



# Juvenile Networking

Volume 3 Issue 2

"Many Ministries-One Mission"

Fall 2006

## Facts You Can Use:

The percentage of TYC youth who were re-incarcerated within three years of release is the lowest it has been since at least 1995. Source: TYC Study

More high school seniors use Marijuana (6%) on daily basis than use alcohol (3.2%) on a daily basis. Source: OJJDP Study

Three out of ten high school seniors said they were drunk at least once during the past month. Source: OJJDP Study

15.8% of high school seniors use cigarettes on a daily basis. 53.7% of high school seniors used cigarettes during the past year. Source: OJJDP Study

*"Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching." Hebrews 10:25*

## Inside this issue:

Staying Home—Going Home Model	2
Organization Reaches Out to Youth Continued	3
Easy Steps to Prison Ministry Continued	3
Juvenile Justice Ministries Network of Texas	4

## Organization Reaches Out to Youth

By: JENNIFER BRANCH/Reporter 09/18/2006 The Citizen Pasadena Reprint

There is an unassuming building on Pasadena Boulevard just past Thomas Street that has a pool table, a ping pong table, a music studio and an art department, all for the youths of Pasadena to come and enjoy at no cost to them.

Once inside, the youths can watch movies, get help with their homework, paint, or talk - just about anything. Cross in the City founder James Leslie wanted there to be a place for at-risk youths to go, to be safe, to learn. "It started, believe it or not," said Matthew Fulton who works at CITC, "with James driving around, talking to people, talking to kids." That began in 1997. Cross in the City has been in their Pasadena Blvd. location since 2000.



"Our mission," said Leslie, "is through mentoring, to work with at-risk youth so that they can become the next leaders in their communities. "And work with youth they do. On any given week, as many as 30 people will have come through the doors, to visit, to play, to hang out or to get help with school work. "We do tutoring," said Fulton. "If they're having trouble in school they can bring their homework here and we'll help them with it." The mentoring doesn't stop with schoolwork, though. For a period of time, Leslie worked with at-risk kids in Chicago, many of whom were gang members.

(Continued on page 3)

## Easy Steps to Prison Ministry

by Don Smarto

This title is intentionally deceptive. I frequently receive calls from people saying, "Our church would like to start a prison ministry. Can you tell us how?" Many times people want me to give them instructions by phone or send them a simple outline.

In some ways it is an alarming trend. There is an important need for para-church organizations like those that go into juvenile institutions. When volunteers come to events it looks deceptively easy. That is because everything has already been planned or organized for many months.



Para-church organizations do not replace the ministry and calling of the local church, but they have met a specialized need to a neglected area or group that requires special knowledge and even training. It is not possible to teach the local church how to do effective juvenile ministry in three hours or by mailing them an outline.

I believe there are two principle reasons why churches frequently do not work with para-church organizations; one is ownership and the other is control. Neither sounds very good. For some churches, they are not willing to have their members in-

(Continued on page 3)

# Staying Home—Going Home Model

by Boone Vastine

This proposed model program is aimed at two specific problems within the greater problem of juvenile criminal behavior; *high costs and poor success rates*.

## THE PROBLEM ADDRESSED

The most serious juvenile offenders, approximately 3% of all youths handled by the juvenile courts in the state, are sent to the Texas Youth Commission, the state's juvenile correctional agency. These youth are the most dangerous and recalcitrant of the offenders. With the current system the average cost *per day per child* being held in one of TYC's 13 secure institutions in fiscal year 2004 was \$155.02 or an *annual cost per child* of \$56,582.30. [This cost is actually higher when the \$26.64 per day per child is added for the 45 days each child spends at Marlin being evaluated for placement.]

At the same time, the recidivism rate for fiscal year 2004 for re-arrests within 1 year of release for any offense was 54.9% and re-incarceration for any offense within 3 years of release from TYC was 47.6%. If there is any good news in these numbers it is that felony re-arrests and re-incarceration for those same time periods were closer to one in three rather than one in two overall.

These statistics suggest that the current system is very costly and very unsuccessful. Why is it so costly? All youths receive what is described as "comprehensive treatment" through the Re-socialization program. Some youths with specialized needs receive issue-specific treatment at a more intensive level. This program includes required education for all youth and a 16 hour-day program schedule. Because of these programs, the skill levels and number of employees required per youth is higher than that required for the adult system.

At the same time, TYC reports that recidivism rates for youths in intensive treatment programs when compared to rates for youths who demonstrated a high need for treatment, but were unable to receive services, were lower in almost every category. However, since TYC is not able to provide the intensive treatment to all youth who demonstrated a high need for it, many of these youth are not getting that level of treatment. If they were, the costs for the programs would be even higher than they are presently.

## ATTACKING THE PROBLEM

The focus of the "Staying Home—Going

Home" model is to provide more intensive and youth-specific-needs programming within the environment of the family and community. The concept is to create a community action point of intervention to help these youth find the help they need to deal with issues contributing to their criminal behavior while assisting the family in dealing with their issues that are so often the source of the youth's behavior.

## THE PROGRAM

The program envisions community intervention at two stages of the offender cycle as a two pronged attack on high cost incarceration and high recidivism.

---

*“. . . create a community action point of intervention to help these youth find the help they need to deal with issues contributing to their criminal behavior while assisting the family in dealing with their issues that are so often the source of the youth's behavior."*

---

**Phase 1** is at the county level and is in the form of intervention by diversion into a local nonresidential program for a qualified offender who would otherwise be incarcerated.

**Phase 2** deals with the offender who has been placed in a residential program at the state level and will be or has the potential to be released back into the community.

In this program, criteria would be established to evaluate the likelihood of "success" in terms of re-offending and utilizing existing and developed programs that would provide specific and intensified treatment and assistance to change those factors in the life of the juvenile that have contributed to the criminal actions of the youth. This would be done through specially designed education, job training, life skills training, mental and emotional therapy, including drug and alcohol treatment, family mediation and community restorative justice alternatives.

A critical feature is the involvement of the program with the family to help address those factors contributing to the failure of these kids. It is also important to realize that the specific youth who are themselves in the justice system often have siblings that either are or potentially will be in the system if these factors contributing to criminal behavior are not changed.

One of the keys to the Staying Home—Going Home program is the use of mentors to develop a consistent, trusting, supportive relationship between a mature caring adult and a carefully matched youth, who is en-

couraged to reach their potential, discover their strengths and develop confidence. In other words, to help the youth learn new behavior to overcome the old. A major part of this program is to have "community based" mentors or coaches that would be working with the youth during the entire diversion process and, for those who are incarcerated, during that period so when they return to the community, the youth has the necessary support, based on an established relationship, to be successful.

By focusing on two classifications of offenders, the felony offenders and the Determinate sentenced offender for which the "minimum length of stay" and sentence (in the case of the Determinate sentenced offender a sentence of up to 40 years with a possibility of being transferred to the adult system at age 17) is the longest, with the most to lose from failure, the impact of achieving success is potentially magnified on the lives of these boys, their families and their communities. The benefit to the larger community and the taxpayers from reduced incarceration and recidivism will be great.

## CONCLUSION

The program will be difficult and will require cooperation between the juvenile justice system, the community and the individuals involved to a degree that is perhaps unprecedented. However, the result of failing to address the problems coming out of the present system, in terms of both financial costs and lives wasted, would be in itself criminal. The failures in the existing system and approach threaten to overwhelm society's ability to deal with the growing problem of antisocial and criminal behavior. The Staying Home—Going Home model of program is an effort to address these problems on a community shared and community benefited basis.

**Going Home—Staying Home** was a lead-in presentation from a workshop panel at the Restorative Justice Ministry Conference held in Houston, Texas April 2006. Panel Members: Sylvia Bolling, Aldine Y.O.U.T.H., Steve Holloway, P.A.C.E., James Leslie, Cross in the City, and Boone Vastine, Initiatives for America's Youth.

## Easy Steps to Prison Ministry Youth continued

involved unless their name is on it. For others it is simple a control issue of wanting to dictate procedures when they usually have very little expertise. Keep in mind that for those in para-church organizations it is a fulltime job. For someone assigned to do prison ministry at a local church, they usually have another job that is not even related. In a sense they become weekend warriors with no foundation in a "war college." In some ways it is worse when a group or church goes into a juvenile institution and violates policies and rules. The staff, the youth and even the volunteers may have a bad experience, and it makes it difficult for the professional para-church organization that will follow.

As an example, planning an event in an institution involves security, shift changes, counts, meals, movement of the population as well as policy. It is important for leaders to understand adolescent development in planning relevant programs. The volunteers must be recruited. There must be a background check, good training to emphasize confidentiality and issues related to teenagers. When a para-church organization sits down with a chaplain or an administrator, it is important for that ministry to have a credible track record, to have a program that is sustainable, that has good outcomes in terms of networking, follow up, Bible studies and mentoring, and a program that can be replicated.

The local church is not equipped to produce juvenile programs that are credible, sustainable, have good outcomes, and can be replicated because that is a

full time job. Occasionally you will find a church that has hired a full time person and has put sufficient revenue to make it work.

---

*'So that ministries are not "hit and run," we need follow up, mentoring and dialog with researchers to measure our effectiveness.'*

---

Volunteers come in all shapes and sizes and at all levels of education, but what will always be important for the volunteer is compassion. Many with a high school education have a big heart and are kind, but running an effective juvenile ministry requires organizational and management skills, the ability to train and to understand the analysis and measurement of programs. Increasingly the professionals in the juvenile system have a master's degree level and it is important for ministry leaders to be able to dialog at levels of higher education, including understanding psychology and sociology principles. Future leaders will need graduate degrees.

Gone are those days that a ministry can simply ride on emotions, good stories and a high number of decisions. So that ministries are not "hit and run," we need follow up, mentoring and dialog with researchers to measure our effectiveness. Juvenile Justice Ministry has and will continue to fight the barriers of anti-intellectualism, or perhaps better put as an "anti-education feeling." There is a combination of grad studies, advanced degrees and compassion that make for effective leadership in juvenile minis-

tries.

So when I get a call that a church wants to start their own prison ministry, I know they are often looking for quick steps. They believe that I can teach them in three hours what has taken three decades to learn. Churches need to support para-church organizations because it is a full time calling, and it is their expertise. What churches do best is discipleship. If churches were more focused on disciplining and growth than simply converts, there would be enough volunteers to help missions in Mexico and Africa as well as in Waco, Dallas and Houston.

The next time you are tempted to start your own ministry, count the cost, and ask yourself not simply are you called but are you equipped?

*Don Smarto is the President of Youth Direct Ministries. A nationally recognized non-profit ministry that serves the juvenile justice community. Find out more about this ministry by visiting their website at: [www.youthdirect.org](http://www.youthdirect.org)*

### Parenting Today's Youth

Parenting Today's Youth, hosted by Don Smarto airs Monday—Friday at 8:00 PM CST on Dallas/Ft Worth's 100.7 FM This one hour show provides real solutions for real problems and concerns.

## Organization Reaches Out to Youth continued

"Kids join a gang, in my experience, for one of three reasons," he said. "They're bored out of their minds, they're economically depressed, or they feel that nobody loves them. We're here to break those barriers, to show these kids that somebody loves them, and to give them something to do that will keep them safe." The center, which frequently has youths or struggling families referred to it from the court system or school districts, strives to engage youths in community service projects and activities that will enrich them.

Leslie recounted a recent trip wherein a handful of children at the center went to East Texas and helped with relief ef-

forts after Hurricane Rita. They recently returned back from a camping trip to the same area as a reward for their efforts a year ago.

"And the really cool part," said Leslie, an ordained minister, "is the reason we knew to go out there to begin with. A friend of mine, who works for NASA, knew the people in (that particular region) of East Texas, because they helped NASA look for pieces of the Columbia when it exploded." "It was like things were coming full circle," added Fulton, who has his Master's degree in counseling psychology from Our Lady of the Lake College in San Antonio. CITC also offers counseling to students, families, and students who have dropped out, among other people, for a

nominal fee. The reason CITC works: trust. "They trust us," said Fulton. "They know we're here to help them, they know we care about them. Kids, especially these kids, are really, really good at spotting fake people." Fulton added: "And keep your promises. That is so important." For more information, contact Cross in the City at (713) 477-9600.

*"Your Friends are like elevator buttons; they will either take you up or bring you down."*

*Source: Unknown*

## Officers and Executive Committee

**Don Smarto, Chairman**  
*National Representative*

**Mike Gahan, Vice Chairman**  
*South Texas Representative*

**Boone Vastine, Secretary**  
*East Texas Representative*

**Weldon Fox, Treasurer**  
*North Texas Representative*

**Phil Oliver**  
*Central Texas Representative*

**Shirley Orr Smith**  
*West Texas Representative*

Juvenile Justice Ministries  
Network of Texas  
PO Box 765156  
Dallas, TX 75376-5156  
[www.jjmnt.org](http://www.jjmnt.org)

## About Us:

Published by the Juvenile Justice  
Ministries Network of Texas

We are a Christ centered association of ministries, churches, and individuals that minister to juvenile offenders and their families. Our goals:

- Equip faith based workers with resources and training to enhance their ministry work
- Coordinate juvenile justice ministry events to maximize participation, attendance, and outcomes
- Advocate for juvenile justice legislation
- Promote juvenile justice ministry opportunities, events, and initiatives
- Educate workers and society regarding methods of spiritual intervention that help youthful offenders

JJMNT is a 501 (c) 3 Non-Profit Corporation. For membership information send email to [membership@jjmnt.org](mailto:membership@jjmnt.org) or contact us by mail. Membership is a one-time \$35 fee for lifetime. For comments about articles that appear in this publication or suggestions about future content email [editor@jjmnt.org](mailto:editor@jjmnt.org)

## 90 Volunteers Needed for 500 Boys!

**November 11th**, Youth Direct will present programs for the nearly 500 boys in Mart, east of Waco. Performers include Don Smarto, Melvin Adams, Alan Ward, a new rapper and an outstanding drummer, plus vintage cars and classic bikes. Invite your friends, carpool, and pray for many volunteers and many blessings on that day. Go to [www.youthdirect.org](http://www.youthdirect.org) for more information about this exciting event.



Juvenile Justice Ministries Network of Texas

PO Box 765156 Dallas, TX 75376-5156

*"Many Ministries—One Mission"*