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DA Provides \$25K Grant to Program that Diverts Youth Arrested for Arson

San Diego County District Attorney [Summer Stephan](#) announced today that her office is providing a \$25,000 grant to the San Diego Burn Institute in support of their [Youth Firesetter Intervention Program](#) (YFS). The diversion program incorporates evidence-based risk assessment tools and education to intervene in dangerous fire setting behavior by youth and stop it at the source. The grant comes on the heels of the DA announcing its new [Juvenile Diversion Initiative](#).

“Data shows that most youth come into contact with the criminal justice system only once, so initiatives like the Firesetter Intervention Program are critical in re-directing young people away from this specific behavior that got them into trouble,” said DA Summer Stephan. “The program also addresses the root cause of the juveniles’ arson behavior which can put themselves or others in danger.”

YFS responds to referrals from county fire departments, law enforcement, school officials, probation, juvenile justice systems, Metro Arson Strike Team, and others in San Diego and Imperial Counties. The Burn Institute provides risk assessments for future fire setting behaviors and education courses with the youth and family about legal ramifications, fiscal ramifications, and the dangers to self and others. The program also makes referrals to community agencies to address compounding clinical issues.

“Fire is everywhere in our society, from lighting a candle, to large explosions in movies,” said Susan Day, Executive Director of the Burn Institute. “Children see and mimic these behaviors when they don’t understand the risks or think through what could happen. Our YFS program uses prevention and intervention techniques to help change a child’s behavior before a curiosity or experimentation with fire becomes more destructive”

Juveniles under age 18 who are referred for fire setting behaviors are eligible for services available in English, Spanish and other languages. The District Attorney’s Juvenile Division reviews about 10 allegations of arson by youth each year. However, the YFS program assists many more youth than cases the DA receives. Firefighters or law enforcement might suspect a youth is involved in starting the fire but may not have the evidence to submit a case. In those cases, the youth will still be referred to Burn Institute for assessment and education on the dangers of fire.

Research shows that 55% of U.S. arson arrests are under the age of 18, and almost half of these arrests are age 15 and under. Arson is the second leading cause of all fatal home accidents, and fire setting is the largest cause of home deaths among children.

The YFS program is confidential and free of charge. Individuals don't need a referral and can self-enroll in the program by contacting the Youth Firesetter Program Coordinator at 858-541-2277 x 111 or YFS@burninstitute.org

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