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Educational Service Helps Out-of-Control Teens

■ *Kim Rubin and 11 professional consultants work to find the right intervention and treatment*

By GABRIELA C. GUZMAN
Journal Staff Writer

An out-of-control teenager suggests a broken home, where the parents, if present, are largely absent in a household that struggles to pay the bills. And maybe domestic violence and a possible drug or alcohol addiction. At least that's what most would imagine.

But what if none of these characteristics are present and a teen is still out of control?

This is where Cate, a pediatrician in Albuquerque, who asked that her last name not be used, found herself in September 2001. By then her 16-year-old daughter had dropped out of four public high schools, gotten into a hair-pulling fight, ignored curfew and stayed out all night and was obviously using drugs, Cate remembered recently.

Cate and her husband, a counselor with a doctorate, were beside themselves about how to reach their troubled daughter.

"Of course we were horrified," Cate said. They sought

professional help, but the advice that their daughter would eventually grow out of this phase provided little consolation.

"I was not willing to play that gamble. We were afraid the next call was that she would be dead," Cate said.

Through an acquaintance, Cate heard about Kim Rubin, a private educational consultant in Santa Fe. A psychologist, social worker and special education teacher with more than 30 years of experience, Rubin told them their daughter had a good prognosis, but a therapeutic wilderness camp followed by boarding school would be best.

Rubin, founder and president of Rubin Educational Services, and 11 consultants who work with her are unique within the state—no other similar business in New Mexico is a member of the Independent Educational Consultants Association. The organization is a nonprofit, international association that provides training, workshops and conferences for qualified consultants.

Applicants must meet stringent requirements: three years of experience in admissions or counseling work, advanced degrees, proof of having visit-



Kim Rubin, founder of Rubin Educational Resources, stands in the company's offices in Santa Fe.

ed 50 educational programs, marketing materials and three references, said Mark Sklarow, the association's executive director.

"We are pretty cautious," he said during a telephone interview from his Fairfax, Va., office. The association was chartered 29 years ago, but there are only 500 members, even though hundreds apply for membership every year.

Precautions must be taken, Sklarow explained, because while educational services are a booming industry, therapeutic placement is a niche where an unqualified consultant can have devastating, even deadly, results.

Some years ago, schools outside of the United States

that marketed themselves as therapeutic were found to be more like prisons where, in some cases, teenagers committed suicide.

"There is just too much at stake," Sklarow said.

A large portion of Rubin's time is spent traveling to the different schools where teens are sent.

"We never place a kid unless we've seen (the school)," she said during a recent interview in her office on Miguel Chavez Road.

A former special education teacher, gifted programs coordinator and diagnostician, Rubin has worked with children with a

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Specializing in Troubled Kids

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variety of special needs. Family friends came to her with their unruly teenagers.

"The word got out that I knew how to do this sort of thing," she said. Business continued to grow, and last fall Rubin and the consultants moved into their current office space.

All of Rubin's consultants have advanced degrees. Her business does not just deal with teenagers in crisis, but also with children with learning disabilities and special needs, as well as students needing tutoring or test preparation or college counseling. It's something of a one-stop educational center, Rubin explained.

She also provides parent coaching, usually for those parents whose child just returned from a therapeutic wilderness camp and need help with the transition.

But most of Rubin's time is spent with children on the wrong track— often with psy-

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MARK SKLAROW

chological disorders, but always, like Cate's daughter, "oppositional."

"We were finally getting the help we needed," Cate said about her first encounter with Rubin in 2001.

Cate and her husband's experience is atypical, Sklarow said. "They have raised their children well, but kids have become better at hiding behavior," he said.

Also the world is a much more dangerous place, said Karen Sands, the family coach at Rubin.

"Instead of adolescents relying on the wisdom of their families, many kids are forming families of peers," Sands said, and that's where bad

habits form.

Cate and her husband did not tell anyone about their decision to send their daughter away, fearing she would run away. When Cate woke her daughter at 5 a.m. and told her two escorts were waiting to take her to Utah, where her seven-week wilderness program was to take place, "she was vile. She was cussing me out," Cate said.

After the camp, the girl went to an all-girls boarding school in Arizona where she remained until February 2003. There she excelled academically and underwent counseling.

All of this carried a hefty price. For some the cost of these programs is not an issue,

but others have taken out loans or a second mortgage to pay for a monthly bill that can range from \$3,500 to \$10,000. Cate rationalizes the cost this way: every month as she and her husband wrote checks for exorbitant amounts of money, it was not just for her, but the whole family.

"It was for her, but the benefits were further reaching than just her alone," Cate said.

She added that some families save money for their child's college tuition. Without having spent this money on their daughter, there would have been no college or even a future.

"She's alive. She's drug-free. She's working hard on trying to move her life forward," Cate said.

A thank-you letter from her daughter came 10 days into the wilderness camp.

"She thanked us for saving her life. There's hardly a week that goes by that she does not thank us," Cate said, adding that as a mother, that's all she needs to hear.