

# news

## THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS HEALTH SCIENCE CENTER AT DALLAS

southwestern medical school - graduate school of biomedical sciences - school of allied health sciences

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CONTACT: Ann Williams  
Office: 214/688-4303  
Home: 214/279-9402

SPECIAL TO MID-CITIES DAILY NEWS:

\*\*\*\*\*Eulless resident develops counseling  
career at D-FW Airport.

DALLAS--"The worst part of my job is wondering whatever happens to the people I see," says Paula Wilson.

A program assistant in the Community Services office at Dallas-Fort Worth Regional Airport (D-FW) and a rehabilitation science major at The University of Texas Health Science Center at Dallas (UTHSCD), Ms. Wilson assists passengers flying into the airport who need help. Usually, they fly out and she never hears from them again.

But she wonders what happened to them. Like the 93-year-old man she went to jail with. He was supposed to change planes at D-FW, but he was hard-of-hearing and couldn't understand what the stewardess was telling him. The airline even had a car at the plane to take him to the next one, but he didn't understand. When the airline personnel started to "help" him get off the plane, he became frightened and started hitting, kicking and biting everybody within reach.

"I saw him grab a man's necktie with his left hand, pull him close and sock him with the right hand. He was doing everybody that way, including the DPS (Department of Public Safety) officers. I took off my neck scarf so he couldn't grab that and just started yelling in his ear. The airline refused to carry him further without someone to take care of him. So the DPS had to take him to jail. I went with him because I was the only one he wasn't kicking. He would hold my arm and say, 'I'll go home with you.' So I waited with him until his nephew could fly in and take him home," said Ms. Wilson.

And she wonders about the woman the Red Cross was sending to see her critically ill son in the service. He had taken a drug over-dose and was not expected to live. The mother was recently divorced and had been in an accident the day before. So she needed someone to meet her and just sit with her while she waited for her next flight.

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first add airport

Ms. Wilson wonders about the runaways.

Community Services, the first agency to be co-sponsored by Dallas and Tarrant County United Way, works with the Texas Youth Council in returning runaway kids home. When runaways have to change planes, a program assistant meets them and "babysits" with them to make sure they don't run away and that they get on the right plane. The community services office includes a small TV room complete with refrigerator and snacks.

"You can send me home, but I'll just run away again," said an 11-year-old girl who had hitch-hiked across the country.

"These kids are starved for affection. All of us in this office have 'Have you hugged your kid today?' bumper stickers on our cars," said Ms. Wilson.

Older people run away too. One morning at 6:00 Ms. Wilson was called in. (Employees carry beepers, and there is a "hot line" phone by the door for times when no one is in the office.) A young runaway wife had flown in. She was supposed to be under a doctor's care, but she hadn't eaten, drunk anything or taken her medication in three days.

"She was just wild. I sat with her and talked with her, and I finally got her husband on the phone. He told me that she had tranquilizers in her purse, and she should take one. That was at 10:30, and Alice (the director) had given me until 11:00 to do something with her, or we would have to admit her to a hospital as a psychiatric patient," said Ms. Wilson.

After the tranquilizer took effect, the woman was "a different person." She combed her hair, apologized for her behavior and gladly got on a plane for home.

Another runaway refused to go home.

A young battered wife flew into D-FW carrying only her baby and her purse, stuffed with diapers and clothes for the baby. She said she had read that Dallas had a shelter for battered wives, so she picked up her baby and came. Since Dallas has no such shelter, Ms. Wilson and the director had to refer the woman to a private agency for financial aid and shelter.

The community services people, a director, an assistant director and three program assistants, spend a lot of time sitting and listening. They do a lot of talking on the phone-- a lot of locating families. But they also do a lot of running. They may get a call to meet someone on a plane that is landing "right now" on the other side of the airport. Or that a woman is proclaiming herself "Jesus Christ reincarnated" and scaring everyone to death at Gate 9.

If the problem is in one of the Braniff terminals, Ms. Wilson merely runs to meet it. If it is in another terminal, she runs downstairs to her car which is parked at the foot of the stairs at the far end of Braniff Terminal C. She says getting to the other terminals is easy "once you learn your way around."

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second add airport

Ms. Wilson has been learning her way around in general, not just at the airport, since her divorce three years ago. She entered the job market as a secretary while she attended Tarrant County Junior College at night. Fortunately, she said, they counted most of the 30 hours she'd earned 25 years ago.

While working as a secretary, she enrolled in an Explore course, a course in self-awareness for women. She became completely depressed over an exercise in setting long-term goals--she knew she didn't want to be an executive secretary for 20 years, but she didn't know exactly what she wanted to do. She wanted to help women, especially middle-aged women.

Then on her 45th birthday, June 9 of last year, she had lunch with a psychologist friend. He told her that the bachelor's degree in psychology she was thinking about is not a marketable degree. He advised her to check into the rehabilitation science program in the School of Allied Health Sciences at UTHSCD.

"Why would I want to rehabilitate people?" she argued.

"Just check into it. I know you'd like the courses," he said.

She called UTHSCD July 9 to check the on the program, and on the 15th, the deadline for fall admission, she walked in at 1:00 p.m. with the necessary forms complete for admission to the rehab science program.

Once she had decided to enter the allied health school, she took the plunge and quit her secretarial job, not knowing how she would support herself. But she got a loan from the school and worked part-time, confident that getting a degree in rehab-science was the right thing to do.

In her first semester Ms. Wilson was required to visit and write a report on a social agency. She had no idea any agency existed at D-FW but selected it from a list because it was near her home in Euless. She wrote papers for two courses on her one-day visit.

Agency Director Alice Dement asked to read her papers. Evidently Ms. Dement liked them cause she offered Ms. Wilson a job. They also worked out a practicum for the next semester. So last spring Ms. Wilson worked in the agency under the supervision of Ms. Dement and Kamal El-Din, assistant professor of rehabilitation science at UTHSCD, receiving credit toward her degree for a practicum course.

Now Ms. Wilson works from one to six p.m. Monday through Friday and is on call all day Sunday. She attends class three mornings a week, studying toward her bachelor's degree in rehabilitation science next May.

Since she began working at D-FW, another program assistant, Joanne Fletcher, has enrolled in the rehab science program at the allied health school.

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third add airport

"This program is the most pragmatic, practical, down-to-earth training that I've seen. It gives Paula the opportunity to practice what she learns. In addition to that, because of her life experience she brings many of the abilities she needs to be able to work with other people. She has a nice ability to understand herself as a person, and she is very understanding of other people," said Ms. Dement.

Looking back to last year's birthday, Ms. Wilson said, "This had been a fantastic year because of that birthday lunch." She has learned counseling skills to help other people, but also her courses have helped "pull my stuff together."

In "pulling her stuff together," she has had the moral support of two sons. Mike will receive his doctor of veterinary medicine degree from Texas A&M University next May. He's married and has a son and a daughter. Warren is a Dallas police officer.

Ms. Wilson is "pulling her stuff together," working and studying. At age 46 she has started a brand new career. Wonder what she'll do next.

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