

LOCAL WOMAN  
DEDICATES LIFE TO  
HELPING OTHERS



# ONE SUNDOWN AT A TIME

BY CHALISA MADSEN

**IT TAKES A SPECIAL KIND** of person to help kids get their lives back on track after struggling with addiction. It takes long hours, patience, determination, and dedication. No one knows this better than Kim Echols.

For the past twenty four years, Echols has dedicated her life to helping the kids of Sundown Ranch, an adolescent drug and alcohol rehabilitation center located between Canton and Athens. But her passion for helping people and making a difference goes back much further.

"I did an internship in college with TX MHMR, now known as the Andrews Center," explained Echols. "Growing up, my parents fostered a boy, and then later on, adult women with special needs. I knew early on that I wanted to do something to make a difference."

And make a difference she has. Echols uses her insight into psychology and her master level crisis intervention training to help kids from all over the world get their lives turned around.

But this job is not for the faint of heart. Sometimes the kids are aggressive, coming down from drugs, or just simply don't want to be there. They'll try to harm themselves and their families, the staff, or other clients. In the process of handling aggressive

situations, Echols has suffered a broken finger, she's torn the meniscus in both knees, and attained all sorts of bumps and abrasions along the way. "You either have what it takes to do this kind of job, or you don't," laughed Echols.

Needless to say, it can take a lot out of you, but Echols explained what makes it all worthwhile: the success calls.

"To me, the kids that call back make it all worth it," said Echols. "I'll answer and they'll say, 'I don't know if you remember me, but you changed my life. If it wasn't for Sundown, I wouldn't be here.' Then they'll tell me how they have families of their own now, or how they went on to medical school or law school."

Some ex-clients even go and get their counseling degrees so they can help other people that are in the same situation that they overcame. Sundown Ranch will even hire ex-clients after they have been sober for a few years, and let them help the new clients with their success stories and insight.

One of Echols' favorite programs at Sundown Ranch is the ROPES course. Called experiential therapy, or even adventure therapy, the ROPES course is a form of therapy that teaches teamwork, trust, and faith by

using obstacles designed to challenge a participant and make them think outside of the box. Some of the tasks seem dauntingly impossible at first, like scaling a 14 foot wall with no hand or foot holds, or walking a tightrope while dangling 20 feet above the ground.

"I love ROPES therapy because it really facilitates teamwork," explained Echols. "There's no 'I' in the 12 Steps, or in recovery. You cannot do it alone. You have to learn how to ask for help and in turn, help others. The ROPES course helps them practice all those skills for real life."

Sundown Ranch's ROPES therapy even takes outside groups looking to further their teamwork, as well. Echols has led many different groups through the ROPES course, from Henderson County Juvenile groups, Trinity Valley Community College groups, and church groups, as well as the police department from the city of Irving.

"The Irving police department was fun," said Echols, with a laugh. "They had quite a few control issues in that group."

Echols explained that while the success stories make the job worthwhile, not everyone has a success story. Sadly, the odds are stacked against people trying to stay clean and sober, and it is truly a battlefield. Not everyone will make it out of their addiction.

"Everyone knows someone impacted by addiction," said Echols. "It's a struggle. Working in this field, you will be touched by these lives."

Kim Echols is an amazing woman who has dedicated her life to helping others. Her tireless work and devotion has impacted thousands of lives over the years, and even though she prefers to stay out of the spotlight, her story is one that needs to be told.

When it comes to her talents or accepting praise for a job well done, Echols doesn't take the credit. "In everything I do, I give God the glory," she said. "It's not about me at all." In fact, she has a favorite Bible verse that she lives by, and shares with the kids when they need to hear it. "My life verse is Philippians 4:13, 'I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.'"

Sundown Ranch is one of Texas best-kept secrets. They don't advertise; all of their business comes from word of mouth. Taking in adolescents and young adults from 12-24, they are one of the top in-patient rehabilitation centers in the country. For more info on the program, or for any questions, please email [Kim@sundownranch.org](mailto:Kim@sundownranch.org) or call 903.479.3933. You can also read more about their work at [www.SundownRanchInc.com](http://www.SundownRanchInc.com)



*Echols, seen here on the ROPES 14ft wall at Sundown Ranch, is passionate about helping others.*

