



River Oak Center for Children **Helping children and families overcome obstacles**

Oct. 13, 2010 -- When Jackie's parents first came to River Oak Center for Children almost one year ago they had lost hope that anything might help Jackie's difficult behavior after it had escalated into sudden violent fits. Her parents had imagined weekend trips together; instead, they had to install locks on her windows to prevent her from jumping out.

Jackie was angry about going to River Oak, and even less receptive when she began her weekly treatment regimen of two early morning therapeutic visits, an evening session with a skills trainer, another evening with a therapist and a visit to the psychiatrist. But week by week, with solid rules and consequences from her parents, she began to see that she didn't need – or want – to fight every battle.

A breakthrough came when psychological testing revealed that Jackie had been exposed to drugs while in the womb, before her parents adopted her at eight months. The new information helped her parents feel more confident that with love and structure eventually Jackie could live a "normal" adolescence without numerous weekly visits with her therapeutic team.

Helping families and children to heal

We rarely hear about the thousands of disadvantaged children and families who are helped each year in the Sacramento area through the innovative, research-based programs provided by River Oak Center for Children (www.riveroak.org).

River Oak continues to be Sacramento region's primary safety net provider for mental health services for children and youth. It offers preventive services through intensive outpatient treatment for infants to young adults up to age 21. And, through a new program for youth in the Juvenile Justice system funded by a Mental Health Services Act grant, it will soon be able to help young adults up to 26 years of age.

How United Way funds help

River Oak Center for Children will use United Way contributions for two purposes:

- Provide emergency support through its Helping Hand Fund
- Fund activities and materials through its Activity/Scholarship Fund

"We're seeing families unable to meet their basic needs, such as rent, utilities and food," said Laurie Clothier, CEO of the organization. "Families are stressed and the ones that feel the brunt are the children."

Alice Gentry, community affairs manager, explained, "Through our Helping Hand Fund, we were able to help a young mother whose preschoolers were having a hard time keeping up while walking her two older children to school. A double stroller made it possible to get her children to school on time."

The Activity/Scholarship Fund makes it possible for children to participate in school activities such as overnight science field trips.

Building on strengths

Besides effective programs based on solid research, River Oak Center for Children is distinctive for building on the strengths and resources of families and children.

As Alice puts it, “A lot of really good parents have children with behavioral health issues. They’re working very hard and trying to do their very best.”

You may not hear a lot about River Oak and its clients in the news, but they’re making Sacramento a better place to live for all of us.

Note: All clients receiving mental health services through River Oak are referred by the Sacramento County Child Access Team at 916-875-9980.