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NEW PROGRAM USES ART TO REHABILITATE AT-RISK TEENS

El Paso County Attorney's Office, the El Paso Juvenile Probation Department, West Texas Community Supervision and Corrections Department, the Honorable 65th District Court Judge Yahara Lisa Gutierrez, Centro de Salud Familiar La Fe, El Paso Independent School District and Las Americas Immigrant Advocacy Center have joined forces to create a new program that hopes to rehabilitate teens in the juvenile justice system by channeling their energy towards art.

The idea behind the program is to nurture artistic talents in delinquent children to help them find a new purpose in life and transform their destructive behavior. Studies suggest that developing artistic talents helps troubled teens to withdraw from substance abuse and other negative habits while giving them skills and knowledge to help themselves.

The program was spearheaded by local muralist Jesus Alvarado ("Cimi") from Centro de Salud Familiar La Fe. El Paso Independent School District, through the "Delta Academy" provided \$5,000 to pay for painting supplies. Anna Pilhoefer, the EPISD Department of Fine Arts Visual Arts Facilitator, donated about \$1300 to assist in the purchase of supplies. "Las Americas Immigrant Advocacy Center" collaborated by providing a building where the mural is being created.

Currently 8 boys and 2 girls ages 15 thru 17 who are under the supervision of the El Paso Juvenile Probation Department participate in the program. The teens have been working on the mural Monday thru Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. since the first week of May and are scheduled to finish just in time for an unveiling ceremony scheduled for Wednesday June 2, 2010.

The mural was created by the students under the guidance of Jesus Alvarado, and pays homage to immigrants, depicting farm workers, monarch butterflies (who migrate back and forth from Canada and Mexico every year), and Statue of Liberty along with Lady Justice."

65th District Court Judge Yahara Lisa Gutierrez praised the program explaining that “it gives participants a true opportunity to rehabilitate by providing them marketable skills while nurturing creativity and giving them an opportunity to communicate with society.”

El Paso County Attorney Jo Anne Bernal explained that this ground-breaking program fulfills the mission of the juvenile system by providing rehabilitation to teens instead of punishing them for their bad behavior.

“I am a firm believer in rehabilitation programs for teens. Minors have not developed yet their personalities, and timely intervention with positive reinforcement can produce in them remarkable, life changing results,” Bernal concluded.

For more information, please call Assistant County Attorney Tracy Almanzan at 546-2050.

WHO: Representatives from participating agencies and students from the “Delta Academy”

WHAT: Unveiling of Mural

WHEN: Wednesday June 2, 2010 at 4:00 PM

**WHERE: Las Americas Immigrant Advocacy Center
1500 East Yandell Drive**

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