

# The Almanac

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## **Holiday Fund: Helping youths, families in crisis**

**By Andrea Gemmet**

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The teenage years can be rough on parents and kids alike -- so rough that a teen may decide to take to the streets rather than face a seemingly impossible situation at home. That's when Yvette MacDonald and the staff at Your House South can step in.

Located in a cozy, unassuming three-bedroom house in Redwood City, Your House South is a safe haven where up to six runaway teens can spend as many as six weeks while they and their families work on resolving differences and reuniting.

It's one of 19 programs, ranging from a 24-hour suicide-prevention hotline to transitional housing for foster care wards, that are offered by Youth and Family Enrichment Services, a San Carlos-based nonprofit agency serving San Mateo County residents.

Whether they're brought in by the police, or are referred by a school counselor or teacher, most teens at Your House South are only 13 or 14 years old, says Ms. MacDonald, Your House South program manager.

Some leave home because of abuse, others because they aren't getting along with step-parents.

Often, Ms. MacDonald sees first-generation American girls rebelling against their parents' traditional gender expectations, she says.

Most of the teens are failing school. Some are abusing drugs or alcohol, and some are escaping parents who abuse drugs and alcohol, she says.

One girl came to your House South because she had bad grades, and was afraid that her father would beat her, Ms. MacDonald says. When she contacted the girl's mother and told her why her daughter was afraid to come home, the mother says, "Well, she should be -- it's what she deserves," Ms. MacDonald recalls.

A recent graduate of Your House South ended up there because he was chafing under the rules of the homeless shelter where he was staying with his mom, she says.

"We have a lot of families that are struggling financially. Eleven people living in a one-bedroom, those kinds of situations where, of course, it's very stressful on everybody."

Your House South isn't equipped to handle everything -- abuse and neglect cases go to Child Protective Services, drug and alcohol problems to programs that specialize in them -- but the staff makes referrals and connects families to a range of services, including academic help, outpatient counseling and after-school programs. Your House South also runs a hotline that fields 500 calls a year, Ms. MacDonald says.

On an annual budget of \$525,000, Your House South provides crisis interventions, counseling sessions, homework help and 24-hour-a-day supervision.

Youth and Family Enrichment Services relies on private donations for about 12 percent of its \$6 million annual budget, says Executive Director Bob Rybicki. About 10 percent comes from fees, and the remainder is government funding from a variety of sources, he says.

The Almanac's Holiday Fund is a major source of private donations for the agency, he says.

## **INFORMATION**

For information on Youth and Family Enrichment Services programs, go to [www.yfes.org](http://www.yfes.org) or call 591-9623.