



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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New center provides hope and help for runaway and homeless youth

No matter how they left, kids without a home are at risk for all kinds of exploitation and abuse.

That's why Gulf Bend Center created the Basic Center to provide temporary housing and other services to runaways and homeless youth in the Crossroads area. The center will hold its grand opening event on March 15 from 4 to 5:30 p.m. at the center's temporary housing facility, 208 Marilyn Dr. in Victoria.

"Our ultimate goal is to reunite families and help these kids get back on the right path," said Keith Rucker, lead case manager for the Basic Center. "We have a lot of ways we can help them get there. We can give them a temporary place to stay, food to eat and clothes to wear. We can offer counseling to them and their families. We can help teach them how to make good life decisions."

The center's overall goal is to reunify 95 percent of the youth they serve with their families, Rucker said. Over the next year, the Basic Center plans to work with about 100 runaway and homeless youth. The center will also work with local school districts to prevent children from running away or becoming homeless, he said. In addition, youths will receive services after they have returned home.

Along with counseling, outreach and temporary housing services, the Basic Center can connect students with other resources, ranging from school tutoring to placement in permanent new homes.

The program is open to children and youth ages 0 to 18 living in Victoria, Calhoun, DeWitt, Goliad, Jackson, Lavaca and Refugio counties. Certain services and referrals are available to adults ages 18 to 21. Rucker noted that the Basic Center is open to teenage mothers and their children.

“Every child should have a safe place to call home, and we’re very proud to be a part of making that possible for so many youth in the communities we serve,” said Don Polzin, executive director at Gulf Bend. “The Basic Center is one more way Gulf Bend is achieving its mission of helping the people of this region recover from mental and personal challenges and live rich, full lives.”

The Basic Center is funded by a grant from the Family and Youth Services Bureau, part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The Basic Center can be reached during business hours at 361-485-0886 or any time at its 24-hour crisis hotline, **877-876-7827**.

For more information on Gulf Bend Center, visit GulfBend.org.

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***About Gulf Bend Center:** Gulf Bend Center’s mission is to improve the quality of life of persons and their families who are challenged with problems related to mental illness and intellectual & developmental disorders. The center offers its services to those living in Victoria, Calhoun, DeWitt, Goliad, Jackson, Lavaca and Refugio counties. Its staff seeks to help restore everyone who suffers regardless of ability to pay.*