

### Meet the Reclaiming Futures El Paso Fellows



**Paula Wharton**  
*Project Director*

Paula Wharton is the project director for Reclaiming Futures El Paso. Ms. Wharton has been employed with El Paso County Juvenile Justice Center for nine years and is currently serving as the clinical unit supervisor. Prior to joining the department, she was the director of outpatient services at Aliviane and for five years was employed as an adolescent counselor at Ysleta del Sur Pueblo. She is active with the Texas Certification Board of Addiction Professionals and serves as a Case Presentation Method evaluator for candidates seeking licensure in the State of Texas. She is a Licensed Chemical Dependency Counselor and a Certified Criminal Justice Professional.

***Judicial Fellow***  
**The Honorable**  
**Yahara Lisa Gutierrez**

65th District Court

***Justice Fellow***  
**Roger Martinez**

Chief Probation Officer  
El Paso County Juvenile Justice Center

***Treatment Fellow***  
**Armando Salas**

Program Manager  
University Medical Center of El Paso

***Community Fellow***

**Marguerite Rivera Houze**  
Program Director  
University Medical Center of El Paso

## RECLAIMING FUTURES NATIONAL PROGRAM DIRECTOR TO VISIT EL PASO

Laura Burney Nissen, Reclaiming Futures National Program Director, is the visionary force behind changes to the juvenile justice system in communities across the United States. She will be in El Paso, Texas, in August 2010, to meet with employees of the El Paso County Juvenile Justice Center and members of the public to share her expertise and learn about changes underway here.



In her role as National Program Director, Laura has written extensively about the lessons of the Reclaiming Futures initiative, and, along with other members of the Reclaiming Futures community, she is a regular participant in national meetings regarding juvenile justice reform. Laura has worked with state and federal agencies to encourage system-wide recognition and utilization of strength-based methods in youth services. Most recently, she was instrumental in developing new grant opportunities for Reclaiming Futures communities through the federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJPD) and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

Laura is an associate professor of social work at Portland State University School of Social Work, where she teaches in the areas of social service administration and leadership, and addictions. Her research interests focus on qualitative research methods, leadership and system reform issues, and communication strategies as tools for social change.



## National Week of Recognition



July 18 to 24 was National Probation, Parole and Community Supervision Week, designed to recognize the work done by those dedicated officers who help offenders continue living with their families and rehabilitating their lives, while protecting the community where they live.

This year the West Texas Community Supervision and Corrections Department (a.k.a. Adult Probation), El Paso County Juvenile Justice Center, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice Parole Division, and the United States Probation and U.S. Pretrial Offices united to celebrate the week.

Several events, including recognition by the El Paso County Commissioners Court and the El Paso City Council, receptions, a luncheon, a cross-agency volleyball tournament, and fun day showcased the agencies and their efforts in helping offenders become productive citizens.

## *In Their Own Words*

### **An Essay by A. M.**

Drugs, a pathetic discovery. Drugs could have never been created. Life could have been utterly and drastically different. Life could have been so different for many families, kids, and people. Drugs are a horrible cause of change. Addiction, also a horrible effect of drugs. It can cause massive brain cell loss. There are many different kinds of drugs - inhalants, pot, shrooms, acid, peyote, cough syrup, cocaine, ecstasy, meth, that's really all the drugs I have tried.

Change, a great yet horrible thing. It depends on the way you change, or what you change into. You could become something beautiful, yet with drugs, that has never been the case as far as I've seen. I have seen change in all sorts of shapes and forms. I've seen people go from incredible to nothing. I've seen it all. The worst is seeing an amazing woman go to nothing. Great men, reduced to filth. Fathers transformed into strangers, into someone his own children couldn't recognize. As well as watching myself fall into a massive black hole, falling helplessly deeper, drugs clogging my vision, creating a false world. Nothing but lies and false hope. Creating someone I didn't know.

Addiction, a horrible thing. Horrible, horrible thing. Life changing, and not for the better either. Addiction controls you like a puppet, strings and all. Yet instead of a person, it's a substance. Imagine a bag of weed, a line of coke, or a hit of meth pulling your string, controlling you. Try to see yourself killing someone for something so pathetic. Taking another's life for a substance, a drug, just another high. A great "trip" which inside is really only killing you or tearing you apart. See yourself taking all your family has got and selling it for drugs. Leaving your family needy and starving and in danger. Drugs tend to destroy.

Honestly, I can say drugs are amazing, but is it worth losing amazing memories, losing times that will never come back, times that you can only bring up because of memory? Imagine shooting up before the birth of your child and then just a few years later forgetting it completely. Not even being able to remember if your child cried or not. Think of every amazing memory you have stored in your bank of memories, then it just going completely blank. Your first kiss, gone. Your first time winning a spelling bee, gone. Or even simply forgetting how to get back home from the gas station down the street.

Brain cells. Trust me, you need them. Let's use myself for an example. I started smoking at 12. It was rarely at first, and once I had hit the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, it became an addiction. I was able to do 10<sup>th</sup> grade algebra in my head. Bring up an equation so easily, but it got to the point where I couldn't even remember how to gain area. Then at grade 11, I began huffing spray paint. Wow. Now that fried my brain cells. I couldn't even remember simple math. There was one point where I spooked so much, so constantly, that I couldn't remember my home number or my mom's birthday. Pathetic.

Drugs have been problems over the decades, taking the masses and dragging them into its grasp. Taking full control. I believe drugs cause more of a mental addiction than a physical one. It gets to a point where you like being high. You like the experiences and the way you experience. It can make a long boring walk through a desert seem so quick and simple.

Also I believe drugs make it so people can have a simple way to get closer to friends. In my experience, drugs have always brought people together, but is it a friendship or are you being used? I believe that it is more of a usage because when a person is in need and has no way of connecting, they call upon a "friend" to get high and usually stay with them until the drug is used up, they get hungry, bored, irritated, or sleepy. What is an experience like that when you could just as easily go skating with a friend, even for a walk, or to the park? In the end, drugs ruin.

