

## PALMER DRUG ABUSE PROGRAM

At present, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) consists of 27 separate Institutes and Centers. Of particular concern to current Vocero readers are the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (created in 1970) and the National Institute on Drug Abuse (created in 1973).

This current concern for San Antonio regards two well documented (NIH) and bothersome facts.

First, students who drink before the age of 15 are four times more likely to develop alcoholism than those who start drinking at age 20 or later; unfortunately fifty three percent of American children who drink begin drinking in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade (14 years old). Second, drug abuse and addiction constitute a major burden to society. The cost to U.S. taxpayers amount to one-half a trillion dollars per year – due to medical help, crime, and losses in productivity (educational and economic).

The Palmer Drug Abuse Program - San Antonio (PDAP) began to address these two problems (alcoholism and drug abuse) in November 1977.

PDAP is a twelve step program that holds group meetings, individual and family counseling, and fun activities that focus on healthy relationships and building life skills. PDAP is based upon spiritual principles rather than upon a specific religion.. In addition, PDAP provides prevention and life skills education - working with students in middle schools, high schools, and alternative schools in the greater San Antonio area.

PDAP has eight full-time counselors. In the twelve-month period between July 2008 and June 2009 (the United Way calendar year) the staff worked with 1183 chemical

dependent clients, between the ages of 12 and 60. The **Younger Group** (12-18) and the **Older Group** meet separately.

PDAP also works with approximately 450 family members of substance abusers. Adults 18 and older meet in the **Family Group**, 14-17 year old members in the **Teen Generation**, and children under 18 in the **New Generation**

In addition, the staff works with approximately 200 high school and junior high school students during facilitated group meetings in four area school districts; and the staff participates in about 100 speaking engagements and presentations on substance abuse at various civic organizations.

A good example of how the program has worked would be the Martinez (fictional name) family. Four years ago, Maria, was a high school junior, an honor student, and an active member of the volley ball team. When her grades started to fall and she lost interest in volleyball, the family became concerned – but could find no cause. Then one day the school phoned to inform Maria’s parents that Maria had been caught smoking marijuana and that she would be sent to an alternative school. The alternative school, treating substance abuse as only a behavioral issue, allowed Maria’s addiction to grow. Maria’s reckless behavior also grew – manifesting itself with violent arguments with her parents and, eventually, with criminal behavior that landed her in juvenile court.

The court ordered both Maria and her parents to attend any of several approved drug rehabilitation programs. The family chose PDAP. Reluctantly, Maria attended the PDAP Younger Group; her parents attended the Family Group, and her younger brother the New Gen group.

At present, Maria has been clean for two years. She has passed her GED, is enrolled in a local community college, works part time, and is living in her own apartment.

While this sounds like a success story, it is not. It is only a beginning story.

Maria's addiction will be a life-long problem; her addiction is a disease. The inability of Maria's family to find a cure for that addiction will also be a frustrating and life-long problem.

Therefore, Maria continues to attend the PDAP Older Group on a weekly basis and attends many of their weekend outings. Her group continues to encourage her in her battle to fight the disease. Her younger brother still attends the New Gen programs (weekly meetings and weekend events) and her parents are still active in the Family Group – both of them on the advisory board. The prevailing model here is “Progress, not Perfection.”

The NIH has established that our nation's biggest problem with substance abuse lies in families who choose to ignore, belittle, or are ashamed of the disease itself. PDAP works hard to educate the community of San Antonio about these issues. All of PDAP's services are FREE. PDAP is supported by churches, businesses, foundations, United Way-SA/Bexar County, members, and individuals from the greater San Antonio area. PDAP does not accept government funding. You can find PDAP at [www.pdap.com/sahome.htm](http://www.pdap.com/sahome.htm)

PDAP, however, is not the only source of help here in San Antonio. You can find other groups listed under the San Antonio Council on Alcohol & Drug Abuse and Prevention Resource Center. It's full of useful substance abuse prevention information and programs offered by the Council. [www.positivepreventions.org](http://www.positivepreventions.org).

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