

# Helping People to Lead Drug-Free Lives: The Push-Up Foundation

By Ashley Gatewood

Where can an addict who has no family, no job, or no home turn to for help? The Push-Up Foundation is one option. Started in March 1995, the Push-Up Foundation aids people in kicking their addictions and starting a drug-free life. With a range of services such as addiction counseling, transitional housing, intensive case management, and a business training school, the organization takes a holistic approach to mending people's lives.

Shirley Rodriguez, the foundation's office manager (pictured below), explained that Push-Up's mission is to provide transitional housing to substance abusers so that they can become self-sufficient, drug-free, and crime-free. She said people in need hear about the foundation by word-of-mouth. In addition, the foundation also receives referrals from the criminal justice system as well as other treatment centers.



They also run an outpatient program that provides weekly group and individual sessions to help their clients deal with addiction. Rodriguez pointed out that most of their clients

are substance abusers because they have experienced a trauma or difficult issues in their lives. Alcohol and drug addiction is just one symptom of a much more complex issue. Through therapy, counselors address these underlying causes to enable the clients to begin walking on the road to recovery. Everyone that the Push-Up Foundations aids has an addiction problem, and it is one of the eligibility criteria to receive treatment. This stipulation is a result of Push-Up's funding requirements, which states that they can only serve that population. Funding comes from the City of Austin, private organizations, donations, and support from HUD. However, like many other non-profits, funds often fall short to perform all the work that needs to be done.

There are some people that the foundation is not equipped to help. These include persons who need to undergo a detoxification regimen, intensive treatment, or a residential recovery program. After a person completes any of those programs, they are welcome to come to Push-Up to initiate the next stage of recovery.

If a person is homeless and trying to stay clean, they may take advantage of the transitional housing program. Push-Up owns two buildings one for women and one for men. People are permitted to return to the program up to three times in one year.

The Push-Up Foundation also offers a Women and Children's Supportive Housing program. It provides services to single women and women with dependent children from birth to age 12. The program is structured to teach women responsibility and accountability for their actions. Its goal is to get women back on their feet and to teach them how to be mothers toward their children. In order to stay in the program, the women must seek employment. Rodriguez stresses that each woman is different and therefore a separate program must be tailored to each individual. Such a program may include a range of services from medical treatment to resume development.

They want to help women become more active in their children's lives and to put more responsibility on the parents. Right now they would like to provide more services for children, but due to a lack of funding they are unable to have a children's counselor. Also, they are not equipped to help abused women, and in those situations refer women to SafePlace.

A vital part of rebuilding a person's life is helping find employment. Some of the foundation's clients are in need of job training skills and may have never been employed. Push-Up gives them an opportunity to work in a carwash it runs as well as at their donation call-center. For female clients, they give them office assistant work or cleaning jobs. Once out of the program, Rodriguez says many find employment, which enables a client to become more self-sufficient.

Push-Up's own workforce is comprised of 22 people in a mixture of full-time and part-time positions. Occasionally there are volunteers who help out in any number of ways including organizing children's activities and answering phones.

Rodriguez, a former client of the Push-Up Foundation, graduated in 1998. She says that after the organization helped in her time of need, she stay connected. About six months later she was offered a position as a member of the direct care staff. She monitored client activities and ensured that clients were following the program's rules. Since that time she has worked her way up to her current position as office manager.

Rodriguez says that a typical day for her is hectic and that she often juggles ten things all at once. She wears many hats and performs a variety of tasks from billings to ensuring the office runs smoothly. She credits multi-tasking with helping her stay organized and focused. Rodriguez smiles when she says that she has been affiliated with the organization for so many years. It is apparent that the Push-Up Foundation has made a positive change in her life, as it has for countless others.