

# Nonprofit St. Jude's eyes transitional-living program for Alamo City

BY TAMARIND PHINISEE

St. Jude's Ranch for Children plans to expand its operations into San Antonio by the beginning of next year.

The nonprofit organization was recently awarded a \$100,000 grant from the Impact San Antonio Foundation Inc.

The organization plans to use the grant to open a home in the Alamo City for its transitional living program.

The transitional living program serves young adults from the ages of 16 to 21 and teaches them life skills so that they're able to become self-sufficient and function in society.

The program is currently housed at its Bulverde campus.

Moving the program to the city, say officials with the nonprofit group, will present better opportunities for children participating in the program by providing greater educational opportunities and better access to public transportation.

The nonprofit is currently looking to lease a home to house its transitional program, St. Jude's officials say.

The group is looking on the Northeast Side, but will choose a home with the best location for the right price, the officials say. Details on the final location and size of the space will be released at a later date.

Plans are to have a space selected in time for the youth to start school in January 2009.

St. Jude's serves abused, abandoned and neglected children ranging in age from in-

fants to 21.

All of the children it serves are wards of the state and have been removed from their homes because of safety concerns. It receives reimbursement from the state for each child.

The nonprofit has two campuses located in Texas: one in Bulverde, which houses 42 children, and one in New Braunfels, which serves 16 children.

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**Christine Spadafor**

CEO

St. Jude's Ranch for Children

The nonprofit is headquartered in Nevada, where it has a third campus. It entered the Texas market in the early '90s through acquiring a former group foster home in Bulverde.

## A helping hand

The transitional living program puts extreme importance on education, says Arnold Valdez, St. Jude's Bulverde campus

director. That education can take the form of trade, vocational training, or traditional college.

In addition, Valdez says, the program teaches the young adults how to budget money and put aside necessary savings for future needs.

It also teaches them how to build resumes and provides financial education classes through its partner, Randolph-Brooks Federal Credit Union.

Because the program helps youth up to the age of 21, the program helps prevent teenagers — who are considered adults at the age of 18 — from becoming homeless, says St. Jude's CEO Christine Spadafor.

"When they age out at 18, typically seven out of 10 have no place to live and within 18 months, one of two become homeless," Spadafor says.

Changes in the law to allow agencies to help children beyond age 18, she says, have allowed St. Jude's to provide them the transitional help they need.

A side benefit of moving the transitional living program to San Antonio, says Valdez, is it allows him to serve more youth at the Bulverde location — going from 42 to 54 children.

Some 12 children are expected to be served by the transitional living program in San Antonio, he adds.

## Doing more

Apart from expanding its reach to San

Antonio, St. Jude's also plans to start a program for pregnant and parenting teens at its New Braunfels location.

Spadafor says the new program will serve a "tremendously unmet need." Right now the New Braunfels campus serves children — infants up to 13 years old.

The pregnant and parenting teens program will serve children ages 10 to 17.

The program will allow teens to stay with their babies and seeks to promote family preservation and maternal child bonding.

The young mothers will be taught how to be good parents and how to care for their child mentally, emotionally and socially.

"This isn't just a warehousing place. That's what distinguishes us from other places," Spadafor says. "This is a comprehensive, holistic ... and therapeutic program."

But before the program can be launched, Spadafor says the nonprofit will need to renovate its existing New Braunfels campus, which is currently about 3,000 square feet and serves 16 children.

The goal is to raise about \$250,000 for the project and to expand the facility by another 1,000 to 1,500 square feet.

Spadafor says the nonprofit wants to start the new program in the near future, but does not yet have a timeline on when it will launch.



Spadafor