

A caring partnership *With the help of Todos Juntos, there is support for kids and parents*

Todos Juntos is a local success story which begins with Eric Johnston, who in 2000 had an idea for a community-based non-profit that would serve youth and families in Clackamas County's rural areas. In partnership with Clackamas County's Children, Youth and Families (CYF), a division of Health, Housing and Human Services (H3S), a program called PreventNet was founded. The common goal was to improve outcomes for families by creating a web of support among schools, non-profit agencies, community members, local businesses and local government. This support includes: prevention and early intervention services in local schools and reducing risk factors such as poor academic performance, truancy, alcohol and other drug use, poverty/homelessness, and negative peer relationships.

CYF contracts with three non-profits offering PreventNet services at 10 schools throughout Clackamas County.

Todos Juntos has grown a program that specializes in services to the rural areas of the county. "We originally envisioned culturally-enhanced services for kids," Johnston, Todos Juntos Executive Director explained.

The PreventNet model includes staff who host group discussions during the school day as well as assorted after-school activities that keep youth engaged in school and their communities.

Todos Juntos PreventNet sites include Cedar Ridge Middle School, Sandy Grade School, Estacada Junior High School, Baker Prairie Middle School, Molalla River Middle School, and there's also Diversion programs at Sandy, Estacada, Happy Valley, and Molalla through a partnership with the Juvenile Department.

"Services offered by the amazing Todos Juntos staff are strongly supported by the schools and are well received by youth and families," said CYF Prevention Specialist Tiffany Hicks. "It works because the partnership is strong and we can see we are making a difference."

Todos Juntos delivers a range of challenging, age-appropriate programs in a safe, structured, and positive environment, including: academic and homework help, culture and gender-specific curriculum/discussion groups and parent education.

The schools identify students – who with the support of their families – might be in need of enhanced services, and then the participating schools work with each youth's



Todos Juntos founder Eric Johnston (bottom left) and Albert Garcia (bottom right) Family Resource Coord. at Molalla River Middle School, hosts Boys Council there one day a week that includes seventh graders Eric, Jackson (both, top) and Dominic (bottom center.) They talk about school and family issues in a supportive environment.

academic schedule to support them.

"Our gender-specific services are called Boys Council and Girls Circle," explained Johnston. "These sessions take place during the school days, and are confidential discussions where kids are free to share what's going on their lives or special challenges they are facing. They talk it out together."

After school, youth can participate in homework help, or other clubs.

Albert Garcia works at the Molalla River Middle School PreventNet site as its Family Resource Coordinator, and facilitates the Boys Council meetings there. He says that popular after-school activities involve Lego Robotics, and woodworking- where some of the boys build furniture for teachers or other uses.

"More than anything, the kids enjoy the camaraderie of the clubs," said Garcia. "The Boys' Council provides the boys I work with a sense of belonging and they respect each other's thoughts and ideas."

Three seventh graders who are part of the Molalla River Boys' Council agree. Jackson, Eric and Dominic all say they are glad to be part of the program, and it's helped to have a place to talk about whatever they want and know it will stay within the group.

"Albert and the others in the group are guys we all can trust," Dominic said. Eric and Jackson agree.

"The after school activities give me something fun to look forward to at the end of the day," Jackson said.

Todos Juntos also offers the Diversion program through a contract with Clackamas County Juvenile Program. This facilitates opportunities for youth who have had contact with the juvenile justice system to complete mandated restitution or community service.

Mark McDonnell, a supervisor in the county's Juvenile Department, said that their partnership with Todos Juntos have proven invaluable over the years.

"Our youth clients have worked with Todos Juntos staff on outdoor restoration projects, graffiti removal, and other initiatives," McDonnell said. "In the past, Todos Juntos has been able to incorporate after school sports activities into their PreventNet sites, too."

According to McDonnell, Todos Juntos is one reason why Clackamas County youth offender recidivism rates are so low.

"In Clackamas County, we share ideas and resources," he said. "Successes come from finding the shared goals of county departments and community partners and working together."

Johnston says that part of the Todos Juntos mission is overall connection to community and addressing families' needs.

"All our programs are designed to connect with kids who might be hard to reach."

To find out more: www.todos-juntos.net/; www.clackamas.us/juvenile/; www.clackamas.us/childreneyouthandfamilies/youth.html