STARS:
Supporting & Training
At-Risk Students
89 percent of the students had not committed another offense or been in trouble with the law since attending STARS programming. Ninety-two percent of the parents also indicated that their students’ school attendance had improved.

Of the 24 students that have attended the GED Help Sessions, 12 have since obtained their GED. Six of these students are enrolled in college, and another three students received college scholarships to enroll in the Fall 2008 semester.

An additional benefit of the STARS program is the hands-on training it provides for College of Education graduate students. Doctoral students, under the supervision of Counselor Education professors, serve as part-time program staff and provide mentoring for master’s level practicum students, counselor interns, and graduate students delivering services in the program. To date, 43 College of Education students (17 doctoral and 26 master’s level) have assisted the STARS program. Graduates and current participants describe the experience as invaluable to their personal and professional development.

The STARS program has proven highly successful, and it is one that the Office of Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention, the Antonio E. Garcia Arts & Education Center, and TAMUCC’s College of Education can refer to with pride.
The education level of STARS participants’ parents varies. Of 320 responding parents, 49 (15 percent) had completed one or two years of college, 34 (11 percent) had completed more than two years of college, and 117 (37 percent) held only a high school diploma or its equivalent. Two had master’s degrees, and the remaining 120 had education less than a high school diploma.

Impact

STARS programming provides structure, accountability, and guidance to young people and their families. The families continue to express appreciation for the changes they see in their youth. One parent, John, said, “I can really see a difference in my son. He’s going to school, and now we actually are talking to each other.” Another parent, Kellie, said, “I overheard a conversation he (son) was having with his little brother about listening to what I said. I never thought I’d hear that from him.”

According to a survey of participants’ parents conducted six months after program completion,
To date, 743 households from 18 different zip codes in the Corpus Christi area have participated in programming made possible by Office of Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention funding since October 2004. The students range in age from 11 to 18 with an average age of 14.5; most are in the ninth grade. The student population has been 57 percent male and 43 percent female.

When asked ethnicity, 89 percent of participants indicated Hispanic, eight percent Anglo-American, two percent African-American, and 1 percent other. The average age of the primary caretaker of students attending the STARS program is 39. Only 28 percent of the students live with both parents. Forty-seven percent live with one parent (39 percent with mom and 8 percent with dad); 15 percent live with one parent and a step parent; five percent live with grandparents, and five percent live with a guardian.

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The **Youth Leadership Academy**, a camp designed to enhance the leadership capabilities of court-referred students, has been offered the last three summers. The original curriculum was developed by 17 College of Education doctoral students taking an educational leadership course. Graduate students (doctoral and master’s level) continue to deliver the program. The camp concludes with a ropes challenge course designed to encourage and develop group interaction, problem-solving, and leadership. To date, 74 students have participated in the Youth Leadership Academy.

Located at the Antonio E. Garcia Arts & Education Center, an off-campus community center near downtown Corpus Christi, the **Supporting & Training At-Risk Students (STARS)** program utilizes graduate students and university faculty to make available counseling services for at-risk youth and their families.

Primarily Latino, the neighborhood suffers from poverty, unemployment, teen pregnancy, crime, dysfunctional families, drive-by shootings, illiteracy, and substance abuse. Family services are desperately needed.
Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi (TAMUCC) is a Hispanic-serving, public, degree-granting institution of higher education. It is a comprehensive urban institution enrolling almost 9,000 students.

TAMUCC strives to endorse citizenship and service, to stress collaborations within the university and the community, and to educate and prepare its students to contribute in both arenas. Through the perseverance and vision of a dedicated faculty, staff, community, and student body, TAMUCC has

Anger Management Classes encourage students to see differently the situations that make them angry. Designed to change thinking processes and reactions, the sessions consist of process and psycho-educational groups.

The sessions provide participants with perspectives and skills to express their needs and wants in respectful ways, thus improving the quality of life and interactions with others.

“I’m feeling a lot better since I shared a lot of what’s been bugging me, because it actually makes me feel like I have someone to talk to.”

—Jenni, 17
grown to fill a unique and important role in meeting the educational needs that will strengthen the region in the future.

TAMUCC and the College of Education have a history of success in educating professionals to work with children and families within a diverse society. The Antonio E. Garcia Arts & Education Center is a key to this outreach, providing the extensive and unique resources of the university to hundreds of community members annually.

Family Night Out, held every other Friday, provides local families with family counseling in the form of activities and games. Dinner ingredients are provided—cooked one session by children for their parents and the next session by parents for their children. This program emphasizes family communication and support.

One counselor was struck by the number of families who said they had never shared a meal together.
Young people living in poverty must make complex decisions every day; unfortunately, many make unhealthy choices. Too often they select criminal activity, dropping out of school, gang affiliation, substance abuse, running away, or parenthood before high school graduation.

Corpus Christi’s courtrooms are flooded with adolescents. Local judges, probation officers, and case managers struggle to find programs to encourage good choices over poor ones. An Office of Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention appropriation has permitted Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi’s College of Education to assist in meeting this need through the STARS program.

**Family Connectivity** promotes familial bonding. The program activities allow parent and child to open lines of communication while developing family unity and teamwork. A poignant observation of one student was, “I didn’t realize my dad had pictures of me and my sister in his wallet.”

Session topics include improving communication skills, boundary setting, developing healthy lifestyles, choices and priorities, self-concept, respect, responsibility, and empowerment.
Seeking to help court-referred and at-risk youth develop the confidence and skills to succeed academically and socially, STARS emphasizes improving academic success and vocational awareness (Academic Success), strengthening family relationships (Family Connectivity), and drug and alcohol prevention and intervention (Healthy Interactions).

Additional offerings, including Family Night Out, Anger Management, GED Help Sessions, and the Youth Leadership Academy, have been developed to enhance the original STARS program. Some students are court-mandated to attend, and others do so by choice. The following pages describe these various programs.

Healthy Interactions addresses self-esteem, peer relationships, participant and familial substance abuse, participant victimization, choice and consequences, and coping skills by providing assessment, counseling, and prevention/intervention programs. As students in groups express themselves, they are encouraged to examine their thoughts, feelings and behaviors.

“All of us have different points of view, but for the most part, our issues are basically the same,”
—Yajira, 14
Academic Success provides students an opportunity to enhance their academic skills through individualized tutoring and mentoring. During sessions, students envision plans for their future, share them with counselors and fellow students, and explore the means to achieve them.

As part of Academic Success, students tour the TAMUCC campus.

GED Help Sessions are offered to students ordered or wishing to obtain their high school equivalency. Additionally, web-based resources are provided to assist them in developing the necessary skills to pass the GED exam. Participants must also plan short and long-term goals for their educational and occupational futures.

“I come to classes so I can get a better job, make something with my life, and not be dependent on other people.”
—Marco, 19