

## **THE BALANCE PROGRAM**

The Balance Program is multi-component community based program that addresses public safety concerns, educational requirements, mental health and substance abuse issues, and the various social needs of juveniles referred to the Wichita County Juvenile Probation Department. The concept allows juvenile delinquents, including serious offenders, to remain in the community with the expectation that the public will be safeguarded from juvenile crime and offenders will receive appropriate rehabilitative services.

Juveniles referred for felony offenses and offenses that require mandatory expulsion from school are the primary candidates for the Balance Program. Other probationers having difficulty in school, or who have substance abuse or other behavior issues may also be referred to the program.

It is expected that 85% of the youth enrolled in the Balance Program will not be placed in a secure post adjudication facility or committed to TJJD. It is expected that 70% of the youth who complete the Balance Program will not commit an offense as an adult that is equal to or greater than the offense that caused placement in the Balance Program.

### **PUBLIC SAFETY COMPONENT**

Each juvenile referred to the Balance Program will have a supervising case management probation officer. The probation officer will seek compliance with the orders of probation as directed by the Juvenile Court. The probation officer will set curfews and reporting times in relation to the seriousness of the juvenile's offense and in response to the juvenile's cooperation with the terms of probation. The probation officer may address violations in graduated sanctions to include curfew reduction, home detention and detention. Case managers will remain in regular contact with the probationer's parent or guardian.

Juveniles in the Balance Program will be seen at home on a regular basis by compliance officers. This team of probation officers will make home visits during curfew hours on weekdays and on weekends. During home visits, probationers may be subject to searches of their person and/or property. Random drug screens may also be conducted. Sex offenders will be subject to additional scrutiny such as searching for pornography. Compliance officers may intervene in domestic problems that are present at the time of the home visit.

Compliance officers will utilize GPS electronic monitoring to help ensure that the terms of probation are being met. These terms include, but are not limited to, compliance with curfews, home detention, disassociation with other probationers, and avoidance of contact with victims. Each workday morning, compliance officers will provide case managers with an electronic report of the previous night's activity, including problems noted in the home. Case managers will immediately address reported problems.

If warranted, probationers can be immediately taken into custody for a violation of probation. Probationers may be taken before the Juvenile Court to address non-compliance issues.

## **EDUCATIONAL COMPONENT**

Probationers in the Balance Program will be enrolled in the Wichita County Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Program. Probationers will be required to report daily and will receive academic instruction from certified teachers provided by the Wichita Falls Independent School District. Special education services will be provided to students requiring such services. Academic progress and attendance will be strictly monitored. Reports will be submitted to parents or guardians throughout the academic year.

## **MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE COMPONENT**

Juveniles in the Balance Program will receive services from the department's mental health staff which includes a licensed professional counselor and a licensed master social worker. The mental health coordinator, who is a licensed professional counselor, will review already completed psychological evaluations, or, if necessary, will refer juveniles to a clinical psychologist for a full scale evaluation. If there is a recommendation for medication, the mental health coordinator will assist the juvenile's parent or guardian with obtaining services. Individual, family, and group counseling services will be provided by the counseling staff.

The program facility is licensed by the Texas Department of State Health Services through Helen Farabee MHMR for outpatient substance abuse treatment. The department employs two licensed chemical dependency counselors who provide services along with counselors from Helen Farabee MHMR. Additionally, the department's LCDCs facilitate an after care support group for juveniles transitioning from treatment.

If a probationer is taken into custody for a violation and placed in detention, the probationer will continue to receive services from the counseling and chemical dependency staff.

## **SOCIAL SERVICES COMPONENT**

Realizing that a dysfunctional home environment, often accompanied by poverty, is a significant cause of juvenile delinquency, the Balance Program employs a licensed social worker who provides a variety of social service needs to probationers and their families. Some of the services provided include: housing assistance; employment assistance for both parent and probationer; simulated baby program; interpersonal, social and resiliency training; budgeting and financial education; college preparation; Medicaid and Medicare assistance; transportation assistance; clothing and food assistance; MHMR and IDD placements; and assistance with parental placements for the probationer.

## **PROGRAM PHILOSOPHY**

The Wichita County Juvenile Probation Department believes that a standalone component of the Balance Program will not suffice in the efforts to help ensure public safety and the rehabilitative needs of juvenile offenders. It is the combination and balance of the above described components, working together, that has the greatest potential for success. Juveniles require discipline and must be held accountable for their actions; however, their youthful status must not be overlooked. Education, counseling and the satisfaction of social needs are vitally important. The Wichita County Juvenile Probation Department believes that if we can help a youthful offender change his or her behavior from bad to good, then we have helped to ensure public safety; often, for a longer period of time than allowed by incarceration.