

## County launches probation program for juvenile offenders

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SAN DIEGO (KUSI) – A group of local officials, led by District 3 Supervisor Kristin Gaspar, launched a program to assist youth in completing their court-ordered probation conditions.

Youth on probation can get help with homework, learn career skills and meet with mentors as part of the new program.

“Today is a turning point for youth who are involved in the juvenile justice system,” said San Diego County Supervisor Kristin Gaspar on Tuesday at the launch of the Achievement Center in Escondido.

Gaspar had led the the push to develop programs to assist youth to meet terms of their probation after they are released from Juvenile Hall.

The county will have Achievement Centers in Escondido and southeast San Diego to serve youth in the juvenile justice system.

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GOVERNMENT

## County Launches Achievement Center to Help Probation Youth Succeed



*Social worker Hector Miramontes is one of the staff at the Achievement Center in downtown Escondido. He works with youth, who are referred to the rehabilitative afterschool program to help them complete the terms of Probation and build themselves up in other areas.*

By **Yvette Urrea Moe**, County of San Diego Communications Office

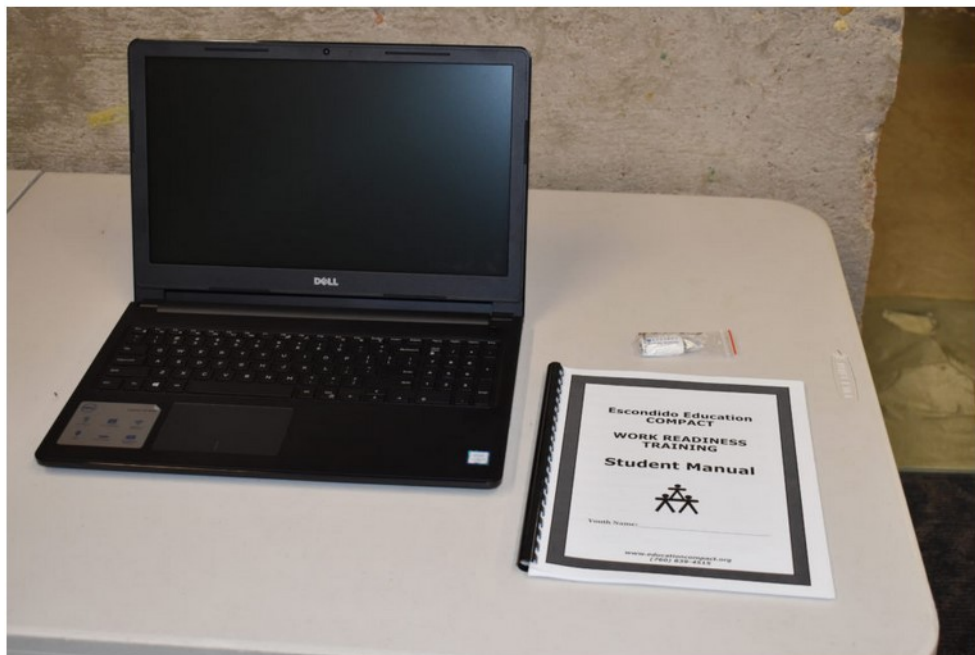
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Escondido youth who need help completing their court-ordered terms of probation have new opportunities to succeed through an Achievement Center.

The Achievement Center offers probation-referred youth between the ages of 14 to 19 an after-school program that includes academic tutoring, work readiness training, career exploration, sports recreation, group and individual counseling, case management, mentoring and follow-up services. It even includes transportation to and from the center, a snack and dinner.

It is one of several new and innovative programs that San Diego County juvenile justice partners have collaborated on to divert youth from detention and instead provide them with rehabilitative services in their own communities.

“Our goal is for Achievement Centers to help young people maintain positive community support, complete their education, and learn about new, lifelong opportunities,” said San Diego County Probation Chief Adolfo Gonzales. “Similar programs in other states have shown success in guiding youth toward completing Probation and going on to lead crime-free lives. That’s what we want for our young people.”



*This is one of the work stations for youth who are interested in work readiness training. Every participant creates a resume and gets their own thumbdrive to store the document and other important information.*

The San Diego program got its start in 2018 when then Board of Supervisors Chairwoman Kristin Gaspar led an effort to research and develop an after-school rehabilitative program model for the region’s Probation youth . San Diego County Probation worked with the District Attorney, Public Defender, Health and Human Services Agency, Juvenile Court and community partners to adapt the program to our area. The Achievement Centers are located in Escondido and Southeastern San Diego, two areas with larger concentrations of justice system-involved youth to better serve them.

The program costs approximately \$1 million to operate both centers and is being funded by the state’s Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act and County Probation.

“As a County, we have made meaningful investments to transform the culture that surrounds our regional juvenile justice system,” said County Supervisor Kristin Gaspar. “The opening of the Achievement Center here in Escondido is an example of the fundamental shift we have taken as a region to invest in and rehabilitate youth who are at-risk for returning to juvenile hall.”



*County Supervisor Kristin Gaspar, Probation, Public Defender, and City officials were among the collaborative partners who helped design the program to help Probation youth.*

In Escondido the program is run by the Escondido Education COMPACT, a nonprofit youth development and youth workforce development program. The Achievement Center in downtown Escondido has been operating since Sept. 1 but held its grand opening for the community Tuesday.

Mayor Paul McNamara presented a proclamation to the Escondido Education COMPACT for their efforts to support the program.

“We hope the youth involved do well in the program and look back one day and realize what an amazing opportunity this was for them to have the services and resources and a caring group to help them along,” said McNamara. “We believe this program will make a difference in the lives of the participants who fully take advantage of the rehabilitative services which include counseling and building them up in other areas.”

Escondido Police Chief Craig Carter echoed McNamara’s sentiment that he welcomed the program.

“Somebody asked me, ‘Is this going to be a good thing or a bad thing for our community?’ I’m going to tell you right now, this is the best thing that’s happened in a long time for this community because we have to invest in our youth,” Carter said. “We cannot arrest our way out of this. We have to do something different. This is something different, and we need to invest a lot in this to make sure this happens.”

Currently 15 young men and women are enrolled in the program but another seven are pending registration, according to Patricia Huerta, executive director for the Escondido Education COMPACT. The program can manage 25 youth at one time.

Services are provided from 3 to 7 p.m. Program operators report participant progress back to Probation to ensure youth are attending the program and fully participating in the services offered.

“The Achievement Centers represent a critical piece in the juvenile justice system’s alternatives to provide safe, effective, and proven efforts to address youth needs in the community, not in detention,” said Gonzales. “Achievement Centers are an investment in the youth we serve through Probation and in the neighborhoods they live in.”

# New Centers help youth meet probation terms

## Achievement Centers in Escondido, San Diego await after Juvenile Hall



Kristin Gaspar

By Gary Warth

### ESCONDIDO

Youth on probation can get help with homework, learn career skills and meet with mentors at two new centers designed to help them meet court-order conditions and turn their lives around.

“Today is a turning point for youth who are involved in the juvenile justice system,” said San Diego County Supervisor Kristin Gaspar on Tuesday at the launch of the Achievement Center in Escondido.

“The opening of the Achievement Center here in Escondido is an example of the fundamental shift we have taken in the region to invest in and rehabilitate youth who are at-risk for returning to Juvenile Hall,” she said.

Gaspar had led the push to research and develop programs to assist youth to meet terms of their probation after they are released from Juvenile Hall. The Escondido center and another in Barrio Logan opened Sept. 3 and provide various after-school programs, including recreational activities such as boxing and basketball for the youth and their family members.

Each center will serve up to 25 youths ages 14 to 19. The county Board of Supervisors approved the program in September 2018 and provided \$500,000. Another \$500,000 came from the state Juvenile Justice Criminal Prevention Act.

Adolfo Gonzales, chief probation officer for the San Diego County Probation Department, said the centers are part of a pilot program that could be expanded to other regions in the county.

In all, 1,300 youths are on probation throughout the county, including 112 in the northern region that can access the Escondido center, while 230 youths are in Juvenile Hall, he said.

The Probation Department already was coordinating similar services for youths on probation throughout the county, but Gonzales said the new centers are a way of putting them all under the same roof. Participants are provided transportation to get to the programs.

The centers are modeled after the Evening Center Reporting model, a program shown to be successful in Ventura County and Washington, D.C.

The nonprofit Escondido Education Compact is the lead fiscal agent in the North County center. At the Escondido launch, Executive Director Patricia Huerta of the nonprofit introduced staff members who included three youth coaches, and she said the effort will be augmented with 60 mentors, various volunteers who will teach art, guitar and other skills, and social work interns from Cal State San Marcos.

The Achievement Center in Escondido is in a temporary location in a Grand Avenue building owned by Classical Academy, but it is expected to move to a space inside a Salvation Army building at 1301 Las Villas Way in January. The other center is in Barrio Logan at 2175 Newton Ave., San Diego.

Partners in the centers include the District Attorney’s Office, Public Defender’s Office, Juvenile Court and local law enforcement.

Escondido Police Chief Craig Carter said many communities would not want to embrace such a center, and he credited Mayor Paul McNamara with having the vision to welcome it.

“Somebody asked me, ‘Is this going to be a good thing or a bad thing for our community?’ and I’ll tell you right now, this is the best thing that’s happened in a long time in our community because we have to invest in our youth,” Carter said. “We cannot arrest our way out of this. We have to do something different. This is something different.”

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## Transitioning From Punishment to Rehabilitation



The opening of our new Achievement Centers in Escondido and Barrio Logan mark a turning point for youth who are involved in the juvenile justice system. The mission of the centers represents the fundamental shift the County is making to invest in and rehabilitate youth who are at risk for returning to Juvenile Hall. They were designed to provide teens with resources like tutors, mentors, career skills, as well as art and sports programs.

After researching several models around the country, I visited a few counties that seemed to have remarkable success rates. With the blessing of my fellow Board of Supervisors, I asked County staff to develop a new program that would help our youth meet the terms of their probation after their release from Juvenile Hall.

My friend Jack Martin from Clark County, Nevada who is a national leader in the field of juvenile justice once told me "We should be locking up the kids that scare us – not the ones who make us mad." This really resonated with me and is the prevailing concept behind this model.

A special thank you to Escondido Mayor Paul McNamara and Police Chief Craig Carter for welcoming the center in their community. Details about Achievement Centers: [CLICK HERE](#)