

# Baptist agency offers PAL to young adults leaving foster care

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When Terri Hipps cut the ribbon to officially open the Kerrville Transition Center the accompanying smiles were for the symbolic action and because after 30 minutes in biting cold everyone could go inside.  
(Photos by Craig Bird)

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By **Craig Bird**

*Baptist Child & Family Services*

KERRVILLE—Baptist Child & Family Services has opened Texas' first Preparation for Adult Living support program outside of urban areas for youths aging out of foster care.

The Kerrville Transition Center will serve hundreds of foster and at-risk youth ages 15 to 23 across a large swath of the Hill Country, including Boerne, Comfort, Fredericksburg, Junction, Leakey and Medina.



David Spouse, a Baptist Child & Family Services trustee and a physician in Kerrville, gets down on a child's level at the reception following the grand opening of the Kerrville Transition Center.

“Our Preparation for Adult Living programs cover 28 counties stretching from Victoria to Del Rio, and I have long been concerned with how we

could deliver the same quality of service as we do in San Antonio," said Terri Hipps, PAL program director for Baptist Child & Family Services, a ministry affiliated with the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

"The Kerrville Transition Center, in many ways, will be the 'home' that young men and women who grow up in foster care usually don't have."

The beautifully restored, vintage 1800's house, "Is more than I dreamed. God's finger prints are all over this. ... We know we're supposed to be here," Hipps said.

"Two years ago the Legislature said residents of rural areas should have access to the same quality of programs as youth living in cities," Vicki Coffee-Fletcher, division administrator of Family Focus with Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, told several dozen people who gathered for the grand opening. "BCFS is the first one to respond to that challenge."



Amber Klecka, a successful Preparation for Adult Living participant in San Antonio, came to Kerrville to support one of her favorite people, Terri Hipps. Hipps is program director for both PAL and the Kerrville Transition Center.

In addition to job skills and interpersonal skills training, hundreds of youth are expected to get help from Baptist Child & Family Services with money management, housing and transportation, health and safety issues and planning for a successful future, Hipps explained.

The transition center offers meeting rooms, computers/internet access, and even a washer and dryer for emergency laundry.

Other agencies such as Alamo WorkSource, Good Samaritan Community Services and Avalon Social Services will have offices at the center, providing ready access to a wide range of programs.

“When Child Protective Services removes children from their homes for reasons of abuse and neglect and places them with foster families, the larger community becomes their ‘parents.’ And a parent’s ultimate score card is what your children do with their lives after they leave the nest,” according to Janie Cook, executive director of Youth and Teen services for Baptist Child & Family Services.



Cheronda Tillman, San Antonio-based youth specialist for the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, roused the crowd at the Kerrville Transition Center grand opening with a spirited rendition of "His Eye is on the Sparrow," backed up by members of the Texas Hill Country Youth Choir.

"Most young adults who haven't been in a foster program continue to get some sort of support (financial and otherwise) from their parents into their mid-20s. BCFS recognizes that reality and strives to support those youth and young adults into productive, successful adulthood."

Hipps provided specific examples.

"Children aren't placed in foster care because they are 'bad' kids. They have bad home situations. Because they grow up in foster homes it is not unusual for a young man or woman to age out without knowing how to open a checking account much less how to manage money. Often they don't even have a driver's license" she said.

"Just becoming a legal adult doesn't guarantee you have the ability to live successfully independently. Where do you go for Christmas and July 4 if you've lived in multiple homes growing up but are no longer a part of any of them? PAL, and now KTC, will connect them to opportunities to learn

survival skills and connect them with each other and staff that really care about them so both their information needs and their emotional needs are met.”

The Kerrville facility resulted from “a Dream Team of foundations,” Hipps said. When Baptist Child & Family Services started exploring the possibilities, Kerrville’s Floyd A. and Kathleen C. Callioux Foundation provided start up funding and invested with the Community Foundation of the Texas Hill Country to purchase the home. Finally, the Meadows Foundation heard about the project and told Hipps it wanted “to fill in funding gaps you have—and fund the restoration of the facility and two of the staff positions.”

“Paired with the enthusiastic support from throughout the Kerrville community, we were bound to succeed,” Hipps said.

Three Baptist Child & Family Services staff members in addition to Hipps will work from the Kerrville center. Hipps will divide her time between the San Antonio and Kerrville offices. Other programs will provide their own staff that will be housed in the facility.

“I am thrilled that, once again, our staff has moved to fill an unmet need in the lives of youth,” Baptist Child & Family Services President Kevin Dinnin said. “Terri and her team are on a mission to help foster care alumni survive and thrive within a spiritually nurturing environment, which is why we are in Kerrville. The opportunity to partner with several other human needs agencies and the good folks of the Hill Country is an added bonus.”

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