

# **Bexar County youthful offenders find a second chance with KAPS**

October 26, 2007

Posted: 10/26/07

## **Bexar County youthful offenders find a second chance with KAPS**

**By Haley Smith**

*Baptist Child & Family Services*

AN ANTONIO—A growing number of South Texas juvenile offenders are hearing good news—jail is not their only option—thanks to an expanding relationship between the Juvenile Probation Department and Kids Adverted from Placement Services.

KAPS, a program of Baptist Child & Family Services that has provided intensive family preservation services for youthful offenders for nine years, recently received an additional \$325,000 from Juvenile Probation. This has allowed the program to increase from four to six the number of three-person teams—which translates into helping an additional 56 families a year.

**“We think programs such as KAPS are ultimately going to take the place of (incarceration in Texas Youth Commission facilities) and other traditional methods.”**

**-Jeannine Von Stultz**

“We think programs such as KAPS are ultimately going to take the place of (incarceration in Texas Youth Commission facilities) and other traditional methods,” said Jeannine Von Stultz, director of Mental Health Services for Bexar County Juvenile Probation who championed the funding increase.

Bexar County courts, realizing the positive effects of KAPS, are ordering the counseling for more teens as the last chance before being sentenced to juvenile detention. Because of the substantial length of the waiting list to get into the program, juveniles often get in trouble with the law again and find themselves back in court before they receive the chance to benefit from KAPS’ services—one reason behind the additional funding.

“Our waiting list is anywhere from 25 to 30 families at any given point who usually wait a time period of about three months or longer,” said Janie Cook, BCFS executive for teen and youth services. “The additional funding should cut the waiting list in half.”

Until recently, the Texas Youth Commission was assigned to handle young people through the age of 21 who had committed a variety of

misdemeanors. However, because of serious allegations of physical and sexual abuse, TYC now is allowed to handle offenders who commit serious felonies until age 19.

Due to this change in policy and the fact many youth in TYC were released early from their sentencing, the state gave money back to juvenile services, which—in turn—redirected a portion to KAPS.

Because research that shows non-traditional counseling programs such as KAPS produce a better success rate than traditional psychotherapy methods, the juvenile probation department continues to rely on KAPS, Von Stultz said.

“I believe the reason for this is that the families sent to these programs usually have multiple issues in addition to the legal issue at hand regarding their child. Often things as simple as transportation keep the family from going to their assigned counseling,” Von Stultz explained.

“KAPS goes into the family’s home, breaking through initial apprehension and practical barriers such as transportation, to get to the heart of the matter.”

KAPS’ goal is to support the family as a whole, offering other resources not part of traditional treatment methods and addressing practical needs such as food and housing.

“When families come to be part of the KAPS program, they obviously are not always happy about the court order. But by the end, they usually tell us that they appreciate the fact that we don’t give up on them. Our staff is pretty tenacious,” Cook explains. “Many of these families feel that the system has let them down, and we want to show them that’s not the case.”

With the additional funding, KAPS is forming two new teams to meet the growing need to minister to the youth assigned to their care. As part of the

team expansion, KAPS is in the process of filling four new staff positions, including two case managers and two case manager aides and one therapist, to increase capacity to handle more teens.

Although 75 percent of the funding will go to serve young people who might have originally ended up in TYC, the money also provides adequate resources to improve the KAPS program as a whole.

“The ultimate goal of the Juvenile Probation Department and KAPS is to serve the kids in our community, using TYC as a last resort,” Cook said. “Any additional funding we receive helps significantly in these efforts.”

News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Baptist churches, in Texas, the BGCT, the nation and around the world.