



# COMPASSPOINTS

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## More Elementary Principals Select Directions' Kid Connection



*"We have prevented the placement of many, many youngsters in Emotionally Handicapped classrooms."*

The Pinellas JWB Children's Service Council had an innovative idea several years ago—let the Principals of the highest-need elementary schools choose the program they think will be most effective in their schools at helping children with emotional problems. The first time that Directions' Kid Connection program was on this menu two years ago, the program grew from five to 13 elementary schools. This May, 17 Principals selected it as the program of choice. The program places a full-time mental health professional on staff in each of these schools.

"Kid Connection has been a wonderful asset to our school. I don't know what we would do without it !!!!" reported Peggy Pearson, Principal of Mt. Vernon Elementary School. "We are interested in the following Menu Program...Kid-Connection, Kid-Connection, Kid-Connection!" she added. Sheila Jaquish, Principal of Skycrest Elementary, echoed her

sentiments, "I have found Kid-Connection to be a wonderful partner. I strongly desire to retain this program!"

"From its onset, the Kid Connection program was designed to identify and assist families, teachers and students when a student is struggling with emotional or behavior problems. Our staff can get involved right there at school or at home to help turn the situation around at no cost to the family," said Jim Colacicco, supervisor of these programs. "We have prevented the placement of many, many youngsters in Emotionally Handicapped classrooms." Kid Connection's recent outcomes evaluation from the JWB reports that 94% of parents of these children increased their school involvement, which is highly correlated with child school success, and 79% of the children improved their behavior at school. Both outcomes were well beyond the levels set for satisfactory performance.

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**COMPASS POINTS** is a quarterly publication of Directions for Mental Health, Inc., a private nonprofit community mental health organization serving Pinellas County.

## Homeless Outreach Expands

In just their first few months of operations, Directions' two new partnerships with law enforcement have shown remarkable results. Funded by the Pinellas Board of County Commissioners this spring, street outreach in both Pinellas Park and the Lealman area have connected hundreds of homeless persons to needed human services, and started many on the road to recovery from substance abuse, mental illness and poverty. In fact, the Street Outreach program has placed 340 unduplicated individuals into sheltered housing. The model pairs a mental health outreach worker with a law enforcement officer full-time. It is a key component of the County's 10-year plan to end homelessness.

"This is really exciting. I don't ever want to go back to being a beat cop," commented Officer Stephen Vangeli of the Pinellas Park Police Department. "This is getting people help rather than simply arresting them again and again," he added. Not only has the Pinellas Park duo been instrumental in helping street people get into rehabilitation centers and obtain medical and other care, but the influx of homeless along Park Boulevard and other areas of the city has decreased dramatically, according to city administrators and Police Chief Dorene Thomas, who have already called the program a "major success".

Despite property tax reductions, both of these initiatives have, so far, shown value enough not to be threatened with loss of funding. "I hope taxpayers understand that effective services that get people off the streets and in control of their lives actually reduce the future cost of jails and other ongoing public expenses," said Tom Riggs, Directions' President and CEO. "It is a bargain to connect people to treatment and help them recover and get jobs."

## Directions Welcomes New Management Team Members

This spring and summer we have welcomed two new members to Directions' Management Team. First, **April Lott**, LCSW joined us as Community Treatment Director, overseeing services that help adults coping with severe mental illness to recover and lead a normal life. These include the expanding street outreach police partnerships to homeless persons that are off to such a good start. Then in August, we were joined by **Nancy Gordon**, LCSW. Nancy assumes the role of Clinical Director, overseeing services for children and families that range from very early intervention to school-based services to outpatient therapy. She will join us as the organization expands from having 13 to 17 full-time mental health professionals partnered with high-need elementary schools. Both women bring over 20 years of professional experience to our Management team.

## Directions for Mental Health, Inc.

presents various community classes throughout Pinellas County.



These include early childhood workshops, parenting classes and ACT: Adults and Children Against Violence Training Program for parents/caregivers.

**Please call 547-4566, ext. 121 or 122 for registration and information.**



# On Safari...



From zebras to lions to elephants and even a tiger...Directions for Mental Health, Inc.'s annual celebration event, with a safari theme this year, was full of fun, friends, wonderful food, music and awareness of mental illness. "Safari Night" was held on April 27 at the Innisbrook Resort & Golf Club in Palm Harbor. Well attended by over 240 guests and with a multitude of interesting auction items for both a silent and live auction, this was the most successful event ever. The emcee was the renowned St. Petersburg Times columnist, Ernest Hooper. Awards were given to Judge Crockett Farnell for his outstanding community leadership in improving care for mentally ill persons in the criminal justice system, to Sarah K. Snyder for her outstanding advocacy and leadership to improve systems of care for homeless persons, to the Tampa Bay Business Journal for their media support in promotion of business partnerships with non-profit organizations and recognizing community mental health, and to Robert Stahl of Stahl & Associates Insurance for his outstanding support of our non-profit organization as a Business Partner.

The Gold Sponsor for the "Safari" was GENOA Healthcare, and many of our Silver and Bronze sponsors are listed to the right under "Sponsors".



## Save the Date...

Directions will celebrate 25 years of service to the community at their annual event for 2008, "**Heal the Hurt Gala**", on **Saturday, April 19, 2008**.

**WATCH FOR DETAILS!** You don't want to miss this one!

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