

TiFA CONTACT

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF TEXAS INMATE FAMILIES ASSOCIATION Vol. 19 No. 3 July 2014



TiFA Invited to Testify on TDCJ Managed Carebefore Joint Texas House Corrections and Appropriations Committees.

On May 29th, TiFA was invited to testify before a joint hearing with the House Appropriations Subcommittee and the House Corrections Committee to consider the monitoring of the administration of the Correctional Managed Health Care system and examine forecasts for short and long-term criminal justice populations and health care cost trends. TiFA submitted a written testimony that included medical issues from TiFA members, a financial impact statement and comments from TX CURE. What follows is a shortened version of the testimony, the entire testimony is available on the TiFA website at TiFA.org. As a result of this testimony TiFA has been asked to meet with Chairs Turner and Parker to have a one-on-one discussion concerning the \$100 medical co-pay. Dr. Linthicum of the TDCJ Medical Services Division has also requested a meeting with TiFA.

TESTIMONY:

Family members in TiFA recognize that offenders are sent to prison as punishment. We also know their safety and well-being are the state's responsibility and they are entitled to a constitutional level of health care. This level of health care is not only about access to and quality of medical care, but the quality of the system as a whole. To this end, the TDCJ system of CMC needs to be evaluated to determine how well services are

coordinated and integrated across the system, and more importantly, how this integration impacts access to services and the overall experience with care. Incarcerated individuals have rights and their punishment should not involve abuse or neglect.

The key issues and challenges related to Correctional Managed Health Care that I would like to discuss include:

1) timely access 2) quality of care and 3) the management of the costs of health care services.

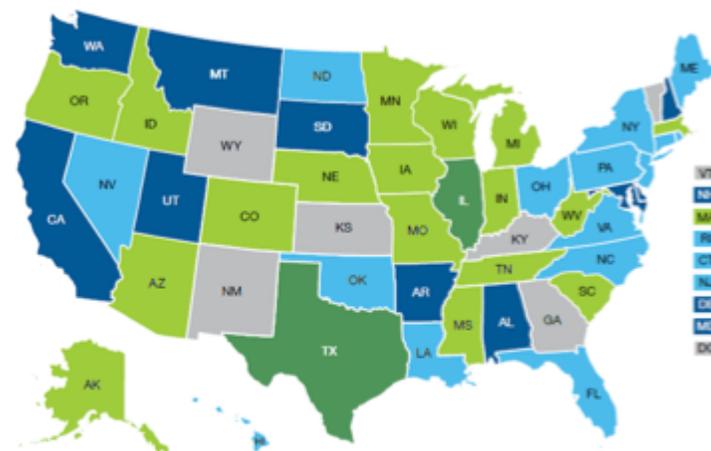
1. Correctional officers fail to identify serious medical/mental issues and there is often a delay in getting medical assistance.
2. Timely access and quality of care should be a standard.

In addition to protocols for prompt medical evaluation, there must also be standards for prompt treatment and compliance with specialists' recommendations. Medical

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Spending on Inmate Health Care Rose in 42 of the 44 States, With Median Growth of 49 Percent Over 7 Years

Correctional health care spending change by state, 2001-08



CATEGORIES:
■ 90% and above ■ 0 to 30% ■ No data available
■ 31 to 89% ■ -7 to -1%

Note: All spending figures are in 2008 dollars. Nominal fiscal 2001 data provided to Pew by the Bureau of Justice Statistics were converted to 2008 dollars using the Implicit Price Deflator for state and local government consumption expenditures and gross investment included in the Bureau of Economic Analysis' National Income and Product Accounts.

Source: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics
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TIFA Contact

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Celebrating the 4th of July with Families

On Independence Day, we celebrate freedom. And no one appreciates freedom perhaps as much as those who love someone that has lost theirs.

This 4th of July was especially significant for those participants of the Freedom for Incarcerated Families Festival sponsored by the End Mass Incarceration Houston Movement and TIFA. This event took place at the SHAPE Community Center Park in Houston and celebrated the children of incarcerated people by giving them a few hours to just being a kid and having fun. These children and families of incarcerated people are affected immensely by an unjust judicial system. They have done nothing wrong and yet their lives are torn apart by the effects of mass incarceration on families. The afternoon was filled with Straws, the clown who shaped amazing balloon hats, face painting, beaded art, a space walk, snow cones and food, food and more food! Today was about celebrating with those that understand... and having some fun.

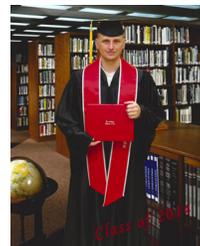
Because when that hammer falls, it's not only those found guilty that get punished, the innocent suffer too. That's why TIFA through the program "End Mass Incarceration" gathered children and family members of the incarcerated at Shape Park to celebrate the 4th.

TIFA was able to financially support this event by utilizing a portion of the funds awarded through a grant from eBay. n



Message from the Executive Director, Jennifer Erschabek

I had the honor to attend the Lee Community College graduation at the Wynne Unit in May and see my son receive his AAS in Welding. I don't think there was a dry eye in the chapel because we all knew we were witnessing a new beginning for 88 men who had overcome obstacles to get their degree.



Nothing else has proven to be as effective as education for a second chance at life and the best hope for never seeing prison walls again. Education is not just acquiring practical knowledge or skills; it's about total transformation, it's about learning to think and express yourself in a healthy way, acquiring new values, constructing a new life, and – staying out of prison forever.

Prison doesn't have to be about isolation and lost time. It can be a university, a career-training center, or a seminary. Time doesn't have to be wasted because of poor decisions in the past. To "make it" when released into the free-world, to survive and thrive, to find a job that provides satisfaction, as well as a good salary, to support your family and serve as a positive role model, there is only one way, education. And the higher the level of education, the greater the ability to secure steady employment, succeed and prosper. It takes discipline and perseverance, two qualities that will serve you the rest of your life. I'm so proud of you son!! n



Reducing the Financial Strain on Families of the Incarcerated

Reinvested Communities is a new initiative between TIFA and Texas Interfaith that brings together formerly incarcerated individuals, people of faith and family members with an incarcerated loved one to work together to promote strategies to reduce barriers to successful reentry. This workshop will offer practical skills training and information via group discussion, interactive exercises, and expert speakers to prepare participants to be leaders for change. Participants will gain the skills to advocate for policies that strengthen communities, families, and allow people affected by the criminal justice system be able to move forward successfully—and TOGETHER.

Reinvested Communities Training is coming to Houston this fall beginning Thursdays Sept. 4- Oct. 23 and there will be an Austin Intensive session August 22-24. Included in the training are:

- Discussions about incarcerations and reentry in Texas

- How to transform your personal story into a powerful tool for change
- Know your rights training and concrete tools for self advocacy for you or your loved one
- How to advocate for your loved one “through the bars”
- Barriers, challenges, and strengths of doing criminal justice work in a faith setting
- Understanding how our policies and systems make it almost impossible for people coming home from prison AND what to do about it!
- How to look at and shift power in your community
- Learn how to effectively talk about these issues in language that represents the person first
- Become a part of a movement to reduce barriers to reentry in Texas.

For more information and an application, email Caitlin@texasinterfaith.org or call 512-472-3903. Or visit TIFA.org for more information and a link to the application. [n](#)

Many times, families who try to maintain the family bonds with their incarcerated loved ones feel the greatest financial impact. And in recent years there have been improvements in the efforts of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice and the Texas Legislature to help families stay connected but it has come at a cost.

Below are some of the financial burdens borne by family members.

1. In 2013, \$5.2 million was paid in healthcare co-pay fees according to the Texas Legislative Budget Board.
2. In 2013, the TDCJ Inmate Trust Fund handled approximately \$115 - \$120 million in funds for inmates and correction officers. The TDCJ commissary generated approximately \$101 million in gross revenue. The operating budget of the commissary, which includes the salaries for 410 employees and the purchase of the commissary inventory, was about \$91 million. After those costs, \$4.5 million was transferred through a memorandum of understanding to the Windham school district to support inmate education, recreation, library services, and the ECHO newsletter. The remaining \$5.5 million was available to be ‘swept’ into the State General Revenue fund.
3. An open records request made by TIFA revealed that the revenues and commissions generated by the Offender Telephone System (OTS) in 2013 was \$32.7 million. Consistent with state law and contractual

Continued on page 7 (Financial Strain)



SAVE THE DATE ! November 7, 2014

On Nov 7 Texas Families for Justice, a coalition of TIFA, Texas Voices and TX CURE will be having a rally in Austin, TX at the Texas State Capitol on the front steps. Watch the TIFA website for more information and registration details.

TIFA Testimony (Cont. from page 1) complaints must be taken seriously and addressed promptly and there must be accountability with medical orders and restrictions.

3. When patients return from the UTMB Galveston medical facility, the specialized instructions for their medical care and work restrictions are not always being followed by unit staff. Other issues that family groups commonly hear are that incarcerated family members have been put on restricted work duty due to hernias, back injuries or other disabilities but unit personnel do not honor the restrictions.

4. Incarcerated individuals cannot obtain their prescribed medication or are given different medications from those they received outside prison or prescribed by Galveston and have various complications because of this. The most common complaint that TIFA receives is that inmates are denied pain medication for severe pain that has been prescribed because of back problems, cancer and other debilitating causes. Also, because of a lack of pharmaceutical inventory, prescriptions are often substituted or remain unfilled, which can cause medical complications. Substituting a cheaper, generic drug that may not have the same pharmaceutical profile as its brand-name counterpart may result in unforeseen consequences or treatment failure, especially in the case of medications used to treat mental illness.

5. The \$100 co-pay is a complicated



Center: Chair House Corrections Committee Tan Parker, Chair House Appropriations Committee Sylvester Turner

administrative process for inmates and doctors alike. Inmates frequently make complaints that they have been charged incorrectly.

The co-pay has resulted in inmates refusing treatment and from unit to unit there are different interpretations of when to charge a co-pay. The financial expectations for the program have not been met and it has only provided an additional financial burden for those who are incarcerated and their families.

Recommendations:

The two keys to safety inside Texas prisons are the promotion of professionalism among TDCJ staff and the implementation of systems designed to remedy problems. We realize that the Committee does not make decisions based on anecdotes, but seeks to establish standards of accountability that will be generally applicable in all situations. TIFA would like to make the following recommendations:

1. Personnel training should include expanded medical and American Disability Act training and also encourage humane attitudes toward prisoners so that cold indifference on the part of personnel does not lead to more tragic deaths. Personnel should be held accountable when standards are ignored.
2. Medical hospitals need to standardize standing orders and practice protocols that take into account the capacities and capabilities of the units to which the patients will be returned.
3. Require unit officials to follow medical orders, specifically cell and work restrictions to improve unit compliance with medical cell and work restrictions as prescribed by a physician.
4. All pharmacies should have inventory systems and pharmacological inventory in place that allows them to meet the needs of the unit population.
5. The decision to charge the \$100

co-pay needs to be revisited and repealed.

6. With the increased aging of the prison population there needs to be 24-hour medical staff on all units. Not only is this a cost saving issue but it is also a public safety issue, as units without appropriate medical personnel require more transports to local hospitals, while delaying immediate care for the offenders. n

“And the Heat Goes On.....”

Although people who are incarcerated have been deprived of their right to liberty, they still retain most of their fundamental human rights, most notably the rights to dignity, life, security of person, the right to be free of inhuman or degrading treatment, and the right to protection of prisoners' rights.

TDCJ is again facing more legal actions and criticisms about offenders having to endure oppressive Texas summer heat. In April, the University of Texas School of Law Human Rights Clinic released its report 'Deadly Heat in Texas Prisons'. The clinic's 36-page recommendation is expected to draw controversy in a state that has never been known for treating its prisoners well and could fuel new lawsuits in addition to the six pending over eight heat-related deaths in Texas' prisons - many of them in East Texas - in the past three years. The report recommends that the TDCJ should air-condition the 109 state-run prisons and take immediate steps to ensure that temperatures this summer do not exceed 85 degrees, a standard that is followed in Texas county jails and advocated in several court decisions in other states.

The full report, 'Deadly Heat in Texas Prisons', can be found at <http://www.utexas.edu/law/clinics/humanrights/workhighlights.php#extremeheat>.

In June, the Texas Civil Rights Project (TCRP), Edwards Law, and UT Law School filed a lawsuit in Houston on behalf of four plaintiffs living at the Pack I Unit. Previous lawsuits had been filed on behalf of the families of inmates who have died. The lawsuit stated that the cells at the Pack Unit become a harmful environment for inmates who are unable to escape the heat during Texas's grueling summers. According to the lawsuit, the cells are so hot "that inmates have resorted to wrapping themselves in damp towels and lying on the concrete floors. Inmates lay towels on the burning hot stainless steel tables to rest their elbows. The walls, also made of metal, trap in hot air like a "parked car." Some dorm windows are sealed shut; others that do open do not air to help provide relief from the heat. The lawsuit alleges that 'a ventilation system blows the sweltering air (which often exceeds 100 degrees) from outside into the cells, but that the system does nothing to cool the place —much in the same way a vent system in a car doesn't provide any comfort and does not lower the temperature when it is run without the car's air conditioning.'



Cooling equipment employs a large fan inside about a 6-foot-by-6-foot box

At the TDCJ Quarterly meeting in May the topic of discussion was building maintenance and the upcoming summer heat. During this meeting Bill Stephens, Dir of the Correctional Institutions Division said that TDCJ was in the process of installing

cooling systems similar to those seen on the sidelines of football games, although these would not be blowing a water mist. The cooling equipment employs a large fan inside about a 6-foot-by-6-foot box. Water from a hose behind the \$1,800 device flows over coils that cool the air pushed by the fan. The fans were going to be placed at transfer units around the state to see how efficiently they would work in different climates. Transfer units were picked because these units do not have outlet plugs that allow the use of the individual fans that most offenders have. In addition to the cooling equipment, TDCJ has purchased close to 700 additional fans for offender housing and work areas and replaced 28 ice machines around the state.

Extreme heat presents a risk of serious and substantial injury to elderly inmates and inmates who are on medication. TIFA will continue to monitor the progress of the lawsuits and keep this issue on the top of everyone's list of concerns. TDJC has an obligation and a duty to humanely treat the people who are put in their charge. n

TIFA Announces the **LAST** Parole Packet Workshop for 2014



TIFA has one more workshop scheduled for 2014. For registration and more information visit TIFA.org or you can call the TIFA phone line at 512-371-0900.

The cost to attend is \$50 for members and \$85 for nonmembers (which includes a membership).

Dallas, TX

Sat Sept 13th, 12-4 pm
 Lover's Lane Methodist Church
 9200 Inwood Rd.
 Dallas, TX 75220

Our workshops in Pearland and San Antonio were a great success. One comment from an attendee:

"I attended the San Antonio seminar on Saturday & learned so much! I think the most important part for me was the "humanization" of the Parole Board members/voters. Frequently we think of people who make such important decisions as un-caring & aloof, but I found both presenters to be extremely cordial & very dedicated to their task at hand. We could tell that they are compassionate & caring. I don't know the members of the Angleton board who will be voting on my brother in Stiles, but I am hoping that they have the same positive attitudes."

Very well organized & well executed training session. I felt welcome from the time I entered the building until I left."

These workshops are for family members and friends who have loved ones in TDCJ and would like to learn more about the parole process and how to put together a parole packet. The workshop provides information about the parole process and the Texas Board of Pardons and Parole, a workbook and parole packet example. A question and answer session will follow the presentation.

We will be working on our workshop schedule for 2015 and it will be available in our November newsletter. n

The Conroe Chapter Welcomes IPO Representatives

by Faith Smith

Regional Supervisor of the Institutional Parole Office, Robin Biscamp and Shane Smith the Assistant Regional Supervisor were the guest speakers at the monthly Conroe Chapter meeting in April 2014. They provided a presentation covering the process of parole in Texas and answered questions afterward. The majority of the questions dealt heavily with the parole process. A few of the questions and concerns of the TIFA members that were addressed are as follows:

Q: Families are concerned that the meeting between their loved one and the IPO is rarely 10 minutes or more. How can the IPO give a recommendation to the Board regarding parole when spending so little time with the individual?

A: The IPO is not allowed to give a recommendation. The goal of the IPO is to gather all information (good, bad, past and present) and provide the Board with a summary report that will help them make an informed decision. The point was stressed that the inmate needs to make certain that the IPO has all certificates or other achievements. Anything that shows progress and willingness to improve one's self is very beneficial. Once the file is up-to-date and complete, the IPO sends the report to the Regional Parole Board office where a lead voter will be assigned.

Q: When should family members or inmates submit a parole packet by mail for the Parole Board to review?

A: Families, and inmates as well, are encouraged to follow the following time lines: If it is the inmates first time to be reviewed, their file will be pulled 6 months prior to the review date. The Austin Parole Board office should receive the parole packet the previous or same month that the inmate's file is pulled. If the inmate has been previously reviewed, their file is pulled 4 months prior to the review date and the Board should receive their packet the previous or same month that the inmate's file is pulled.

Q: When and how do loved ones request a phone or face-to-face interview?

A: A letter requesting a phone interview should be mailed to the Parole Board office that is voting the case. A phone call can also be made verifying that the request was received and noted in the inmates file. The lead voter will determine if the request will be granted. n

Dr. Carpenter Visits the Killeen-Harker Heights Chapter

By Janice Harris



Killeen Chapter Chair Janice Harris and WSD Superintendent Dr. Clint Carpenter

Dr. Clint Carpenter was the guest speaker at the May meeting of the Killeen-Harker Heights chapter. Dr.

Carpenter is the new Superintendent of Windham School District (WSD). He began serving as the interim Superintendent November 2013. We found Dr. Carpenter to be a very pleasant friendly person, very down to earth, eager to share his thoughts and just as eager to listen to ours. His desire to improve and bring new, as well as more and better, educational services to our loved ones was very genuine.

According to Dr Carpenter, he would like to see more educational opportunities, including higher education vocational and college classes. He is trying to get more Windham vocational programs and said they would be "clean" shops, easily packed up and moved (a mobile classroom/shop) to other locations thus allowing for the opportunity for the classes to be available to more people. The courses being considered are: Advanced Copper Wiring, Fiber Optic Wiring, Audio Visual Wiring, and Energy Management Systems. Each would be a 30 to 40 hour course with C-Tech Certification (which is industry standard certification), meaning that the certification would make them hireable to many companies because they would have the same certification that those of the free world have.

Another topic was a shortage of teachers to provide the instruction for these classes. Dr. Carpenter did let us know that WSD has expanded their recruiting efforts to fill these slots by going to Job Fairs and out of state.

Dr. Carpenter also expressed an interest in getting perhaps MP3 players or tablets available for purchase so that our loved ones would have not just download music but books, magazines and even textbooks. For now that may seem

like a dream but all advancements start with a dream, an idea, and Dr. Carpenter seems passionate enough about his opportunity to improve the educational opportunities that WSD is offering our loved ones. So if anyone can pull it off my bets are on him!

However, we need to show our support (and have our voices heard) to people that are willing to work on improving the lives of our loved ones. And that leads me to my plea for attendance at our meetings! I simply cannot even put into words how important it is that we, as a group, need to come together to get things changed. It can't happen without you! We need you! We need you to show up and let those involved in the decisions that affect our loved ones know that we will not just sit on the sidelines merely waiting for our loved ones to come home. We need to let TDCJ, WSD and everyone else know that we want the difference for our loved ones to start within the prison walls! Please come and play your part, starting with coming to your TIFA meetings! n

Financial Strain (Cont. from page 3)

requirements that allows Texas a 40% commission rate, the total commission received in 2013 was approximately \$12.81 million. The law requires that a base amount of \$10 million be paid to the Victims of Crime fund and the remaining amount is to be split between the Victims of Crime fund and the State General Revenue fund. In 2013, this resulted in an additional \$1.4 million for the Victims of Crime fund and the remaining \$1.4 million paid into the general revenue fund.

Recommendations that are being made by TIFA:

1. The decision to charge the \$100

co-pay needs to be repealed. The economic impact on families who provide the fee and the avoidance of health care by offenders to save the \$100 negatively outweigh the contribution that the fee makes to reduce the cost of medical care for offenders.

2. The excess funds (\$5.5 million) made by the Commissary Division should not be paid into the State General Revenue fund but used to provide more educational opportunities for the offenders. This funding could be used to provide more classroom space with the utilization of portable classroom buildings.

3. The commission rate for the OTS needs to be completely eliminated. The sole purpose of the commission rate is to generate revenue and places an unfair burden on families. A phone call between family members is one of the only 'normal' things that occurs during incarceration.

During the hearings on Managed Care, both Parker and Turner requested to meet with TIFA to discuss the medical co-pay. Because of this request, we took the opportunity to include a discussion on the commissary profits and the OTS commission rate. Rep Turner gave a favorable response to the first two recommendations; he replied that the third one would be difficult because it dealt with the Victims funds. TIFA will next be setting up an appointment with Rep. Parker.

If the first two recommendations are adopted there may not be a lot of financial relief for families, but any relief from some of these financial burdens, or extra benefits for our loved ones, can only make it easier for families. n



A Letter From the Inside by Floyd H. (edited for space)

While TIFA is and has been doing/done a lot to assist us behind the walls, their struggle is sure to be never-ending. I am confident that "KUDOS" is rarely ever given as a result. I'd like to take the time to do that.

I have been isolated, at least physically, from the stresses of society for almost 10 years now. TIFA, Tx CURE and the likes were unheard of in 1996. A lot has been accomplished. It is a priority of those of us who are incarcerated to complain almost constantly. I know I've done my fair share. While I am sure there are counseling oriented persons involved who are willing to assist our family, that only aids one side of the equation. I think there needs to be more focus on us, the inmate ourselves, to implement in-depth critical thinking.

When was the last time we (Prisoners) had to deal with all the problems and issues outside these walls that our families deal with? All of those things we as inmates take for granted. Then, at the end of the day, our families manage to find the TIME to devote to those they love who are behind the walls? The time we have is idle for the most part and more times than I can remember I've heard "men" complain about that their folks aren't doing for them.

So, to all of those in white who read these words, take a minute to ponder this thought: IT'S NOT WHAT YOUR FAMILY CAN DO FOR YOU, BUT WHAT CAN YOU DO FOR YOUR FAMILY?

Heck, just a simple letter from us to our family making acknowledgement of what they do, means a lot. If it weren't for them, TIFA, Tx CURE and others, things could sure be worse.

To all of you TIFA members, I would enjoy being able to set up a relaxing session for each of you to reward your relentless, never-tiring efforts in which you put yourselves last. You are worthy of much more. No words could ever be plentiful enough to begin-much less fulfill your deserving.

And a belated Happy Birthday to Floyd!



Texas Inmate Families Association

Strengthening families through support, education, and advocacy

TIFA
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CONTACT
Vol. 19 No. 3 July 2014

TIFA Chapters

Amarillo

1st Friday, 7:00 pm
Buchanan Street United
Methodist Church
617 N. Buchanan
Amarillo, TX 79107
(806) 433-1843

Austin- South

1st Monday, 6:30 pm
Sunrise Community Church
4430 Manchaca Road
(just south of Ben White Blvd.)
Austin, Texas 78745
(512) 371-0900

Austin - North

3rd Monday, 6:30 pm
Lord of Life Lutheran Church
9700 Neenah Avenue
Austin, TX 78717
(512) 371-0900

Beaumont

1st Tuesday, 6:30 pm
St. Jude Thaddeus Catholic
Church Family Life Center
6825 Gladys
Beaumont, Texas 77726
(409) 246-8146

Conroe

4th Monday, 6:30 pm
Eagle's Nest Ministries
1450 Blake Road
Conroe Texas 77304
(214) 766-5603

Corpus Christi

1st Monday, 7:00 pm
Molina Neighborhood Center
614 Horne Road
Corpus Christi, TX 78416
(361) 461-4954

Dallas

3rd Wednesday, 6:30 pm
Lover's Lane Methodist Church
9200 Inwood Rd Oxford Rm #200
Dallas, TX 75220
Phone: (817) 798-9010 or
(817) 219-1628

Ft. Worth

1st Monday, 6:30 p.m
St. Christopher Episcopal Church
3550 S.W. Loop 820
Fort Worth, TX 76133
(817) 798-9010

Houston

2nd Tuesday, 7:00 pm
C.O.O.L. Ministries
5005 W. 34th Street Suite 103-C
Houston, TX 77092
(903) 360-4697

Killeen - Harker Heights

2nd Tuesday, 7:00 pm
Trinity Baptist Church
403 East FM 2410 Rd.
Harker Heights, TX 76548
(254) 449-5050

Pearland - South Houston

3rd Tuesday, 6:30 pm
Pearland Library
3522 Liberty Dr.
Pearland, TX 77584
(832) 748-8990

Rio Grande Valley

St. Joseph's Catholic Church
Portable Room #139
119 W. Champion St.
Edinburg, TX 78539
*(corner of 10th & Champion,
across from medical center)*
(956) 569-5254

San Antonio

2nd Tuesday, 7:00 pm
St. Vincent De Paul Catholic
Church Parish Hall
4222 Southwest Loop 410
San Antonio, Texas
(210) 680-3505

San Antonio - North

3rd Thursday, 7:00 pm
St Marks Evangelist
Catholic Church
1602 Thousand Oaks Dr.
San Antonio, TX
(210) 387-1558

Taylor

Last Saturday, 7:00 pm
Mt. Calvary Baptist Church
602 Symes
Taylor, TX 76574
(512) 352-0006

***If you are interested in
starting a TIFA chapter in
your area, please contact
the TIFA office.
(512) 371-0900***