

Memorandum

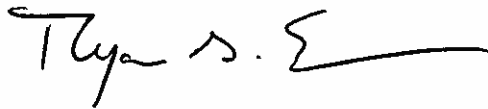


Date: January 29, 2010

To: Mayor Pro Tem Dwaine Caraway, Chair
and Members of the Public Safety Committee

Subject: Juvenile Firesetter Intervention Program J.F.I.P.

The Public Safety Committee will be briefed on the Juvenile Firesetter Intervention Program J.F.I.P. on Monday, February 1, 2010.



Ryan S. Evans
First Assistant City Manager

Attachment

- c: Honorable Mayor and Members of the Dallas City Council
 - Mary K. Suhm, City Manager
 - Deborah Watkins, City Secretary
 - Tom Perkins, City Attorney
 - Craig Kinton, City Auditor
 - Victor Lander, Administrative Municipal Judge
 - Jill A. Jordan, P.E., Assistant City Manager
 - A.C. Gonzalez, Assistant City Manager
 - Forest E. Turner, Assistant City Manager
 - Dave K. Cook, Chief Financial Officer
 - Helena Stevens-Thompson, Assistant to the City Manager Mayor/City Council Office



JUVENILE FIRESETTER INTERVENTION PROGRAM J.F.I.P.

LIEUTENANT MELANIE FORBES-SCOTT

FIRE INVESTIGATION & EXPLOSIVE
ORDNANCE DISPOSAL DIVISION

FEBRUARY 1, 2010



WHAT IS A J.F.I.P.?

Is an intervention program targeting children who:

- Have been caught committing the crime of intentionally setting fires
- Children who have demonstrated fire-setting behavior

OUR GOAL

Is to address and deter firesetting behavior through:

Assessment – child and family risk surveys

Treatment – referral to professional counseling services (if needed)

Education – help children understand the consequences and risk associated with fire setting.
Conduct a home fire safety check with parents

WHO IS THE J.F.I.P.?

Juvenile Firesetter Intervention Specialists are DFR staff assigned to the Arson Division who receive training to administer the program.

- Consists of two Senior Fire Prevention Officers and one Lieutenant

TRAINING

Juvenile Firesetter Intervention Specialists receive training from:

- National Fire Academy
- State of Texas Fire Marshal's Office
- Various agencies and groups, such as Mental Health America (MHA) and the Home Safety Council



IS JUVENILE FIRESETTING A PROBLEM?

Nationally:

- Fifty-four percent of all arson arrests in the U.S. are children under 18.
- Juveniles account for more than half of the arson arrests, with one-third of those children under 15.

Locally:

- Last year 50% of our Arson clearance rate was linked to incendiary fires involving persons under 18.
- Thirty-two percent of the children referred to our program are between the ages of 13-16.

TYPES OF FIRESETTERS

Curiosity/Experimental

- ages 2 to 10
- Ready access to lighters, matches, or open flame
- Unsupervised

Troubled/Crisis

- Mostly boys of all ages
- Use fire to express emotion
- Most likely will continue to set fires until needs are met or identified
- Also known as “cry for help” firesetters

TYPES OF FIRESETTERS

CONT'D

Delinquent/Criminal

- Usually teens with a history of firesetting.
- Fires are set with intent to destroy, or as acts of vandalism and malicious mischief.
- Targets are typically schools, open fields, dumpsters, or abandoned buildings.

J.F.I.P. IN ACTION

- Individual intervention sessions for juvenile fire setters and their families
- Access to additional resources
- Offers group education and intervention in our high fire incident areas (and others as requested)



PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS

“Juvenile Firesetting, A Community Call to Action” – Community leaders discuss the problem of juvenile firesetting.

“In Their Own Words” – 3 teens discuss the fires they set, their motives and consequences.

These PSAs ran May 2009 – October 2009, on the City of Dallas and Dallas Independent School District cable channels.

RECIDIVISM

We conducted 150 intervention sessions last year.

Our recidivism rate continues to be less than 1%.

DOING OUR BEST

- On September 6, 2009 the DFR J.F.I.P. was featured in a Dallas Morning News Article.
- Our manual is now being used as an instruction reference by National Fire Academy Juvenile Firesetter Specialist I and II instructors.

NETWORKS & RESOURCES

- Child & Family Guidance Centers
- MetroCare
- Community Partners of Dallas
- CONTACT Crisis Line
- ADAPT
- Dallas Independent School District
- Big Brothers Big Sisters
- Girls Inc.
- Juvenile Firesetter Intervention Specialists Assoc.
- Dallas County Juvenile Probation
- City of Dallas – Recreation Centers & Libraries

QUESTIONS?



Youth fire setter programs aim to extinguish a problem before it starts

03:02 PM CDT on Sunday, September 6, 2009

By SELWYN CRAWFORD / The Dallas Morning News
scrawford@dallasnews.com

When Robert and Heather Wood realized that their two young sons had started a fire in the laundry room of their apartment complex, they did what many parents would do – punished them.

Then they did what officials say many parents don't – voluntarily got their 10- and 12-year-old boys some help.

That help was at Dallas Fire-Rescue's Juvenile Firesetter Intervention Program, where the youngsters learned just how dangerous their actions could have been, even though the fire they set didn't injure anyone.

"It's just the best program," Heather Wood said. "It was necessary for us to take that step so the boys knew how much damage they could have caused. You can't ever overeducate your kids about anything."

And educating youngsters about the dangers of fire is difficult, fire officials say, in large part because the attraction to fire is normal for them. And that attraction can be reinforced by something as seemingly benign as the applause and approving smiles that even babies receive when they blow out the candles on a birthday cake.

"All kids are subject to playing with fire because there is a natural curiosity about it, unless there's an intervention done," said Dallas Fire-Rescue Lt. Melanie Forbes-Scott, who heads the department's program. "Fire is cheap. It gives them power and it's accessible."

Several North Texas fire departments have some type of juvenile fire setter program, but the one at Dallas Fire-Rescue, which celebrated its 28th anniversary in August, attracts calls from fire officials across the area looking for help, Forbes-Scott said.

The program is strictly voluntary, except for the few cases where a judge has ordered a child to participate.

Out of more than six dozen referrals to the Dallas program since January, Forbes-Scott says, the program has worked with about 40 youngsters.

She said that many parents decline to have their children go through the program out of embarrassment. Others back out when they learn that the first step is completion of a

detailed fire risk evaluation form that often reveals underlying family trauma at the root of the child's fire setting.

"Sometimes we uncover things like sexual abuse," she said. "Some kids express suicidal thoughts or wanting to hurt others, so we have to get them help right away."

Both of the Wood boys say there was nothing traumatic that caused them to start the laundry-room fire a couple of months ago using a lighter, pencils and dryer sheets.

"It was just curiosity, I think," 12-year-old Chase said. "I wanted to see what it would do. It was my idea."

Heather Wood and her husband quickly made the boys accept responsibility. She made them tell the apartment managers what they had done and clean up the damage. Then she took them to a fire station. They eventually decided to go through the program.

"We look at it as good parenting," said Heather Wood. "It'd be bad parenting if you did nothing."

Chase and his younger brother, Shawn, went through about five sessions in which they had individual discussions with a program specialist, watched videos about how quickly a small fire could spread and developed a fire evacuation plan for the family.

"I learned not to do that stuff because it's bad," said Shawn, 10. "I could hurt somebody."

Forbes-Scott said getting youngsters who start fires to understand the potential for harm is usually the best tool in getting them to stop.

"When we have a fire setter, we try to get them before they become criminals," she said.

Debbie Taylor, deputy fire marshal at the Pasadena Fire Department and fire marshals office, has run the juvenile fire setter program there for nearly 20 years.

"Kids who experiment with fire, they feel like they're out of control in so many areas," she said. "When they set a fire ... it's something wild that they have control over. Even if it lasts for just a few moments, it gives them power."

Both Taylor and Forbes-Scott said the most serious type of juvenile fire setter, a youth who starts blazes with the intent of destroying property or harming others, is rare. It's one reason they avoid using the term "arsonist" when they talk about youngsters in their programs.

"An arsonist is a criminal," Forbes-Scott said. "They plan to destroy property or hurt somebody. A lot of these kids don't intend to destroy property or hurt anybody."

And sometimes fire setters start trouble in a misguided effort to avoid more problems.

Taylor said she had a case recently in which a teenage boy set fire to a neighbor's home after the boy was sexually assaulted by other teens on his high school football team, then taunted at school while his tormenters went unpunished.





Taylor asked the boy why he set the fire and he told her that he just didn't want to have to return to school. She pointed out to him that the school year was about to end.

"I know, but I'll have to go back next year," the boy told her. "So I knew I had to do something big to keep me from having to go back."

THREE TYPES OF FIRE SETTERS

The U.S. Department of Justice Office of Juvenile Delinquency and Prevention divides juvenile fire setters into three groups:

- Curiosity fire setters: Children under age 8 who generally start fires simply out of curiosity.
- Intentional fire setters: Children between 8 and 12 who are sometimes motivated by curiosity but are more often propelled by underlying psychosocial conflict.
- Crisis fire setters: Adolescents between 13 and 18 who usually have a long history of undetected fire play and fire-setting behavior and are often motivated by psychosocial or intentional criminal behavior.

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Youth programs aim to extinguish fire problems before they start

Departments work to teach youngsters who set blazes about the consequences of their actions

By SELWYN CRAWFORD
Staff Writer
scrawford@dallasnews.com

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many parents would do — punished them.

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Fire setters in Dallas

Fires started by juveniles.

'06-'07	110
'07-'08	87
'08-'09	44

All intentionally set fires

'06-'07	945
'07-'08	884
'08-'09	670

* Years are fiscal years, with 2009 through July.

SOURCE: Dallas Fire-Rescue

PHOTOGRAPH BY MICHAEL HOGUE/STAFF ARTIST

See **PROGRAMS** Page 12B

Programs aim to extinguish a problem before it starts

12B Sunday, September 14, 2009

NORTH TEXAS

dallasnews.com

The Dallas Morning News

Continued from Page 1B

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Heather and Robert Wood voluntarily enrolled their sons Chase, 12 (second from right) and Shawn, 10, in Dallas Fire-Rescue's Juvenile Firesetter Intervention Program.

REX C. CURRY/Special Contributor

embarrassment. Others back out when they learn that the first step is completion of a detailed fire risk evaluation form that often reveals underlying family trauma.

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