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Adoption center provides advice, information on choices for parents as

By Melissa Naumann
 REPORTER

An unplanned pregnancy can bring confusion and distress, as well as advice or pressure from well-intentioned friends and family members. The Child Placement Center in College Station can help by providing unbiased information on the options available to a pregnant woman, Jaqui Freund, director of the center, said.

"Advice is not the issue here," Freund said. "I'm not going to tell anybody what to do. My job as a social worker is to make sure she's looked at all of her options."

The Child Placement Center is a state-licensed adoption agency but its services extend far beyond placing children, Freund said. If the birthparents decide to put their baby up for adoption, the center provides free counseling before and after the placement of the child.

"For those who choose that (adoption), they need this counseling," Freund said. "Parenthood shouldn't be gone into blindly and neither should adoption."

All legal fees and pregnancy-related medical expenses are covered by the center if adoption is chosen. When a healthy newborn is adopted, the adoptive parents usually pay these costs, Freund said.

If the child is handicapped, however, the large medical bills are often too much for the adoptive

parents to handle. For these children, the center has a bingo fundraiser every Thursday, Friday and Saturday night, she said.

All children can be placed, Freund said. "Many agencies only place healthy, white newborns, so many black or Hispanic women don't come in here because they assume there are no

"Everything has to be her choice and of her own free will. . . We're not here to talk anybody into adoption . . . or into abortion."

— Jaqui Freund, center director

homes for their babies," she said. "The only exception (of a baby that can't be placed) is a baby with AIDS."

For those who haven't decided what to do, the Child Placement Center can help.

A Helpline is manned continually by social workers or carefully screened volunteers.

"The main objective is to be there when a pregnant woman is in crisis and wants to talk to someone," Freund said.

The 24-hour Helpline number is 268-5577. A free support group also is sponsored by the

center for anyone who has put a child up for adoption, adoptive parents or those considering adoption. The support group will meet tonight, 5:30 at the center, located at 505 University East #801 behind Frank's Bar and Grill.

"Many women have the tendency to feel they are the only ones that have ever done this," Freund said. "Their big concern is 'Will my child think I didn't love them?' They need to talk to other people who are going through the same thing."

The Child Placement Center also can help adopted children find their birthparents by referring them to other sources.

Contacting the center for information, counseling or just to talk does not obligate anyone, Freund said.

"The earlier a pregnant woman contacts us the better, but there are no obligations ever," she said. "We're not pushy and we can make referrals. Everything has to be her choice and of her own free will."

Objectivity is one of the most important aspects of the center, she said. The goal is to provide information and not to make important decisions for other people.

"We're not here to talk anybody into adoption or out of adoption or into abortion or out of abortion," Freund said.

She stressed that everything the center does is confidential.

Teacher helps immigrant youth learn 'survival English' to make it in school

DALLAS (AP) — Only a few months ago, teen-agers Jose Mendoza, Jesus Mata and Ivania Parada were hiding from Salvadoran guerrillas who wanted to force them to take up arms.

But like the other students in Manuel Flores' classroom at Thomas J. Rusk Middle School, the youths survived the danger and unrest in their homeland and escaped to the United States.

Now they face another survival test: learning the English language from scratch relatively late in the education system.

These dozen Central and South American students range in age from 13 to 15; some are enrolled in school for the first time in their lives. They are too old to be placed with elementary schoolchildren in English classes, but they aren't advanced enough to keep up with students their own ages who are in the ESL (English as a Second Language) program.

Flores tells them if they don't learn English quickly, they won't make it to high school. They'll drop out. Worse, they could turn to crime.

But Manuel Flores — a migrant farmworker whose childhood was also one of struggle — is determined not to let that happen. Not the man who could barely carry on a conversation in English at age 14 and today has 10 years experience in bilingual education. Not the man who dropped out of school to help pay bills and later, at 34, earned a General Educational Development diploma and two college degrees.

"I relate to these kids. I share their frustrations and I share their dreams," says the 53-year-old teacher.

Flores is quick to point out that his class is helping only a small fraction of the immigrant students enrolled in DISD.

Most simply have to try to keep up in ESL classes.

Of the 20,000 DISD students who are in the ESL, about 850 middle- and high-school students have the same background as the dozen Flores is working with, says Judy Meyer, director of bilingual education and ESL for the Dallas Independent School District. They are new to the country and new to the U.S.'s education system.

Flores works at Rusk as a coun-

selor and tutor for students who are at risk of dropping out. And he teaches English night classes to adults twice a week.

Through his counseling, Flores discovered immigrant teen-age students who could speak no English. So he started a class for a dozen of them, first meeting in a portable room an hour before school each day, then getting a classroom inside the school each afternoon. The goal is to push the students' language skills far enough to sustain them in ESL classes.

Since October, Flores has been drilling the dozen "survival English" students in simple words, phrases and concepts they encounter every day at Rusk.

"They need to know things like 'open your book,' 'turn to page so-and-so,' 'I want you to bring your homework tomorrow.' In some of their (ESL) classes it's sink or swim because of the language barrier, but with a class like this they might be able to stay on top of the water a little longer," Flores says.

Shelda Balcarcel, an ESL teacher at Rusk, has seen progress in the students who attend Flores' sessions. "Their vocabulary is growing and that helps them better understand what's going on in their other ESL classes," Balcarcel says.

The "survival English" students say the time spent with Flores is their favorite part of the day.

They appreciate his constant reassurances and the fun he injects into his teaching. He makes games of introducing new words by using photographs, drawings and pictorial flashcards.

"Cat! Key! Chair! Tree!" come the loud answers in unison from the students who later individually use the same words in short sentences.

Their eagerness — hands shooting up to answer questions and unflinching attempts to pronounce words — is a breath of fresh air, Flores says.

And Flores is a source of strength for his students, a role model they have come to respect.

They know that in his classroom they won't be ridiculed for mangling spoken English.

"I try to instill in their minds that

even though they don't know English, that doesn't mean they're inferior to the other kids," he says.

And every day Flores tells the students they can be whatever they want: doctors, lawyers, architects.

To better understand the students' background, Flores schedules

weekly counseling sessions with each.

"Some of these kids have me things that are horrifying," he says. "They are trying to overcome psychological problems because of what they've been through."

State mental hospital condemned in report

AUSTIN (AP) — The superintendent of Austin State Hospital said long-term care there has improved drastically since January, when federal monitors found psychotic patients in scenes they described as reminiscent of Bedlam, London's notorious 18th century insane asylum.

"This scene in the day room fits the historical descriptions of Bedlam Hospital in England of the 18th century," the monitors said in a report that will be made public later this week when it is presented to U.S. District Judge Barefoot Sanders. The Austin American-Statesman obtained a copy of the report Monday.

The monitors came to "an overwhelming conclusion that this program is out of compliance with major aspects" of court orders in the 15-year-old class-action suit against eight state mental hospitals.

In 1981, the federal court ordered the hospitals to start offering each patient 30 hours a week of therapeutic programs and to maintain safe and healthy living conditions in the mental hospitals run by the Texas Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation.

Kenny Dudley, superintendent of the mental hospital, does not disagree with the findings of the federal court monitors, but said "significant improvements" have changed the unit drastically since January. He also took exception to the "Bedlam" description.

Dudley also said rowdy, disruptive patients now are placed in a room down the hall from the day room, where they color pictures similar to schoolchildren until their behavior is calmer.

Most important, Dudley said, the chronically mentally ill patients are given much more encouragement to attend classes, a key part of the hospital's treatment program. Sixty percent to 70 percent of the patients now attend some therapeutic classes, compared with only about 20 percent when the monitors visited, he said.

The report was written by Austin social worker David Pharis, the federal court monitor for Sanders, and Dr. Raymond Leidig of Colorado, a psychiatrist who monitors mental hospitals as a consultant to the court. Sanders oversees state compliance in the court case. The 1974 suit, which alleged inhumane conditions in the hospitals, was settled in 1981, but Sanders has continued to issue orders in response to his monitor's findings.

Pharis and Leidig paid an unannounced visit in January to the Extended Care Unit, which is comprised of two units that each house about 45 patients.

"There were always 30 to 35 people lounging idly or milling around in the day room," Pharis wrote. "Many of them were slumped in chairs sleeping or appearing withdrawn and uninvolved. Occasionally these people would jump up, pace around in an agitated but undirected manner and then sit down again. Other patients were pacing around in random, undirected ways."

"The noise in the day room at times reaches above 70 decibels in the degree where one could not hear the television," Leidig said.

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