to promote inclusivity in DNA club.

"The club is going to be like a family, basically," Parisi said.

Another club created this year, Tea Club, was founded by juniors Rachel Smith and Brecken Enright.

The club's purpose is to drink and learn about different types of teas, providing a comfortable environment to foster students' interests in these different teas.

"I've always had a lot of fun drinking tea with my friends, and I hoped I could bring that same experience to Maine South and give students an opportunity to learn about and share their love for tea," Smith said.

The founders took a hobby of theirs and turned it into a club in which those with the same interest could enjoy and feel a part of.

"I definitely feel more involved at Maine South after starting this club," Smith said. "It's really nice to create something of your own and have others enjoy it."

Along with students, staff may also notice a need for the founding of a new club.

Maine South counselors Ms. Jen Pendergast, Mr. Bill Milano, and Ms. Trish Conlon created the Unplugged club. Ms. Cris Villalobos joined the team this year.

Unplugged began this school year,



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designed as a club for students to attend during their free periods. It is scheduled to meet every other Friday.

"We wanted a fun place for students to go to unwind and enjoy being with others without using phones or computers," Ms. Conlon said.

Phones and technology play a large part in society, oftentimes consuming one's attention.

"Everywhere you look, students and adults are on their phones and missing out on what's going on right in front of them," Ms. Conlon said.

The group wanted to promote an environment of inclusiveness among students without the distraction of technology.

"[Students] can join in whatever they want or sit and relax," Ms. Conlon said. "There is a lot of talking and laughing."

Every club has a different purpose; however, each creates a space for one's hobbies.

"What I always tell folks is 'get involved in school, find people that have the same kind of goals and interests as you,'" Mr. Berendt said.

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