

PROMISING PRACTICES



Kindred Homes restores youths to their homes and futures

In Central Virginia, few options exist for residential placement of youths who display disruptive, self-harming, oppositional, or delinquent behaviors.

Responding to this need, Kindred Homes, a program of [Central Virginia Community Services](#), has been providing safe homes for youths between the ages of five and seventeen. A typical adolescent placed in Kindred Homes has inappropriate social and life skills, conflicted relationships with family members, poor school attendance and performance, association with negative peers, and a history of failed intensive therapeutic services or psychiatric hospitalization. The youth might also have had encounters with the juvenile justice system, Department of Social Services, school personnel, and a psychiatrist or other medical provider.

Kindred Homes applies the Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care (MTFC) model developed by Oregon Social Learning Center. MTFC is a cost-effective alternative to hospitalization, detention, and group home treatment for adolescents who have serious emotional and behavioral disturbances.

Kindred Homes recruits, trains, and supports Professional Parents who live throughout the Central Virginia catchment area. Youths are placed in a Professional Parent's home for an average of six to nine months. Kindred Homes' clinicians use this placement time to treat the youths and their families.

Each youth in the program has an individual therapist, skills trainer, and family therapist. All work together to meet treatment goals and increase the chances of a successful return to the youth's home of origin. Kindred

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Homes' staff members also act as case managers and coordinate with other service providers to provide comprehensive care for each youth.

The MTFC model provides clear, consistent rules and expectations through a daily point and level system. The model assumes that youths can practice and learn new skills for interacting with others and manage their responses to the challenges they face.

Youths earn points for pro-social behaviors that they can spend for privileges in the Professional Parent's home. The number of points they earn and the speed they move through the levels of the program depend on the youths' own efforts and actions.

Professional Parents take a supportive, mentoring, and encouragement role with the youths. Corrective feedback comes in the form of points being lost and calm explanations as to why. Youths are often surprised that their Professional Parent doesn't yell or hold grudges when they make poor choices. If a youth fails to earn the necessary daily points, he or she faces a demotion to a beginning level and loss of privileges the next day. Yet he or she is encouraged to turn things around and earn points to get back on track. The youths have a concrete way to measure their success and a framework to guide their decision making.

Kindred Homes' clinicians are proficient in engaging with the clients in a positive way and using their therapeutic relationship as the medium for change. The clinicians strive to create environments in which parents and youths can safely practice new skills and become successful. One adolescent had such a contentious relationship with her parents that even telephone contact with them led to shouting. At first, clinicians enabled communication by creating videotaped messages to pass between the youth and her parents. They eventually progressed to face-to-face meetings.

Because positive reinforcement is a major component in behavior shaping, youths hear more words of encouragement than criticism. They begin to view adults -- and themselves -- differently. Parents or guardians, usually expecting to be blamed for having a troubled child, are supported and coached on how to apply the MTFC principles of supervision, consistency, separation from delinquent peers, and positive relationships and activities.

Parents or guardians often face hardship when they try to find the time and transportation to travel to their child's residential placement. To facilitate family participation in the program, Kindred Homes' staff members can provide transportation for the youth if needed.

At times, there is no identified parent or guardian to whom the youth can return. In this case, the goal shifts to enabling the youth to live on his or her own. Treatment can extend as long as necessary for staff to build the youth's vocational and life skills, find affordable housing, or link with an independent living program.

After months of living with clear expectations, and surrounded by people who reinforce their strengths and successes, youths can begin to feel proud of their behavioral changes. A new, positive self-image often begins to emerge and can lead to lasting improvements. A fifteen-year-old youth who lived in a Professional Parent home for almost eight months said Kindred Homes is "a good program because it gives people a fresh start. It matches you with good people to help you with your problems." Describing herself as "melodramatic" in the past, she says she is more in control of her anger now. "I've changed. I'm not that way anymore."

Following discharge from a Professional Parent home, youths continue to receive follow-up services from Kindred Homes for at least three months. The follow-up ensures continuity of care and stabilizes the individuals in their new environments.

In 2011, Central Virginia Community Services earned a renewal of its [CARE](#) Three-Year Accreditation. The survey report noted, "The Kindred Homes Program exemplifies child- and family-centered planning designed to rebuild and restore family relationships once thought to be beyond repair."

For more information about Kindred Homes, contact Program Manager Judy Hedrick at (434) 455-3526 or judy.hedrick@cvcbsb.org. The Central Virginia Community Services website is at www.cvcbsb.org.

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