

BaySmart PROGRAM EMPOWERS AT-RISK STUDENTS IN THE GALVESTON BAY AREA

Today's children are our future leaders, our future workforce and our hope for a better tomorrow. Unfortunately, today's society challenges them more than ever before. Like adults, children need acceptance, recognition and appreciation, and all too often they turn to drug use, gang membership or criminal behavior to meet these basic needs. Such behavior often results in dropping out of school and many times, imprisonment. In fact, almost 90% of all Texas inmates dropped out of school; a sad statistic indeed when one considers that many school dropouts are gifted and talented children.

Youth Educational Support Services, Inc. (YESS), a Houston-based publicly supported 501-c-3 non-profit organization, has developed a unique approach to helping school children stay on the right track. YESS provides outdoor adventure programs to at-risk youths between the ages of 10-18. Programs include wilderness camping, fishing and sailing. Participants in YESS programs gain a better perspective of their current situation, understand the need for a good education and develop a more positive future outlook.

BaySmart is the flagship program of YESS. This unique program provides water-borne educational experiences aboard a 45' Coast Guard certified boat that serves as a floating classroom. During *BaySmart* excursions on Galveston Bay and the Houston Ship Channel, students learn about a variety of marine activities, port-related commerce and petrochemical plants. Often, for the first time, they see the correlation of school work to real-life situations. They experience the intermix of nature, industry and recreation, and learn what has been done, what is being done and what is proposed relative to harmonizing the diverse interests in Galveston Bay.

While *BaySmart* works with students of all ages, it focuses on fifth graders enrolled in public schools in the Galveston Bay area. Typically, fifth graders are old enough to benefit from the program and are not yet involved in drugs, gangs or criminal behavior. As word of the *BaySmart* program spreads, more and more teachers are contacting YESS to schedule *BaySmart* trips for their students. However, most schools do not have money in their budgets to fund such educational enhancements.

Students are not charged to participate in YESS programs because most are from low income families. YESS is committed to providing all children with the opportunity to benefit from its programs regardless of circumstances or resources. YESS derives all its support from donations, fundraisers, grants and contributions. As funding permits, YESS will continue to offer its programs to more students in the Galveston Bay area.

YESS is seeking financial support from local businesses, industry and individuals to help make the *BaySmart* program available to more at-risk students. YESS accepts all types of donations including cash, property, supplies, etc. Since YESS is a 501-c-3 non-profit organization, all donations are tax deductible.

To learn more about YESS and the *BaySmart* program, contact Dr. Barnett at yess@quixnet.net or visit their website at www.yessonline.org .