



**The Honorable  
Yahara Gutierrez**  
*Judicial Fellow*

Judge Gutierrez presides over the 65th District Court and is the Judicial Fellow for Reclaiming Futures El Paso. She has served as juvenile prosecutor for seven years and was the lead prosecutor of the Juvenile Drug Court from 2004 to 2009. Judge Gutierrez joins her judicial counterparts from other RF sites and leads the RF initiative to redefine the juvenile justice system in El Paso.

***Justice Fellow***

**Roger Martinez**

Chief Probation Officer  
El Paso County Probation  
Department

***Project Director***

**Paula Wharton**

El Paso County Probation  
Department

***Treatment Fellow***

**Armando Salas**

Program Manager  
University Medical Center  
of El Paso

***Community Fellow***

**Marguerite Rivera Houze**

Program Director  
University Medical Center  
of El Paso

## El Paso County Selected as Reclaiming Futures Site

Reclaiming Futures is a national initiative that promotes new standards of care to help young people in trouble with drugs, alcohol, and crime. In 2001, with a \$21 million investment from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF), ten communities located throughout the United States were selected to redesign the way the juvenile justice system works.

Since its inception, a total of 26 communities have been designated Reclaiming Futures sites with additional funding and support from federal agencies and partner foundations.

El Paso is the first Reclaiming Futures site in Texas and the only site along the U.S.-Mexico border. El Paso was selected as a site in 2008 and shortly after named five local “Fellows” who represent diverse and important components of the holistic Reclaiming Futures model (see sidebar). The El Paso County Juvenile Justice Center, the 65th District Court, and the OSAR Region 10 Office, University Medical Center of El Paso, are the founding partners in this endeavor.

Every year, more than 2,000 youth come into contact with the El Paso juvenile justice system. Youth are especially vulnerable to drug trafficking and the drug trade’s associated problems due to the area’s proximity to the Mexico border.

Reclaiming Futures El Paso aims to work with youth who enter the juvenile justice system to assess their need for drug and alcohol treatment and link them to community-based services for support. The involvement of parents and other influential adults is a key factor to positive results.

Reclaiming Futures El Paso strives to:

- Improve treatment services for teens by advocating for more evidence-based treatment approaches;
- Develop a comprehensive system of care that coordinates drug and alcohol treatment and family social services, and;
- Involve the community in creating new opportunities for teens.

“We have taken the juvenile justice system in El Paso in a new direction to serve our children and our community,” says Judge Gutierrez. “Reclaiming Futures will insure that troubled youth are given the necessary care and services that they deserve to become productive citizens.”

### RWJF Debuts Video

The Reclaiming Futures model is based on core principles about the treatment of youths involved in the juvenile justice system. Each RF site integrates those principles to its unique environment and each site may approach the coordination of courts, service providers, community groups, and individuals somewhat differently to help teens in trouble. But across the board, the RF model shows positive results!

The RF site in Ohio recently produced a video about its own experience. Knowing that a picture is worth a thousand words, click on the link to view the video and join the RF blog: <http://bit.ly/9pdbDn>.



## Reclaiming Futures Means Systems Change

The Enrique H. Peña Juvenile Justice Center has embarked on the development of a clear mission statement, a viable vision statement, and a strategic mapping process to guide the Center for the next five years.

During a recent RF leadership conference in Portland, Oregon, Chief Roger Martinez engaged Laura Nissen, Reclaiming Futures National Program Director, in a discussion about these plans underway. Chief Martinez proposed to her that “Reclaiming Futures” become the department slogan for the year and Dr. Nissen agreed. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation will review the final plan to assure that it reflects the spirit and guiding principles of Reclaiming Futures.

As the Juvenile Justice Center continues to move forward, the department will move toward the use of evidence-based practices in working with and treating youth for underlying behavioral and social challenges, including problems with alcohol or drugs. In addition to the expertise the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation provide, the University of Texas will work closely with the department to evaluate program effectiveness. This is indeed an exciting time at the Juvenile Justice Center!

### *In Their Own Words* (Unedited Writings from our Youth)

#### Violence in My Life

Violence affect me on my drug use because it made me do a lot of things that I didn't want to do. Violence got me in a lot of trouble and changing is the only way to keep me away from violence and I'll try hard to stay from the bad influnces and that make me do all this awful things. That why I'm here for the bad things I done in life. —S. (age 16)

#### Violence

Well I grew up around a lot of violence and how it has affected my life is by me acting violent with other people that make fun of me and make me mad.

All my uncles and cousins act the same way. I guess they grew up with a lot of violence in there lifes as well. —A. (age 17)

## Juvenile Justice Center Hosts MRT Training

In March, the Juvenile Justice Center was pleased to offer a specialized training, Moral Reconciliation Therapy, to 17 individuals representing Gadsden School District, a local substance abuse treatment provider, and juvenile probation officers, among others.

Moral Reconciliation Therapy, or MRT, is a program recognized by the federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration as a successful and proven therapy. In El Paso, implementation of MRT among serious habitual offenders has had equal success. Since the program was introduced in 2007, the number of youths who have reoffended after participating in MRT has declined steadily each year.

Judge Richard Ainsa presides at juvenile court and works with youths who are incarcerated or on probation.. He states, "I've noticed the positive effect on the kids who undergo MRT. There are less violations and their attitudes are better."

Nationally, a 20-year study on recidivism among offenders who had participated in MRT showed that without treatment, re-arrest rates approach 94%, while the rate for MRT-treated offenders was 81%. Non-treated offenders show a re-incarcerated rate of 82% compared to 61% among MRT-treated offenders.

MRT combines elements from various counseling traditions and aims to develop an individual's ability to confront behaviors and attitudes; assess current relationships; reinforce positive behaviors and habits; develop a positive self-image; build tolerance against frustration and anger; and develop higher stages of moral reasoning.

By training local providers on MRT, El Paso youths will have continued community support even after they leave the juvenile justice system.

For more information about Reclaiming Futures or becoming a designated site, please visit [www.reclaimingfutures.org](http://www.reclaimingfutures.org). Questions about Reclaiming Futures El Paso? Please email the Community Fellow at [mhouze@umcelpaso.org](mailto:mhouze@umcelpaso.org).