



BETTER TOGETHER

Womankind offers female students at Diamond Oaks a place to shine.

► **HELPING TEENAGE GIRLS UNDERSTAND THEIR WORLD—AND thrive in it**—is a tall order. But that was just one of the myriad goals that English teacher Anne Bangert had when she founded the Womankind club in 2017 at the Diamond Oaks Career Campus, and those goals are still evolving. The club promotes “learning through experience,” she says, exposing students to people, places, and ideas that allow them to engage in higher-order thinking about their own lives. Meanwhile, they’re learning empathy, responsibility, and how to imagine a world after high school.

Bangert, who was later joined by co-adviser and Diamond Oaks math teacher Kim Ward, organized a monthly speaker series with help from an operations grant from the Great Oaks Foundation, covering topics over the years like goal setting, self-care, and self-defense; conflict resolution and anger management (led by a former psychologist from the VA Medical Center); and domestic violence. The students have also heard from pros at Dress for Success, YWCA, and Addiction Services Council, and they even took an on-site “field trip” to the Diamond Oaks Auto Tech lab to learn how to change a tire.

The students had their own goals with Womankind, and they mostly had to do with using the group as a support system. “It brought us together,” says Ally Brueckner, a senior in the nursing career program. “A lot of people set us up against each other. This club made us more supportive friends.”

Womankind leverages community expertise with feedback and testimony from the students themselves. “I want it to be different from a regular school club,” says Bangert. “We’re addressing their real-life issues, onboarding them into their adult lives as women.” Crysteannah Carpenter, also a senior nursing student, has felt that difference. “Womankind helps us to be heard,” she says. “Some of us felt like we didn’t have a voice. It makes me feel like I’m important.”

CROWDFUNDING a SCHOLARSHIP

New this year is the Womankind Scholarship, a merit-based program (through an essay application) that grants \$1,000 for postsecondary educational needs. “It was the natural next step for us,” Anne Bangert says, “arming students with that extra support in the real world.” True to form, Womankind members sold chocolate bars around Diamond Oaks to raise funds for their own scholarship, knowing that the money would go to one among them.