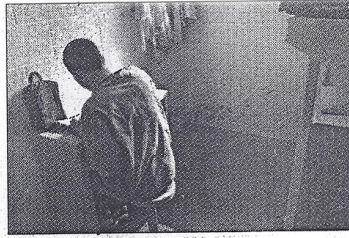


JAIL BREAK



A resident works at his desk between activities at the Santa Fe County Youth Development Program.

Youth-detention center trades punishment for education, treatment

SUNDAY
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Striking deeper chords

While the detention center's structured lifestyle sometimes provides young people with a stability they've never had, the director said he sees more dramatic outcomes when people outside the criminal-justice system visit the center to pay positive attention to its residents.

A nonprofit group whose mission is to bring the arts to institutions sponsors one such program, Outside In. Having volunteers from Outside In teach music, dance, painting and yoga has had a positive impact at the detention center, Sanchez said.

One teenage boy who is serving time for his role in the beating death of another teen said learning how to play the guitar was a turning point for him.

"Music has a magical touch to it. And the guitar to me has a healing effect to it," he wrote in an essay. "There are ways that it heals both the mind and the body such as changing a mood from bad to good, a feeling of calmness to feeling energetic or vice versa, and from getting by in life to being a hard worker and showing dedication. With me it has assisted in choosing a new direction from the dark path I was leading."

Program founder David Lescht said such stories are frequently told by the kids who play one of six guitars that were donated to the facility.

"All of the studies confirm that kids like this, when they have any kind of contact with adults, it interferes with their drift back to negative behavior," he said. "They've got something to hold on to."

Unlike paid jail workers or court-ordered therapists who are seen as part of the institution, Lescht said teens view his program volunteers in a different way.

"The kids know we are there for them," he said. "They sense we are there because we want to help."



Photos by Steve Babuljak/The New Mexican

Residents practice guitar during free time at the Santa Fe County Youth Development Program. Community volunteers teach guitar, dance, art and yoga to residents and provide religious services.