

Many help young offenders refocus

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Some might call it *serendipity*; others might choose *confluence*.

A combination of the two might best describe the common goals of a Dallas County juvenile disciplinary institution, a veteran of more than 30 years in the music business and an organization of socially committed business executives.

The three players:

- The Youth Village Foundation, founded in 2001, helps train young male offenders to help them re-enter society. The program operates at the Dallas County Youth Village, which houses 13- to 17-year-old nonviolent inmates, and the Medlock Residential Treatment Center, which houses young men charged with crimes of substance or alcohol abuse and sometimes multiple offenses. Most are serving 6-month to 1-year terms.

The foundation provides these programs because the county doesn't have the money to do it and also because the foundation can follow up and track the young men after they're released. The county is forbidden to do so by law.

- The foundation reorganized in mid-2007 and hired Jerry D. Silhan as its first full-time executive director.

He came from the music business, where he'd been West Coast vice president of sales and marketing for the \$1.2 billion Bertelsmann Music Group. Silhan helped develop Alicia Keys, Alan Jackson, John Denver, Brooks and Dunn, Britney Spears and others into multi-platinum stars.

He also helped resurrect the careers of Rod Stewart, Santana, Aretha Franklin, Luther Vandross and others.

Silhan decided to pursue a career in nonprofit management in early 2007. He had lived Dallas in the 1980s, and his wife is from here, so he came back and enrolled in courses at Brookhaven College and later Southern Methodist University.

- The 9-year-old Dallas Social Venture Partners is a nonprofit group of business executives who commit time and money to helping various causes in three- to five-year stints.

The 138 members are primarily entrepreneurs, chief executives, chief financial officers, attorneys – and a chef.

The Youth Village Foundation has about 186 young offender clients, and over the course of a year, the staff works with up to 400.

Silhan said that Medlock's recidivism rate is just 21 percent, and Dallas County Youth Village has a 13

percent recidivism rate.

The Texas Youth Commission as a whole has close to a 50 percent recidivism rate, according to an October 2007 report.

New directions

The Youth Village Foundation programs were "created specifically to help youth in trouble turn their lives in a positive direction through education and healthy life changes," Silhan said.

Its dog training program helps youth develop anger management, impulse control and self-discipline skills. The dogs, which come from area shelters, can often be trained to become good candidates for adoption.

Partnerships drive most of the programs. The foundation bought 15 Dell computers so that El Centro College could teach computer courses, and El Centro also offers a nutrition and culinary arts program and a certified food manager program.

The inmates grow vegetables and herbs that are used in the culinary arts programs or donated to the North Texas Food Bank. Sometimes they're sold to local restaurants or at the Farmers Market on weekends.

Investing time

Now that the Dallas Social Venture Partners has selected the foundation as an "investee," it will spend three years working there. It gave \$30,000 for this first year.

The managerial input may outweigh the dollar contributions in importance.

"Money isn't the solution to all of our issues," said Stacy Caldwell, executive director of Dallas Social Venture Partners. "It takes rolling up our sleeves because these people take their work very seriously. When they say they're going to do something, it's done."

The foundation always needs money and volunteers, Silhan says, while expressing appreciation for the following donors during the last 18 months: Speedway Children's Charities, the Sparks Foundation, Dallas Children's Charities, the Rees-Jones Foundation and the Stemmons Foundation.

To help, call him at 214-957-7057 or e-mail jsilhan@youthfoundationvillage.org.