

Minds and K9s, Inc. has begun a new program for 2006 called "Tough as Leather™". Phase I of the stigma elimination program is the Youth/Canine portion. At-risk and adjudicated youth will meet twice weekly. Once at an animal facility, where they will learn how to perform basic grooming, obedience training and play therapy for the dogs (socialization). Indirectly we will show that having the dogs look and act better helps them having a better chance at succeeding in life – finding a permanent home.

It's been shown dogs can reach people when the 'people approach' has failed. We know many of the past attempts to eliminate the stigma associated with the diagnosis of a chronic health condition (including those of the brain) have failed. Youth don't want to be told, "Just say no." Today's youth want to appear tough. Many of them must be, literally – to survive. The stigmas associated with being an offender, a person in foster care, affected by substance use/abuse often prevent our youth from seeking care, reaching out for help – or responding appropriately when that care is offered or mandated. Even youth who've 'crossed the line' need to be kept safe. They do have value, their actions do have worth. Sadly, many of these same youth do not believe that about themselves.

We also know not everything happens by osmosis. That is why the second component of this program is to have direct mentoring. We will be having the youth meet once per week for this portion of the program, and using the Power Source materials to reinforce many of the same concepts that were presented indirectly with the canines. We will help show youth they can be tough – but leather that is worked with becomes soft and pliable while still retaining its strength. Dressing appropriately for a job interview doesn't mean you're cow-toeing to the standards of the world, it means you've figured out a way to be 'tough' - you can manipulate people's first impression of you. You have a better chance of getting hired. A new concept? No. An innovative way to present it? Yes. What are some other ways of being tough? Being tough means you ask for help when you need it. That's not being wimpy – that's having the courage and respect for yourself to find a way to get what you need. Being tough means showing up for school, doing your chores, etc. even though they may not be fun – but you're a tough person who can find a way to do it (even if it means asking for help). Being tough means being able to stand up for your rights, but not at the expense of another's (be assertive).

Keeping youth safe doesn't mean we only help youth who are being bullied; emotionally, sexually or otherwise physically assaulted, etc. It also means we help at-risk and troubled youth again find hope for their lives and futures. When they can believe in themselves – they begin believing in the value of those around them.

If you are interested in our new program, I invite you to learn more about it by visiting our website or contacting us. If you have seminars, educational events or other programs related to keeping youth safe, we invite you to submit them to be posted on our website calendar. It's a public service we offer. Mentally healthy youth don't commit acts of violence against others or themselves.

Bustin the Stigma...

Sharon J. Cunningham, Ex. Dir.

Minds and K9s, Inc.

(913) 250-5433

Minds and K9s, Inc. is a recognized 501 (c)(3) educational and charitable nonprofit organization.

Your tax deductible donations make our work possible!

Visit us at www.MindsAndK9s.org

"No one lives here on Earth in total isolation. Mental health issues affect us all."

If you no longer wish to receive emails from Minds and K9s, Inc. please let us know:
<http://mindsandk9s.org/pages/20/index.htm>