

BCFS program offers last chance for troubled youth

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SAN ANTONIO—Louis Martinez couldn't help but smile as he looked at his teenaged daughter across the kitchen table.

"I just wasn't willing to give up on her yet," he said.

At 15, Lillie Martinez found herself in a world of trouble—but also found a last chance to get her life back on track.

She is participating in the [Baptist Child & Family Services](#) juvenile justice program, a last alternative for troubled teens whose run-ins with the law have landed them one step away from state lock-up. Convicted of aggravated assault with a deadly weapon, she has a history as a runaway who was known to dabble in drugs.

In spite of a troubled history, Louis and Lillie Martinez enjoy time together. Martinez is confident his daughter has taken an important first step toward straightening out her life.

She was assigned to the BCFS juvenile justice program in January as a condition of her probation. The intensive intervention program aims to deter juveniles' patterns of troubled behavior by utilizing family strengths and community resources to stabilize chaos. Ninety-four percent of youth who complete the program do not go on to placement in residential treatment facilities.

Within two weeks of being part of BCFS' program, Martinez said he already noticed a difference in his daughter.

“When we started (the program), I was at my wit’s end,” he said, recalling an altercation he had with his daughter where he was faced with the tough decision of pressing charges, or giving Lillie one more chance to straighten up her life.

“But since BCFS, she started coming around again. Her caseworker is here every week to pick her up, and if they say something is going to happen, it does.”

Reliability and the one-on-one attention have had a lot to do with Lillie’s success, he noted. The family-focused approach to intervention that provides expert advice to parents on how to deal with serious issues has helped him, too, he acknowledged.

In March, BCFS took more than two dozen juvenile offenders to a Texas Youth Commission lock-up facility in Mart. The experience “was a wake up call,” Lillie said.

“If you don’t want to be told what to do, then don’t put yourself in the position to have to go to TYC,” BCFS Case Manager Supervisor Timothy Nava warned the juvenile offenders.

After a tour of the campus—residential dorms, barb-wired recreational areas and real-life conversations with youth serving time in TYC—Lillie, like many of the other youth on the trip, said she was ready to start fresh.

“I may think that I’m tough, but there’s someone in there that’s tougher,” she said. “I just don’t want to have to go there. TYC isn’t any place for me.”

Lillie’s probation is set to end May 19. She’s confident she’ll complete her term successfully, she said.

“I don’t know what we did right to be able to be part of BCFS’ program,” her father said. “But I’ve seen all the difference in the world in my

daughter, thanks to their team.”