

**COMMUNITY PLAN**  
Taylor, Callahan and Coleman Counties  
FY2025-FY2028



**COMMUNITY PLAN SUBMISSION FORM**

*This Box For COG  
Use Only*

Fund Source: WCCA

Date Received  
by COG: 12 / 13 / 24

**Instructions:** Complete this form (continued on next page) and attach it to the community plan when it is submitted to the regional council of governments. The three-page Community Plan Submission form(s) must accompany all community plans.

1. Name of Plan: **REGIONAL COMMUNITY PLAN FOR  
TAYLOR, CALLAHAN & COLEMAN COUNTIES**

2. Cities, counties, or parts thereof covered by this plan:

**Taylor County:** Abilene, Tuscola, Merkel, Lawn, Potosi, Buffalo Gap, Tye, Trent, Impact;  
**Callahan County:** Baird, Clyde, Cross Plains, Putman, Eula; **Coleman County:** Coleman, Santa Anna, Novice

3. List the types (general focuses) of projects currently funded by CJD that the community planning group agrees should continue. DO NOT list specific grant applications or agencies.

Comprehensive Crime Victim Services including trauma informed counseling and advocacy. Violence Prevention and Intervention Services. Specialize training for all agencies involved with crime victims including law enforcement, criminal justice and mental health services. Funding for expansion of current programs to meet the growing needs of each community

4. List the gaps in services that would enhance the community plan if funding were available. List these gaps as types of services. DO NOT list specific grant applications or agencies.

Professional Staff Funding; Ongoing Training Funding; Technology Funding; Facility Expansion Funding; Funding to Expand Programs that Service All Crime Victims

**For more information about this community plan, contact:**

**Name:** Janey R. Wawerna, Executive Director  
Regional Victim Crisis Center

**Address:** PO Box 122, Abilene, TX 79604

**Phone:** Office                      Cell  
326-677-7895                      305-731-4741

Figure 1



## COMMUNITY PLAN SUBMISSION FORM (CONTINUED)

All community plans must be accompanied by a brief written summary of the plan. The summary must meet the following criteria:

**Planning groups must submit a summary of the priorities, goals and objectives from the community plan relating to:**

- **Juvenile Justice & Truancy Prevention Issues**
- **Criminal Justice Issues**
- **Victims' Issues**
- **Mental Health & Substance Abuse Issues**

This summary **must** accompany all community plans and must be submitted to the WCTCOG along with the other two **Community Plan Submission Forms**.

Please type in a brief summary (as outlined above) of your Community Plan in the space provided below. Please attach extra pages if needed.

### **Juvenile Justice & Truancy Prevention Issues**

Develop treatment focused programming, both counseling and residential, in the West Texas geographic area, with emphasis on increased Mental Health Services. Develop partnerships with current providers to facilitate expansion of community-based youth activities and intervention programs to year-round scheduling, which will include services to address self-esteem issues through activities (not just counseling) for adolescents. Develop more programs that encourage parental involvement in the lives of their children at school, & counseling.

### **Criminal Justice Issues**

Must address insufficient funding, manpower issues and availability of adequate training. Further training to respond to changing and increased demands for services. Increasing funding to meet the growing demand for updated equipment and technological needs of law enforcement agencies.

### **Victims' Issues**

Survivors of violent crime need continued assistance, awareness and involvement throughout the criminal justice process and prevention awareness is needed for parents, schools and neighborhoods. Current funding sources must be secured to address comprehensive crime victim care and prevention education. Funding is a continued concern for crime victim services. Training for victim assistance and crisis intervention volunteers is imperative, as well as training for professionals with whom victims of violent crimes come into contact. Although we have outstanding programs to care for crime victims, expansion of services is needed to continue to adequately address the growing problems faced by victims of violent crime, including a need to expand mental health services, particularly, for victims who are mentally ill.

### **Mental Health & Substance Abuse Issues**

Funding for a Diversion or Sobering Center is needed. Expanding Shelter and Housing Options in the areas of service. Expand Jail In Reach and Navigation and begin planning for alternatives to inpatient competency restoration.



**REGIONAL COMMUNITY PLAN FOR  
TAYLOR, CALLAHAN & COLEMAN COUNTIES  
FY 2025 -26**

**Prepared by:**

**Chairman**

**Janey R. Wawerna  
Executive Director  
Regional Crime Victim Crisis Center  
P.O. Box 122  
Abilene, Texas 79604  
(325) 677-7895**

**Committees**

**Juvenile Justice  
Gerald Jenschke  
Deputy Chief  
Juvenile Probation Services  
Taylor County  
889 S. 25<sup>th</sup> Street  
Abilene, Texas 79602**

**Criminal Justice  
Richard Waggoner  
Assistant Chief  
Abilene Police Dept.  
4565 S. 1<sup>st</sup> Street  
P.O. Box 174  
Abilene, Texas 79604**

**Victim Issues  
Alana Jeter  
Executive Director  
Noah Project Family Violence Center  
5802 Texas Avenue  
Abilene, Texas 79605**

**Behavioral Health – Mental  
Health and Substance Abuse Issues  
Jenny Goode  
Betty Hardwick Center  
2626 S. Clack  
Abilene, Texas 79606**





# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>I.</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	Pages	1 - 2
	Taylor County.....	Pages	2 - 5
	Callahan County.....	Pages	5 - 6
	Coleman County.....	Pages	7 - 6
<b>II.</b>	<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>		
	Executive Summary.....	Pages	7 - 8
	Criminal Justice.....	Pages	8 – 10
	Juvenile Justice.....	Pages	10 - 14
	Victim Issues.....	Pages	14 - 16
	Behavioral Health – Mental Health & Substance Abuse Issues....	Pages	16 - 19
<b>III.</b>	<b>CURRENT SERVICES FUNDED THROUGH THE OFFICE OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE DIVISION, STATE OF TEXAS.....</b>	Pages	19 - 20
<b>IV.</b>	<b>CRIMINAL JUSTICE ISSUES</b>		
	<i>Criminal Justice Issue #1</i>		
	“Insufficient Funding, Manpower Issues and Availability of Adequate Training” .....	Pages	20 - 21
	<i>Criminal Justice Issue #2</i>		
	“Changing and Increased Demands for Services”.....	Pages	22 - 24
	<i>Criminal Justice Issue #3</i>		
	“Equipment and Technological Needs of Agencies are not Being Met”.....	Pages	24 - 26
<b>V.</b>	<b>JUVENILE JUSTICE ISSUES</b>		
	<i>Juvenile Justice Issue #1</i> “Focused Programming:”		
	A. Residential Substance Abuse Treatment.....	Pages	26 - 27
	B. Mental Health Services.....	Pages	28 - 29
	C. Residential Services for Sex Offenders.....	Pages	29 - 30
	D. Residential Basic, Vocational, Independent Living.....	Pages	30 - 31
	<i>Juvenile Justice Issue #2</i> “Expand Community Based Activities:”		
	A. More Free Community Activities.....	Page	31
	B. Year Round Gang Intervention Programs.....	Page	32
	<i>Juvenile Justice Issue #3</i> “Parental Involvement:” .....	Pages	32 - 33
	<i>Juvenile Justice Issue #4</i> “Adult Mentoring of Children:”.....	Page	33
	<i>Juvenile Justice Issue #5</i> “Services to Rural Communities”...	Page	34



**VI. VICTIM ISSUES**

*Victim Issue #1* “Assistance for Survivors of Violent Crime:”... Pages 35 - 39  
*Victim Issue #2* “Prevention Education:”..... Pages 39 - 40  
*Victim Issue #3* “Funding at Risk” ..... Pages 40 - 41  
*Victim Issue #4* “Training for Volunteers:”..... Pages 41 - 44  
*Victim Issue #5* “Insufficient Programs to Address Problems:”... Page 44  
*Abilene Palm House Community Plan Contribution* ..... Pages 45 - 48  
*Beyond Trafficking Community Plan Contribution* ..... Pages 49 – 50  
*The Ark Domestic Violence Shelter Community Plan Contribution* Pages 51 - 54

**VII. BEHAVIORAL HEALTH – MENTAL HEALTH & SUBSTANCE ABUSE ISSUES**

*Behavioral Health Issue #1* “Jail Diversion Services” ..... Pages 54 - 53  
*Behavioral Health Issue #2* “More Housing is Needed to Meet Local Need for Treatment” ..... Pages 53 - 56  
*Behavioral Health Issue #3* “Expand Jail In Reach Navigation for Alternative Competency Restoration” ..... Pages 56- 58

**VIII. LONG TERM EVALUATION PLAN**

Long Term Evaluation Plan..... Page 58

**IX. CONCLUSION**

Conclusion..... Pages 58 - 60



## **I. INTRODUCTION**

The Taylor, Callahan, and Coleman County Regional Community Planning Committee is comprised of representatives from Juvenile Probation, Law Enforcement, Victim Services, and Mental Health/Substance Abuse sectors. Service partners within these areas have actively engaged stakeholders through meetings and correspondence to assess current services and identify unmet needs, especially in light of fiscal constraints. This process remains crucial in addressing current service needs and anticipating challenges due to budgetary constraints and increasing demands. Our collaborative effort has culminated in the Taylor, Callahan, and Coleman Counties Regional Community Plan.

The common goal of the counties involved are to work to support the Governor's team to meet the vision of "Building the Texas of Tomorrow". In doing this we are focused in the areas that align with the State's initiatives of a "Brighter Texas" through education, a "Safer Texas" through strong support and partnerships with our law enforcement and criminal justice partners, a "Freer Texas" through building strong partnership that provided support for personal liberty through education, health, and comprehensive crime victim services, all leading to safe environments that will foster a "More Prosperous Texas".

The predominantly rural character of the West Central Texas region presents unique challenges as we strive together in developing and sustaining resources to meet the evolving needs of the population. The Taylor, Callahan, and Coleman Counties Regional Community Plan (2024 -25) reflects ongoing efforts to consolidate resources and enhance service delivery despite growing fiscal pressures.

The region's rural nature persists, challenging efforts to develop and maintain essential services. However, federal and state funding through agencies like the Texas Governor's Office remains a critical avenue for securing support. This support is vital as we seek additional revenue to sustain and strengthen our efforts in these key areas that are a significant in "Building the Texas of Tomorrow" one county at a time.

Since the economic downturn of the petroleum industry in the early 1980s, communities have been compelled to diversify their economies to maintain essential services. While some have successfully transitioned, others continue to face obstacles due to geographic isolation and limited resources. In the face of increasing unfunded mandates and reductions in state and federal funding, it is imperative to consolidate and optimize resources to enhance service delivery and accessibility. The Committee aims to provide a platform for input and establish a conduit for agencies and organizations to seek state and federal financial assistance through the Texas Governor's Office. We know these financial resources serve more individuals when we work collaboratively to strengthen services without duplicating our efforts.

### **Regional Overview**

Taylor, Callahan, and Coleman Counties are situated within the West Central Texas Council of Governments area, commonly referred to as the "Big Country." The region is predominantly rural, with Abilene in northeastern Taylor County being the sole city with a population exceeding 10,000. The area's modern history dates to the early to mid-19th century, marked by settlers engaging in farming and ranching. The construction of railroad lines in the mid to late 1800s spurred population growth, with many communities developing along these routes. Throughout the 20th century, while agriculture remained a cornerstone of the economy, the discovery of oil fields introduced a thriving petroleum industry until downturns in the 1970s. In recent decades,

the economy has stabilized through diversification into light manufacturing, construction, healthcare, education, the presence of Dyess Air Force Base in Abilene, ongoing agricultural activities, and a burgeoning wind energy sector.

## **Taylor County**

### **Economic Context and Demographics (2020–2024)**

The population of Taylor County grew to an estimated 140,000 by 2024 (Texas State Data Center). Key demographic groups include 60% White, 25% Hispanic, 10% African American, and 5% other ethnicities.

The economic base in the region has remained stable with contributions from industries such as healthcare, education, agriculture, and renewable energy, particularly wind energy. According to Texas Workforce Commission (2023) data:

- Healthcare jobs account for 20% of the workforce in the Abilene area.
- The unemployment rate in Taylor County averaged 3.1% in 2023, down from a pandemic high of 5.6% in 2020.
- The median household income increased from \$49,161 in 2020 to approximately \$56,700 in 2023 and grew to slightly over \$60,000 in 2024.

### **Crime and Safety**

Crime rates in the region have shown mixed trends between 2020 and 2024. Key data include:

- In Abilene, overall crime rates decreased by 8% from 2020 to 2023, according to FBI Crime Data Explorer.
- The property crime rate in Abilene remains higher than the national average but is on a declining trend.
- In smaller communities such as Merkel and Tuscola, crime rates have remained stable or slightly decreased.

### **Law Enforcement Initiatives:**

- Expanded mental health intervention programs in collaboration with local agencies.
- Enhanced rural patrol coverage funded by grants from the Texas Office of the Governor.

### **Major Employers**

The region's economy is bolstered by several key employers:

- **Dyess Air Force Base:** As of 2023, Dyess AFB contributes significantly to the local economy, contributing **\$550 million annually** (2023 figures) and providing statewide total economic impact of approximately \$3.6 billion. The base employs 5,156.6 full-time equivalent personnel, including active-duty military and civilian staff, and supports an additional 10,722 indirect jobs.
- **Abilene Independent School District:** Serving approximately 17,000 students, the district employs approximately 2,557 staff members.

- **Hendrick Health System:** A major healthcare provider in the region, employing around approximately 4,000 individuals.
- **Abilene State Supported Living Center:** Provides services to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, employing approximately 1,155 staff.
- **City of Abilene:** The municipal government employs about 1,412 individuals across various departments.
- **Texas Department of Criminal Justice:** Operates facilities in the area, employing approximately 1,189 staff members.
- **Blue Cross Blue Shield:** Maintains a significant presence in the region, employing around 1,208 individuals.

Notably, approximately 20% of the workforce in the Abilene area is engaged in the healthcare industry, underscoring the sector's importance to the local economy.

### **Education Updates (2020–2024)**

The Abilene Independent School District (AISD) reports a enrollment of 15,253 students (2023), reflecting a modest increase. Graduation rates improved to 92% by 2023, while dropout rates fell to 4.2%. Other school districts in the area similarly demonstrated resilience:

- Jim Ned ISD maintained a 98% graduation rate.
- Merkel ISD reported a 2% drop-out rate in 2023, down from 4.2% in 2019.
- Wylie ISD's enrollment surpassed 5,000 students for the first time in 2024, with a 98.5% attendance rate.

### **Higher Education Institutions**

Higher education institutions like Abilene Christian University, Hardin-Simmons University, and McMurry University alone have expanded online and hybrid programs, with combined enrollments on and off campus exceeding 12,000 students (2023). This contributes to the region's strong educational foundation and commitment to adapting to modern learning needs.

The "Big Country" region is home to several institutions of higher education:

- **Abilene Christian University (ACU):** As of the 2022-2023 academic year, ACU reported an enrollment of approximately 5,000 students. The university has expanded its online and hybrid program offerings to meet diverse student needs.
- **Hardin–Simmons University (HSU):** HSU reported an enrollment of 1,765 students for the 2022-2023 academic year. The university has introduced new degree programs aimed at enhancing post-graduation employment opportunities.
- **McMurry University:** With an enrollment of around 1,100 students, McMurry University offers a range of undergraduate programs and has also expanded its online and hybrid course offerings.
- **Texas State Technical College (Abilene Campus):** Offers technical and vocational education, with enrollment figures varying annually.

- **Cisco College (Abilene Campus):** Provides community college education, including dual credit courses for high school students.
- **Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center (TTUHSC) at Abilene:** Hosts the School of Pharmacy and the School of Nursing, contributing to the region's healthcare education and workforce development.
- **Patty Hanks Shelton School of Nursing:** Offers nursing education in collaboration with local universities, supporting the healthcare sector's staffing needs.

### **Dyess Air Force Base**

Dyess Air Force Base remains a cornerstone of the region's economy and community. The 7th Bomb Wing operates B-1B Lancer aircraft, providing all B-1B flight training. The base's economic impact on the Texas economy is substantial, with a total output of approximately \$3.6 billion. The base supports a total employment of 15,879 individuals, including direct and indirect jobs.

Dyess AFB also features the "Linear Air Park," an extensive collection of static military aircraft on display, showcasing 30 aircraft from World War II to the present, many of which were formerly based at Dyess.

The base encompasses over 200 facilities and provides housing through nearly 1,000 family units, both on and off the base. The total community associated with Dyess AFB, including active-duty personnel, their families, retirees, and civilian employees, numbers approximately 13,774 individuals.

In summary, the Taylor, Callahan, and Coleman County region continues to navigate the complexities of a rural economy through diversification and collaboration. The concerted efforts of the Regional Community Planning Committee aim to address service gaps and optimize resource allocation to meet the evolving needs of the population.

Taylor County, located in West Central Texas, encompasses the cities and towns of Abilene, Buffalo Gap, Impact, Lawn, Merkel, Potosi, Trent, Tuscola, Tye, and View. As of July 1, 2023, the U.S. Census Bureau estimated the county's population at 146,836, reflecting a 2.5% increase since April 1, 2020.

### **The county's demographic composition is diverse:**

- **White alone:** 61%
- **Black or African American alone:** 8%
- **American Indian and Alaska Native alone:** 1%
- **Asian alone:** 2%
- **Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone:** <1%
- **Two or More Races:** 3%
- **Hispanic or Latino (of any race):** 25%

U.S. Census Bureau



In the educational sector, the Abilene Independent School District (AISD) reported an enrollment of 15,253 students for the 2024-2025 academic year, with 1,029 teachers, maintaining a student-teacher ratio of 15:1.

### **Public School Review**

The district's graduation rate has improved to 92%, up from 90% over the past five years. Other school districts in Taylor County have also demonstrated commendable performance:

- **Jim Ned Independent School District:** Enrollment of 1,219 students; high school graduation rate of 100% with a 96.2% attendance rate.
- **Merkel Independent School District:** Enrollment of 1,168 students; high school graduation rate of 93% with a 92.5% attendance rate.
- **Wylie Independent School District:** Enrollment of 4,413 students; high school graduation rate of 98.8% with a 97.4% attendance rate.

As of July 1, 2023, the median household income in Taylor County was \$61,806, with a per capita income of \$31,492. Approximately 16.2% of the population lived below the poverty line.

### **U.S. Census Bureau**

The unemployment rate stood at 2.5%, reflecting a robust local economy.

Taylor County boasts a vibrant nonprofit sector, with over 240 organizations delivering a wide array of services to the community. This extensive network underscores the county's commitment to addressing diverse needs and fostering community well-being.

A hallmark of Taylor County is its tradition of inter-agency collaboration. Established in 1980, the Taylor County Juvenile Justice Association exemplifies this cooperative spirit, promoting effective communication among youth-serving agencies to prevent service duplication and enhance support for the county's youth.

Taylor County's blend of a growing, diverse population, strong educational institutions, economic stability, despite the national economic challenges, and a collaborative community framework position it as a dynamic and resilient region within Texas.

### **Callahan County**

Callahan County, located in West Central Texas, comprises the cities and towns of Baird, Clyde, Cross Plains, and Putnam. As of 2023, the county's estimated population is 14,605, reflecting a modest increase from previous years.

### **Demographics**

The county's racial composition is predominantly White, accounting for 93.4% of the population. Other racial groups include African American (2.2%), American Indian and Alaska Native (1.2%), Asian (0.8%), Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander (0.1%), and individuals identifying with two or more races (2.4%). Hispanic or Latino residents constitute 11.9% of the population.

## Education

Callahan County is served by several independent school districts (ISDs), each contributing to the educational development of the community:

- **Clyde Independent School District (CISD):** CISD reports an enrollment of 1,434 students, with 404 attending high school. The district employs 237 staff members. In the 2018–2019 academic year, CISD achieved a graduation rate of 98.8%, and an attendance rate of 98.5%.
- **Baird Independent School District (BISD):** BISD has an enrollment of 305 students, including 88 high school students, and employs 62 staff members. For the 2018–2019 academic year, BISD reported a graduation rate of 70.0%, and an attendance rate of 90.1%.
- **Cross Plains Independent School District (CPISD):** CPISD serves 368 students, with 111 in high school, and has 70 employees. The district reported a graduation rate of 95%, and an attendance rate of 97.2%.
- **Eula Independent School District (EISD):** EISD enrolls 414 students, including 106 high school students, and employs 84 staff members. In the 2018–2019 academic year, EISD achieved a graduation rate of 96.0%, and an attendance rate of 97.2%.

## Economy

The economy of Callahan County is primarily supported by manufacturing, agriculture (farming and ranching), hunting, retail (antiques and collectibles), and the petroleum industry. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the median household income in the county is \$63,836, with a per capita income of \$50,812. Approximately 13.7% of the population lives below the poverty line.

## Crime Rates

Callahan County, Texas, is considered relatively safe compared to national averages. The overall crime rate is 26.62 per 1,000 residents annually, placing the county in the 81st percentile for safety—meaning it is safer than 81% of U.S. counties.

### Crime Grade

**Violent Crime:** The violent crime rate in Callahan County is 3.452 per 1,000 residents per year, earning a B+ grade. This indicates a slightly lower rate than the national average.

**Property Crime:** Property crimes occur at a rate of 14.21 per 1,000 residents annually, resulting in a B grade. This suggests a moderately lower property crime rate compared to the national average.

Residents generally consider the northwest part of the county to be the safest. The likelihood of becoming a crime victim varies within the county, ranging from as high as 1 in 24 in central areas to as low as 1 in 49 in the northwest.

Overall, Callahan County's crime rates are lower than those of many surrounding counties, contributing to its reputation as a relatively safe area.

In summary, Callahan County is a predominantly rural area with a stable population and a diverse economy. The county's educational institutions demonstrate strong performance metrics, and the economic indicators suggest a community with a solid foundation and opportunities for growth.

## **Coleman County**

Coleman County, located in West Central Texas, encompasses the communities of Santa Anna, Valera, Talpa, Rockwood, Fisk, Voss, Leaday, and the Lake O.H. Ivie Reservoir area. As of 2023, the county's population is estimated at 7,684 residents.

### **Demographics and Economy**

In 2022: Population 7,808; Poverty Rate 17.1%; Median Household income \$51,034; Median Property Value \$91,800; Employment 3.37K

Largest employers: Health Care & Social Assistant: Coleman Medical Center est. 1923, new hospital built in 2022-23 Retail Trade and Educational Services

The ethnic composition of Coleman County is predominantly White (Non-Hispanic) at 75.5%, followed by Two or More Races (Hispanic) at 7.53%, White (Hispanic) at 5.23%, Other (Hispanic) at 5.15%, and Black or African American (Non-Hispanic) at 3.24%.

### **Education**

The Coleman Independent School District (CISD) serves approximately 885 students, with 242 enrolled in high school, supported by 170 employees. The district boasts a graduation rate of 86.4%, and an attendance rate of 90.29%.

The Santa Anna Independent School District (SAISD) educates around 264 students, including 63 high schoolers, with a staff of 54 employees. SAISD achieved a 100% graduation rate, and an 98.0% attendance rate.

### **Crime Rates**

In 2023, Coleman County reported a crime rate of 38.10 incidents per 1,000 residents annually. Residents in the southern part of the county generally experience lower crime rates, with a 1 in 42 chance of being a crime victim, compared to a 1 in 18 chance in the northern areas.

The city of Coleman has a crime rate of 42.59 per 1,000 residents per year. The eastern part of the city is considered safer, with a 1 in 35 chance of being a crime victim, whereas the northwest neighborhoods have a higher risk, with a 1 in 14 chance.

Santa Anna's crime rate is significantly lower, at 1.85 daily crimes per 100,000 people, making it safer than 69% of U.S. cities. Residents have a 1 in 149 chance of becoming a crime victim.

These statistics highlight the county's commitment to maintaining a safe and supportive environment for its residents.

## **II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

From 2020 to 2024, Taylor, Callahan, and Coleman Counties have experienced moderate population growth, economic stability during challenging times across the nation, and improved educational outcomes. Challenges persist, particularly in healthcare access, rural crime prevention, and housing affordability. Collaborative efforts continue to address these issues, supported by regional planning and inter-agency cooperation.

Additionally, the United States is undergoing significant demographic transformations, primarily driven by the aging of the Baby Boomer generation and sustained immigration since the 1980s. These shifts are reshaping the nation's age structure and labor force, with profound implications for healthcare, social security, and pension systems. The increasing racial and ethnic diversity presents both opportunities and challenges for social integration. As younger generations enter their prime reproductive years, their fertility patterns will influence the country's demographic landscape for decades.

Texas exemplifies these national trends, experiencing rapid population growth and diversification. According to the Texas Demographic Center, the state's population estimates for January 1, 2024, are as follows:

<b>Ethnic Group</b>	<b>Population Estimate</b>
Anglo	11,914,045
African American	3,466,308
Hispanic	12,968,026
Other	2,193,599
<b>Total</b>	<b>30,541,978</b>

These figures indicate that the Hispanic population has surpassed the Anglo population, a milestone reached earlier than previously projected. Urbanization continues to dominate, with approximately 17.7 million Texans residing in metropolitan areas, compared to 3.2 million in non-metropolitan regions. This urban-rural divide is expected to widen as new residents predominantly settle in cities.

Economically, Texas benefits from a cost of living below the national average. The state's diversified economy, reduced reliance on the energy sector, and significant foreign direct investment and exports contribute to its robust economic health. These demographic and economic dynamics present both challenges and opportunities for policymakers and communities across Texas.

### **Criminal Justice – Law Enforcement**

According to the FBI's 2023 Crime in the Nation report, violent crime in the United States decreased by an estimated 3.0% compared to 2022. Specifically, murder and non-negligent manslaughter rates declined by nearly 12% while rape offenses saw a reduction of over 9% and aggravated assault incidents decreased by almost 3%.

In Abilene, Texas, the 2023 crime statistics reflect both progress and areas of concern. The city reported a total of 573 violent crimes, marking a decrease from previous years.

- **Aggravated Assaults:** 391 incidents, a slight decrease from 392 in 2022.
  - **Forcible Rape:** 114 cases, down from 134 in 2022.
  - **Murder/Homicide:** 6 cases, consistent with the previous year.
  - **Robbery:** 62 incidents, a decrease from 83 in 2022.
- Property crimes in Abilene also showed a downward trend:
- **Auto Theft:** 158 cases, down from 202 in 2022.
  - **Burglary:** 393 incidents, a reduction from 448 in 2022.
  - **Theft:** 1,667 cases, decreasing from 1,900 in 2022.

These figures indicate a positive trend in reducing crime rates within the city.

Nationally, the breakdown of violent crime categories in 2023 was as follows:

- **Aggravated Assaults:** 67% of total violent crimes.
- **Robbery:** 23%.
- **Forcible Rape:** 11.5%.
- **Homicide:** 1.3%.

For property crimes:

- **Larceny/Theft:** 72.47% of total property crimes.
- **Burglary:** 17%.
- **Motor Vehicle Theft:** 10.4%.

The evolving landscape of crime presents new challenges for law enforcement agencies. Cybercrime, including internet-based fraud and identity theft, is on the rise, necessitating advanced technological responses. Traditional crimes are also adapting; for instance, metal thefts have led to significant property damage, prompting legislative action in many states. The opioid epidemic has impacted numerous communities, including Abilene, resulting in overdose deaths and associated criminal activities. Additionally, the prevalence of active shooter incidents nationwide continues to demand strategic preparedness and response from law enforcement agencies.

Addressing these multifaceted challenges requires a comprehensive approach, integrating community engagement, technological advancements, and interagency collaboration to effectively combat both traditional and emerging criminal activities.

**Snapshot of the City of Abilene Crime Statics from 2020 to October 31, 2024**

<b>Part A</b>					
<b>Violent Crime</b>					
<b>YEAR</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2024 (YTD)</b>
Aggravated Assault	336	378	392	391	272
Forcible Rape	126	141	134	114	76
Homicide	3	8	7	6	6
Robbery	64	80	83	62	52
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>529</b>	<b>607</b>	<b>616</b>	<b>573</b>	<b>406</b>

<b>Part B</b>					
	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2024 (YTD)</b>
Criminal Mischief	773	817	825	682	573
Disorderly Conduct	93	34	46	69	30
Driving While intoxicated	403	467	415	437	306
Drug Abuse	717	707	722	703	652
Forgery	107	103	151	64	54
Fraud	458	479	488	570	399
Public Intoxication	505	517	547	508	470
Simple Assaults	2,597	2,272	1,857	1,825	1,814
Weapons Offenses	93	184	207	170	147
Other Sex Offenses	46	68	55	46	70
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5,792</b>	<b>5,648</b>	<b>5,313</b>	<b>5,074</b>	<b>4,515</b>

### **Juvenile Justice Issues**

We are constantly reminded that the United States has a problem with juvenile violence. Nightly, we hear of shootings in communities and even in our schools. People are concerned and rightly so. There is no single cause of violence, but we certainly know factors that increase the chance of its occurrence. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) list specific risk factors in the development of delinquent behavior. These include child abuse and family disintegration, economic and social deprivation, low neighborhood attachment, parental attitudes condoning law violating behavior, academic failure, truancy, school drop-out, lack of bonding with society, fighting with peers and antisocial behaviors early in life. Additionally, some of the newest findings from the research of OJJDP indicate that multiple family transitions (such as those caused by separation or divorce) are a risk factor for delinquency. Researchers found a consistent relationship between the number of transitions and the level of delinquency and drug use among youth. Researchers also found that a male youth's early involvement in drug use and delinquency is highly correlated with becoming a teen father. They found that a number of problem behaviors – early sexual activity (before age 16), gang membership, chronic involvement in violent behavior, and chronic drug use – substantially increased a boy's likelihood of becoming a teen father. Becoming a father does not cause a young male to become more responsible and law abiding but rather was found to be associated with an even greater increase in delinquent behavior. Teenage fathers were more likely to have court

petitions alleging delinquency, to drink alcohol frequently, to deal in drugs, or to drop out of school.

Researchers for OJJDP have also discovered that Serious and Violent Juvenile Offenders begin their criminal careers prior to age 12 and some begin as early as age 10. For very young offenders, the most important risk factors are likely to be individual (e.g. birth complications, hyperactivity, impulsivity) and familial (e.g. parental substance abuse or lack of child-rearing skills). Studies found that protective factors such as pro-social behavior during preschool years and good cognitive performance can buffer or offset the impact of risk factors. An absence of these factors can easily result in juveniles turning to the youth gang subculture in order to have these needs met. Locally, youth gangs have existed for many years; however, they are poorly organized and demonstrate neither clear leadership nor purpose.

Approximately half (46%) of youth today report current alcohol use (within the past 30 days), 27% report alcohol use over the 7 days, and 21% report binge drinking (having 5 or more drinks in a row on at least one occasion during a 2-week period). Moreover, substantial numbers of youth report engaging in risky behaviors associated with alcohol use, such as driving while under the influence of alcohol and riding with a driver who had been drinking. Negative consequences of drinking reported by current drinkers included experiencing headaches and hangovers, being unable to remember what happened after a drinking incident, passing out, getting into a fight, having sex without birth control, breaking or damaging property, missing school, and being the victim of a forced sex attempt. While serious juvenile crime dropped substantially in the mid-1990s, more youth had contact with the juvenile justice system for alcohol and other public order crimes.

Michael D. Resnick, a sociologist at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis, in the September 1997 issue of The Journal of the American Medical Association published the results of a comprehensive survey on adolescents that found that the health and well-being of adolescents “still rests in that strong feeling of being cared for by parents. In fact, the more loved they felt and the more comfortable they were in school, the less teenagers were likely to engage in problematic behaviors, including committing violence. Such information reinforces the significance of parental involvement in the lives of their children as a deterrent to unlawful behavior. Locally we have attempted to provide parents with assistance both through voluntary parent support groups and court ordered parenting classes. Despite our best efforts to assist parents in gaining the badly needed skills for properly raising their children, attendance and participation continue to be unsatisfactory. In the absence of this parental commitment, we have attempted to establish adult mentoring programs such as “Big Brothers/Big Sisters”. These programs have been helpful; however, the needs are too great and volunteers too few to adequately address the needs of our communities.

In order to successfully prevent and reduce juvenile delinquency, it is necessary to address not only the offenses that bring youth to the attention of the juvenile justice system but also understand the myriad underlying factors that affect the lives of juveniles and their families, including mental health problems. One of the most pervasive of these factors is exposure to trauma. To be most effective in achieving our mission we must both understand the role of traumatic exposure in the lives of children and engage resources and interventions that address child traumatic stress. Such problems affect many of the approximately 1.8 million youth who enter the juvenile justice system each year. Recent estimates place the rate of serious emotional disturbance among youth in the general population at 9% to 13%, much higher than the 0.5% - 5% range previously used by policy makers. National estimates of

youth in the juvenile justice system with a diagnosable mental health disorder range from 50% to 75%. It is safe to estimate that at least one (20%) out of every five youths in the juvenile justice system has serious mental health problems. There is a sizable group of youth who critically need access to mental health services because they are experiencing serious problems that interfere with their functioning. Over the past several years, there has been greater recognition and documentation of the high level of co-occurring substance abuse disorders among individuals with mental health disorders. Greenbaum, Foster-Johnson, and Petrila (1996:58) found that "approximately half of all adolescents receiving mental health services" in the general population are reported as having dual diagnosis. Efforts to address these problems confront numerous barriers, including the following: The confusion across multi-service delivery and juvenile justice systems, at both the policy and practice levels, as to who is responsible for providing service to these youth; Inadequate screening and assessment; The lack of training, staffing, and programs necessary to deliver mental health services within the juvenile justice system; and, the lack of funding and clear funding streams to support services.

In FY2003, the Texas Juvenile Probation Commission (TJPC) initiated the use of the Diagnostic Interview Schedule for Children (DISC) to investigate the prevalence of mental health disorders among juveniles referred to probation departments in Texas. Almost half (47.5%) reported at least one disorder using the DISC. Fourteen percent (14%) of the sample reported having made a suicide attempt in their life. Less than 1 of 5 or 18.1% reported that they had received a mental health contact in the last year. Given the number of juveniles with a mental health disorder, juvenile justice professionals should receive basic training on the most common psychiatric disorders seen among juvenile offenders. This knowledge can assist them in accurately identifying and referring mentally ill youth to appropriate mental health professionals for evaluation and treatment.

If one considers other complicating trends, such as managed care, the privatization of services, and the diagnostic and treatment issues surrounding particular populations such as youth of color and girls, one quickly gets a sense of how great a challenge any change will be. Whenever possible, youth with serious mental health disorders should be diverted from the juvenile justice system. Given community concerns about safety, there are youth who, regardless of their mental health needs, will require placement in the juvenile justice system because of their serious and violent offenses. Diversion to services, however, requires a multi-disciplinary partnership involving the justice and treatment systems and a comprehensive range of services to which youth can be diverted.

Those who work in the field of juvenile justice recognize that families are the most important resource in the life of any youth. Juvenile justice, child protective services, and mental health practitioners often have been too quick to identify families as the source of the youth's problems. The temptation is to remove a child from the home and institutionalize them in order to "fix" them. Children, however, usually prefer to live with their families. Whenever possible, service providers engage families in the treatment process. When the home environment is shown to be contributory to the child's delinquent conduct and improvement impossible, the juvenile court may need to remove the child and place them into an alternative residential setting. This is one of the hardest decisions that a Juvenile Probation Officer will have to make. For some in the juvenile justice system, the placement process is a very limited option due to lack of resources. The most important consideration should be the child: his/her characteristics and special needs such as age, offense history, medical issues, gang involvement, alcohol/drug problems, learning problems or disabilities, and dysfunctional family. However, simply determining a child's needs is not a guarantee that



placement can be obtained that will meet those needs. This data snapshot published by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention provides a graphic representation of a decrease found in the number of youth in residential placement facilities, which fell below 25,000 in 2021. The research found that relative declines from 1999 to 2021 were greater for committed youth (83%) than detained youth (62%); detention rates decreased the most for Asian (71%) and Hispanic (69%) youth between 2010 and 2021; among detained youth, youth of color had been in placement longer than white youth; the proportion of detained and committed youth held for a person offense increased between 1997 and 2021; commitment rates decreased by at least 69% for youth of all race/ethnicity groups between 2010 and 2021; and among committed youth, Asian youth had been in placement longer than youth from all other race/ethnicity groups. In Texas, the average basic care placement may result in average annual costs of up to \$74,250.00. Should a child need special treatment the costs can range from \$74,250.00 to \$131,400.00 annually. In the last 16 years, we have continued to see the costs for such care dramatically increase. To help offset some of these expenses, the federal government provides a 56% reimbursement on residential costs through the Title IV-E program for those children who may qualify (single parent or substitute parent homes, low income, etc.). Prior to 2004, surprisingly few children needing residential placement could qualify for this funding source. However, beginning from 2004 to 2012, we saw a significant increase in the number of children who qualify for these funds. Recent changes in eligibility criteria have all but eliminated Title IV-E funding as a resource for juvenile justice residential placement. Beginning in 1988, funding from the Texas Juvenile Probation Commission (TJPC) was provided for placing children who were defined as multi-problem (delinquent and mental illness, delinquent and abused/neglected) with a requirement of equal matching funds from local authorities. These Challenge Grant funds were suspended in the Spring of FY2003 and have now been eliminated altogether due to state budget cuts. Other TJPC funds utilized for placement in the past were Secure Felony Placement funds that provide for placing offenders in secure Post-Adjudication Facilities. These programs are typically specialized for Sex Offender Treatment, Substance Abuse Treatment, or Cognitive Skills Treatment. TJPC made such funding available on a “first-come-first serve,” basis and would only cover 6 months of a child’s placement subject to possible extension. The Secure Felony Placement Grant was eliminated in 2009 and a portion of this fund was rolled into a single Grant for placement and counseling services. In 2008, the Texas Youth Commission (TYC) underwent numerous changes resulting in facilities being shut down and commitment criteria adjusted to prevent counties from committing juvenile misdemeanor offenders. In 2011, the Texas Legislature eliminated the Texas Youth Commission (TYC) and the Texas Juvenile Probation Commission (TJPC) and effective December 1, 2011, created the Texas Juvenile Justice Department (TJJD). Institutional commitments by local jurisdictions were further restricted. Funding has decreased slightly through the Commitment Reduction Program for the 2012-2013 Biennium. Due to a dramatic drop in commitments and the belief that this grant has supported this drop, funding for Grant C has remained stable for the 2014-2015 Biennium. The purpose of this grant is to provide an array of rehabilitation services for juvenile offenders, including, but not limited to, community-based, residential, transition and aftercare programs or services. Locally these funds have been dedicated to the placement of Felony Offenders in Residential Treatment Facilities as a diversion from commitment to Texas Juvenile Justice Department (TJJD). Funding received through a grant from the Criminal Justice Division (CJD) of the Governor’s Office, for Purchase of Juvenile Services, that has been used for both residential and non-residential costs, was also cut by 38% in FY2004 resulting in a significant reduction in placement funding. Again, in FY2008 these funds were cut by 4%. For FY2023 and FY 2024 this funding increased slightly and allowed for more psychological testing and more youth receiving counseling in the community.

Meeting the multi-dimensional needs of today's severely dysfunctional families and juvenile offenders becomes a major challenge when the rural nature of our communities is factored in. Currently, only basic social and juvenile justice services are provided to Callahan, Coleman and rural Taylor Counties. Children and families are forced to travel long distances in order to access many services. For those individuals and families who experience low income, such distances make services unattainable. When services such as parenting classes have been provided, the response has been exceptionally positive which demonstrates a willingness and desire to take advantage of such help when made available on a local level.

As Federal and State funded programs are eliminated or reduced, a greater burden is placed on remaining resources forcing local officials to concentrate resources in more populous areas in order to maximize resource effectiveness. Further complicating the availability of resources are the numerous and unfunded state mandates on local secure facilities and Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Programs (JJAEP) as well as probation services. These mandates along with reductions in state and federal funding have increased financial hardship on local jurisdictions and result in reduced levels of services to children at a time when we recognize significantly growing needs.

Despite these setbacks, our communities have made significant progress in reducing juvenile crime and victimization. This progress is attributable, in part, to strong efforts in developing comprehensive, community-based strategies, that combine prevention and early intervention programs which hold young offenders accountable and support their rehabilitation.

### **Victim Issues: The Need: A Growing Crisis**

Violent crimes leave lasting scars—not just on victims, but on families and communities. In recent years, the demand for our services has grown exponentially. Victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse, and in some recent situations, human trafficking, turn to the multiple professional Crime Victim Advocacy organization across this region that offer comprehensive services such as trauma counseling, specialized advocacy and legal services. This includes professionals at the District Attorney's Office, Regional Victim Crisis Center (RVCC), Noah Project, Palm House, The Ark Domestic Violence Shelter, Beyond Trafficking, the Taylor County Child Advocacy Center and other vital crime victim service providers. Crime victims reach out to these state and federal funded service providers in their darkest hours, seeking safety, support, and a way forward. Yet, even as the need increases, resources remain limited.

#### **Consider these key statistics:**

- **1 in 4 women and 1 in 7 men** will experience severe intimate partner violence in their lifetime.
- Nearly **1 in 5 children** experience abuse or neglect.
- Survivors of violent crimes are **at greater risk for chronic mental health issues**, including PTSD, depression, and anxiety.
- Many victims face significant barriers, from financial hardships to fear of seeking help, leaving them isolated in their pain.

Your continued support will change this. Together, we will meet this growing need, helping victims heal and rebuild their lives with dignity and resilience. This is a huge step in working toward the initiatives outlined by the Office of the Governor.

### **The Impact: Lives Transformed**

Together, we provide comprehensive, trauma-informed services designed to address the unique needs of every survivor we serve:

- **Trauma-Informed Counseling**
- **Advocacy and Legal Support**
- **Comprehensive Community Care**

Each service provided by crime victim services creates a ripple effect of healing, resilience, and hope—not just for survivors, but for their families and our entire community.

Consistently at RVCC alone, every year over 50% of our primary clients are under 18 years old. Statements from children and teens who have experienced sexual abuse often reflect profound emotional pain, confusion, and a longing for understanding and safety. Here are some generalized sentiments based on various accounts and testimonies from young clients in our region, as well as findings from research on child sexual abuse - **RAINN** (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network) and **The National Child Traumatic Stress Network**:

1. **Feeling Isolated and Confused:** Many children express feelings of isolation, struggling to understand their experiences. They often say things like, "I thought it was my fault" or "I didn't know how to tell anyone." These statements highlight the internalized shame and confusion that frequently accompany abuse.
2. **Desire for Support:** Young crime victims often communicate a desperate need for support, saying things like, "I wish someone would have believed me" or "I wanted to talk, but I didn't know how." This underscores the importance of having trusted adults and resources available to every young victim in these situations.
3. **Longing for Normalcy:** Many children express a desire to return to a sense of normalcy, stating, "I just want to feel safe again" or "I miss playing without being scared." These sentiments reveal the lasting impact of trauma on their daily lives and mental health.
4. **Seeking Understanding:** Statements often reflect a yearning for understanding and validation, such as "I want people to know what happened to me" or "I need others to understand I'm not broken." This emphasizes the importance of empathy and acknowledgment in the healing process.

### **In the words of a child crime victim:**

“When I was just eight years old, my life changed forever. One day, I was playing outside when I heard shouting. I thought it was just kids having fun, but it quickly turned into something scary. I saw someone get hurt, then I got hurt too. I didn't understand what was happening, but I felt a big fear deep inside that I had never felt before. I ran inside and hid under my bed, hoping that if I couldn't see the bad things, they wouldn't be real.

After that night, everything changed. I didn't want to go outside anymore. I felt scared all the time, even in my own home. I couldn't sleep; I had nightmares about what I had seen. At school,

I found it hard to concentrate. My teachers noticed that I wasn't myself and told my mom. She took me to a counselor who helped me talk about my feelings. It wasn't easy, but it felt good to finally share my fears.

I learned that what happened to me wasn't my fault and that I wasn't alone. I realized that I could talk about it without feeling ashamed. I want others to know that if they've been hurt, they should speak up. It's okay to ask for help. There are people who care and want to help you heal. I'm still working on feeling stronger, but I know that with my helpers, I can get better."

Securing and expanding these life-changing services is dependent on appropriate funding. Funds invested in crime victim issues and concerns will:

- Expand trauma-informed counseling programs to serve more victims of all ages.
- Strengthen advocacy efforts to ensure survivors have a voice in the justice system.
- Continue and develop prevention and education initiatives to stop violence before it begins.

These are all fundamental in striving for a "Brighter Texas", a "Safer Texas, a Freer Texas, and ultimately, a "More Prosperous Texas".

Together, we have and will continue to build a community where every crime victim has the resources they need to heal and thrive! A community where hope replaces fear and resilience conquers trauma!

By investing in comprehensive trauma-informed crime victim services we will provide the following essential outcomes.

- 1. Promoting Healing and Recovery**
- 2. Enhancing Community Safety**
- 3. Reducing Recidivism**
- 4. Building Community Resilience**
- 5. Economic Benefits**
- 6. Addressing Systemic Issues**
- 7. Upholding Community Values**

### **Behavioral Health – Mental Health and Substance Abuse Issues**

The behavioral health needs in our community are well documented and are the focus of several collaborative health groups. During the preparation for this plan, several community needs assessments and strategic plan documents were reviewed to identify strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for our community. In preparation for this year's Community Justice Plan, consideration was given to the following points of reference–

- Statewide Data and Trends available through HHSC
- Region 2 Prevention Resource Center's Regional Needs Assessment
- Betty Hardwick Center's Behavioral Health Planning Activities and LMHA data
- West Texas Homeless Network Data and Partner Input
- Hendrick Medical Center's Community Needs Assessment
- Behavioral Advisory Team discussion and priorities

In preparation to submit this plan, we review the progress made in prior years and the current behavioral health services environment. Our community is continuously striving for improvements and enjoys wonderful collaboration, but this report focuses on unmet needs and service gaps.

According to the Mayo Clinic, “Mental illness, also called mental health disorders, refers to a wide range of mental health conditions — disorders that affect your mood, thinking and behavior. Examples of mental illness include depression, anxiety disorders, schizophrenia, eating disorders and addictive behaviors. Many people have mental health concerns from time to time. But a mental health concern becomes a mental illness when ongoing signs and symptoms cause frequent stress and affect your ability to function.” We often talk about mental health broadly. It is important to distinguish that people may have poor mental health, without having a serious mental illness.

In the U.S. there was a move toward deinstitutionalization of the mentally ill starting in the late 1800s and that was solidified in 1963 when the Community Mental Health Centers Act was passed that allowed for only persons who “posed an imminent danger to themselves or someone else” to be committed to psychiatric hospitals. This continues to be true today and while many people fare very well in community-based care, there are some who believe that as a result of underfunded community-based care programs have led to more mentally ill people being treated by the criminal justice system. The answer is probably more complex than that, because often the mentally ill may also have co-occurring substance use disorders, difficulty maintaining safe and affordable housing, and impacted by a host of these issues. Nevertheless, these issues contribute to the state of things for our neighbors living with mental illness and substance use disorders and it’s helpful for us to understand the complexity of their needs as we consider what service gaps exist and the types of solutions that our community desires to bridge those gaps.

The Center provides services to youth and adults with serious mental illness and substance use disorders in five counties in west central Texas – Taylor, Jones, Callahan, Shackelford and Stephens counties. The total population for the area is 191,884 people over 4,594 square miles. Most of the area is considered rural, with Taylor County serving as a semi-urban hub for surrounding areas. The socioeconomic makeup of the region includes median household income near \$54,000 with an average of 20% of households being uninsured. The Center seeks to promote health equity in ways that ensure access to services, reducing the impact of common barriers such as poverty, unequal access to healthcare, lack of education, stigma and racism. As such, we anticipate that most persons served will be between the ages of 18 and 65 and representative of our community in terms of gender, race/ethnicity, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, and socioeconomic status. Data regarding gender reflects almost equal representation between male persons who identify as male and female, and fewer than 1% who identify as transgender. Approximately 6% identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual. Race and ethnicity reflect persons in the service area identify as white 64%, black 7%, Hispanic 24%, Asian 2%, and other at 3%.

According to the American Psychiatric Association, “Mental illnesses are health conditions involving changes in emotion, thinking or behavior (or a combination of these). Mental illnesses are associated with distress and/or problems functioning in social, work or family activities.

Mental illness is common. In any given year:

- nearly one in five (19 percent) U.S. adults experience some form of mental illness
- one in 24 (4.1 percent) has a serious mental illness

- one in 12 (8.5 percent) has a diagnosable substance use disorder

Mental illness is treatable. The vast majority of individuals with mental illness continue to function in their daily lives.”

When the prevalence data percentages are applied to the local population, projections would suggest that there are a considerable number of individuals, 7,800 who may have serious mental illness (SMI) in our local area, 36,000, who may have some form of mental illness and another 16,000 with a diagnosable substance use disorder.

During FY24, Betty Hardwick Center served 7750 clients in services, 2774 in ongoing adult mental health services, 717 children and youth in mental health services and 124 in outpatient substance use disorders. Many others are served in crisis care contacts via our hotline, mobile crisis outreach and community response teams. The population served in crisis varies to include persons in the SMI population, but often also include persons with other mental disorders or mental illness that co-occurs with substance use disorders or intellectual and developmental disabilities.

In July 2023, Texas HHSC provided suicide data for the Betty Hardwick Center catchment area as it compares to Texas. IN 2021, 4,191 persons in Texas died from suicide, 50 were in the Betty Hardwick Center area. The nation and our state have seen increased rates of suicide since 1999, and our local area has found that to be true in our community as well. Research indicates that demographics, access to care, the availability of firearms and cultural differences are among several factors that influence numbers of suicides.

The CDC finds that suicide is not just a mental health issue and should be considered a broader public health issue, bolstered by the point that many people who die by suicide were not known to have a diagnosed mental health condition at time of death. Data indicates that there are a host of variables that can contribute to suicidal ideation including financial crises, substance abuse, pending criminal legal issues, relationship problems, unstable housing, physical health problems and other types of impending crisis in one’s life. These factors have implications for the broader prevention and education efforts across our whole community, and that means to be effective in prevention, everyone needs to be better educated about risk factors, warning signs and how to intervene.

Data reflects that suicide prevention efforts are effective. The National Council for Behavioral Healthcare reports “For every person who dies by suicide, there are 278 individuals annually who think seriously about suicide but do not die.” Many of those people are connected to treatment and treatment is effective.

Locally, our regional experts at Abilene Recovery Council compose a Regional Needs Assessment that summarizes statistics relevant to risk and protective factors associated with drug use, as well as consumption patterns, consequences data, insight into gaps in services and challenges with data.

Current substance use concerns are as follows:

#### Adults

- Methamphetamines
- Marijuana
- Alcohol
- Prescription Drugs – primarily opioids

#### Youth

- Electronic vape products
- Marijuana
- Alcohol
- Prescription Drugs

There are several substance use treatment providers in our community, however, they do not all have adequate capacity for all populations by age, insurance status and service intensity.

Finally, in preparation for this report, all stakeholders who participate in Betty Hardwick Center's services area and Behavioral Advisory Team were invited to participate in a Sequential Intercept Mapping exercise and in subsequent work groups. The Sequential Intercept Model (SIM) informs community-based responses to people with mental health and substance disorders involved in the criminal justice system. The model is most effective when used as a community strategic planning tool to assess available resources, determine gaps in services, and plan for community change. The initial meeting was held in July 2023 and work continues on these priority areas that were identified, as well as other important topics raised by stakeholders in the planning process. Participation included a wide array of stakeholders across the community including advocates, service providers, law enforcement, local officials, other nonprofit agencies, and hospital staff.

### **CURRENT SERVICES FUNDED THROUGH THE OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR CRIMINAL JUSTICE DIVISION Callahan, Coleman, and Taylor County**

#### **General Victim Assistance-Direct Services Programs Fund- 10/1/2024-9/30/2025**

- **Noah Project, Inc.** CJD Award- \$397,500  
Project Title: *Family Violence Victims' Assistance Program*
- **Regional Crime Victim Crisis Center, Inc. of Abilene** CJD Award- \$228,024  
Project Title: *Comprehensive Assistance for All Victims of Violent Crimes*
- **The Ark Domestic Violence Shelter** CJD Award- \$336,398.31  
Project Title: *Victims Advocacy and Support*
- **Beyond Trafficking** CJD Award- \$80,000  
Project Title: *Project Beyond: Uplifting Human Trafficking Survivors and Communities*

#### **Violence Against Women Services Programs Fund- 9/1/2024-8/31/2025**

- **Abilene Palm House** CJD Award-\$74,790  
Project Title: *Training on Communication and Conflict Resolution for Victims and Victim Assistance Support*
- **West Central Texas Council of Governments** CJD Award-\$22,400  
Project Title: *Enhanced Regional Law Enforcement Training Project*

#### **Justice Assistance Grant Programs Fund 10/1/2024-9/30/2025**

- **City of Coleman-CJD Award-\$17,275.75**

Project Title: *Coleman Police Communication Technology Upgrades*  
**State Criminal Justice Planning (421) Fund-9/1/2023-8/31/2025**

- **West Central Texas Council of Governments**

CJD Award- \$188,598

Project Title: *Regional Law Enforcement Academy*

**Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Programs Fund-10/1/2024-9/30/2025**

- **Taylor County –CJD Award- \$22,400** Project Title: *Purchase of Juvenile Services*

**IV. CRIMINAL JUSTICE ISSUES**

**CRIMINAL JUSTICE ISSUE #1:**

**Insufficient funding, manpower issues and availability of adequate training.**

**Supporting Statistics:**

In the past several decades there have been major changes in the training requirements for Texas Peace Officers. Some of the changes are mandatory; others are elective, but necessary for the successful completion of assigned duties. This training can be broken down into three categories:

1. **Initial Training-** mandated to acquire Peace Officer Certification.
2. **Ongoing Training-** mandatory to retain Certification.
3. **Specialized Training-** necessary for specific job tasks.

Initial training for peace officers must follow a curriculum provided by the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement (TCOLE) followed by a TCOLE licensing exam. The current TCOLE curriculum requires 720 hours for training to be completed prior to the licensing exam.

Until recent years, ongoing training (other than firearms qualification) was not an issue. However, it is now mandated that an officer completes several courses on a biannual basis in order to maintain his/her certification.

Specialized training covers a variety of topics and is usually associated with assignments that require a higher degree of proficiency in a more narrowly defined field. Departments of all sizes perform a wide variety of services and the success or failure of this type of training will likely be tilted towards the results that the agency is measured by. Because specialized training is typically the most expensive and usually not conducted in house, it is the type of training that is most likely to be cut or dropped due to budget constraints.



Specialized training is very necessary to deal with the new and changing service demands listed in Criminal Justice Issue #2. Because of the events of September 11, 2001, officers must now be prepared for not only natural disasters, but man-made ones as well.

Most agencies are concerned about how to fund their training needs. In addition to the cost of the training, is the fact that someone has to replace the officer that is in training. Manpower shortages and lack of funds to pay overtime to temporarily fill the position is a great hindrance to training needs. This is particularly true for those law enforcement agencies with five (5) or fewer officers.

A great help with cost and availability issues is the West Central Texas Council of Governments which operates the Regional Law Enforcement Academy. This Academy provides training to meet the needs for Basic and Intermediate Peace Officer Training and Certification as well as Basic Corrections Officer Training for a 19 county region that includes Taylor, Callahan and Coleman Counties. As is the case with many local agencies, the Academy has seen its funding become restrictive in recent years. The importance of this program to the rural law enforcement training needs can not be over- stated. It is important that such programs be maintained or all of us in law enforcement will see cost increases in training as well as the uncertainty of law enforcement staffing for many of our communities.

#### **Action Plan to Leverage Resources:**

Agencies will attempt to maximize the use of regularly budgeted funds to pay for the training itself and to provide adequate service while their officers attend training. Interagency cooperation, especially among the smaller agencies, will also help to alleviate some of the cost and staffing concerns. Where possible, agencies will attend "train the trainer" courses designed to teach one person who will then return and teach the remainder of the agency. This will allow agencies to maximize the use of any other funding sources

#### **Funding Priorities:**

This issue is prioritized as #1 of 3.

#### **Goals and Objectives Based on Problems:**

The law enforcement community will stay current on TCOLE mandated training by:

1. Scheduling mandated training to comply with current requirements;
2. Scheduling the most efficient use of current manpower to cover vacancies due to training;
3. Obtaining additional funding for manpower as necessary to allow for training; and
4. Develop in-house trainers.

We will also complete Specialized Training indicated by the agencies current needs by:

1. Evaluating agencies specialized training needs;
2. Entering into Memorandums of Understanding between agencies to maximize the effect of specialized training;

3. Obtaining funding to cover the cost of training and the shortage of manpower it creates; and
4. Providing thorough training on any new equipment or technology introduced into the agency.

## **Criminal Justice Issue #2**

### **Changing and increased demands for services**

#### **Supporting Statistics:**

In 2023 we observed a decrease in violent crime (-6%) from 2021 and a decrease in property crime (-14%) from 2021. Abilene's call load is ever changing but must be dealt with on a daily basis. These numbers were increasing over the years. In 2023 Abilene communication received 177,981 calls for service compared to 306,822 in 2021 with 164,304 being of a police component compared to 139,044 in 2021. While the overall number is down the number that require a police response are up.

The variety in the nature of the calls for service has caused law enforcement to deal with many situations that they simply are not prepared to handle. Some examples of this include, but are not restricted to;

1. Crimes via the Intranet- More and more personal and financial data on citizens is being made available on the Internet and with it, the increase of data theft for illegal use also rises. Identity theft, Web Stalking/Bullying and Fraud schemes continue to plague the world and the U.S. As these crimes continue to require a law enforcement response, the drain on resources and qualified personnel to investigate such crimes continue to pose a problem.
2. Homeland Security- Since the events of 9/11, law enforcement has been on high alert for activity of a suspicious nature no matter where or what jurisdiction we protect. Add to this the recent surge in domestic terrorism and law enforcement has its hands full as it deals with homeland security issues. Recent shooting events throughout the nation go a long way in showing just how close we all are to having an event of this nature. Having our officers fully trained and equipped to handle an incident of a similar nature is not only expensive, but time consuming especially for the small rural agencies.
3. Legislative Mandates- These unfunded state and federal mandates continue to strain local jurisdictions that are already feeling the pinch from manpower shortages and dwindling resources.
4. School Security issues- Not all agencies have the resources to have an increased presence in the local school systems. Add to this that the number of school and students in our area are showing growth and this issue becomes even more important. Abilene ISD, Wylie ISD all have officers working within their schools. Merkel, Trent and Tuscola have a Taylor County Sheriff working those campuses, and the Clyde Police Department recently added their first School Resource Officer. On top of all the unknowns are the complications of School policies conflicting greatly with Law Enforcement Agency policy. Many school officers feel pulled in several directions with no clear answers in sight.

5. Drug usage trends- It has been well documented that powdered Cocaine use has given way to crack cocaine and that crack Cocaine has given way to Methamphetamines. Now, recent trends show that “Meth” has some competition as the Mexican Drug Trade Organizations (DTO’s) have increased the amount of Marijuana and black tar Heroin flowing into the US. Fentanyl has added a new layer to the illicit drug trade. Deaths associated to fentanyl overdose’s are now investigated as homicides. This adds workload to already overworked Detectives who are now completing the drug overdose investigations. As the drug trade continues to change and alter its efforts, law enforcement must alter its response to meet the needs of the changing trends. All of this must take place without the assistance of multi-agency task forces which were disbanded by the state in the last few years. Their enforcement actions must now fall under each jurisdiction that encounters the drug flow. Add to this, the complications brought on by other states legalizing marijuana, and Law Enforcement is falling even further behind in the war on drugs. The legalization of marijuana in the form of medical or recreational use has had a huge impact on the resources of local law enforcement. The state has now also legalized hemp which has backed up drug prosecutions for months. State labs do not have the current technology to determine the THC levels in distinguishing hemp from marijuana.

6. Intelligence Led Policing- This is the newest version of Problem Oriented Policing from the late 1990’s into the mid 2000’s. Intelligence Led Policing is a concept that takes into account the large influx of crime data coming into a policing agency and places a priority on dissecting, analyzing, mapping and finally disseminating the data back to the officers in an easy to understand format of charts and maps. It is then used to target the places/persons that have been identified through analysis by the officers on the street. By giving the street officer the “who and where”, it allows them to take back their streets and combine efforts across numerous shifts. The biggest issue with ILP is that it requires free time for officers to target the persons/places identified and it requires qualified persons to conduct the analysis and breakdown of the crime. It becomes a numbers game to have enough officers available on the street to prevent them from becoming solely reactive in nature when staffing is already short. Although ILP is still an important tool for crime fighting, agencies are also using more community oriented policing. This paradigm shift relies on police agencies utilizing community efforts and assisting neighborhoods to take back their communities. This line of thinking does not come without expense. Agencies must take the time and effort which in turn takes money and manpower in order to hold the forums to enable their affected communities.

7. Mental Health Community- Due to funding cutbacks in recent years, law enforcement is seeing an ever increasing demand for service from the mental health community. Government agencies tasked with monitoring and assisting people with mental health issues as well as the clients themselves are demanding services at such a high rate that most agencies simply cannot keep pace. Several agencies have joined together or have working MOU’s or other agreements to supplement each other in dealing with mental health consumers. One conceptual program that has been implemented in Abilene is the formation of a Community Response Team. Consisting of a Police Officer, a Fire Medic and a Mental Health worker, these units respond to persons in mental health crisis and alleviate regular patrol officers from needing to respond. In 2023 they responded to 3,081 calls. Another caveat is that these units also provide proactive care and follow up to specific, identified clients that cause the largest drain on resources. The hope is that by seeking out the frequent requestors of service, and making sure their needs and medication requirements are being met, the less crisis these citizens would experience and the less calls for service agencies would take in. These units have been successful in several other jurisdictions and Abilene’s

CRT is proving that the concept works. The cost of the unit is funded by the City of Abilene, Betty Hardwick, Hendrick Medical Center, and a partial grant. The team has been so successful that a second grant was awarded to fund a second CRT. Almost every survey returned this year mentioned some aspect of dealing with mental health. This one issue alone can consume an agency's ability to function due to the time delays and other issues that encompass a mental health consumer's travel through the criminal justice system. From delays in awaiting mental health services to arrive on scene to conduct evaluations, to correctional facilities having to house inmates already deemed incompetent by courts while they await their next step, to court dockets being filled with cases that involve mental health consumers, every stop in the criminal justice system is bogged down.

**Action Plan to leverage Resources:**

Agencies within the service area will need to continue to monitor their individual or group needs as new service demands arise. Most have already completed assessments in the area of Homeland Security and many have used Federal grant money to make purchases in this area. Regular budgets will also need to attend to some of these changing needs. Whenever possible, agencies will need to work together and complete joint operations and share equipment resources. The Abilene Police Department SWAT, EOD, Forensic Unit and Critical Missing Persons Teams were all sent outside of Abilene this last year to assist with calls to other agencies that did not have these resources available to them. Training in the area of sharing and allocating resources has been conducted and will continue to be sought after in this service area.

**Funding Priorities:**

This issue is prioritized as #2 of 3.

**Goals and Objectives Based on Problems:**

The law enforcement community will develop strategies to deal with the increasing call loads by:

1. Exploring and initiating "Differential Police Response: to reduce the amount of time spent on calls and eliminate some calls that can actually be handled by others not working the streets;
2. Exploring new shift configurations to ensure that staffing is optimized; and
3. Innovative staffing to meet needs (example: hiring back retired officers to assist with mental transports or volunteers to assist with non-sworn job duties such as fleet maintenance, downloading prisoner photos.)

The law enforcement community will develop strategies to deal with new service demands by:

1. Identifying new crime trends and service demands by citizens;
2. Obtaining equipment/technology which would maximize capabilities in dealing with new service demands; and
3. Staffing agencies adequately to meet new service demands.

**CRIMINAL JUSTICE ISSUE #3:**

**Equipment and technological needs of agencies are not being met.**

### **Supporting Statistics:**

The overall United States economy has impacted the availability of federal grants that had been used by agencies to supplement their regular budgets. Agencies are already running on “bare necessity” budgets with the expectation to do more with less. More often than not, personnel and equipment are not being replaced and new technologies, which could save both time and money, are simply not being pursued for budgetary reasons.

Gathering hard statistics to support the problem is difficult; however, citing specific examples from different agencies can show how they are falling behind on these critical infrastructure needs. The following are examples and do not cover the full spectrum of needs for all agencies in the Region.

### **Equipment/Technology**

1. Many agencies are not adequately able to equip their officers with the very basic needs when it relates to safety and protective items. These include but are not limited to body armor, raincoats, latex gloves and CPR masks. Conducted Electrical Weapons (CEW's) have developed into a costly but very effective tool for officers in the use of controlling a combative individual that would put officers at risk of injury if traditional methods were used to subdue them. The cost of CEW's make their acquisition difficult for most departments. An item of conversation has been “body cameras”. These items are displayed with ever changing advances at every technology conference and their use debated at every water cooler. While their positives are many and well received, they are still very high ticket items when it comes to the budget. How can the smaller agencies keep up with the newest technology while maintaining a viable budget?
2. Other equipment needs such as radios and phones are now almost required equipment for officers. Upgrades to communication systems all over Texas are either being done or have already been completed in order to become compliant to state regulations as soon as possible. Cell phone technology has grown at such a fast pace that many officers can communicate better with a cell phone than with some of the antiquated radio systems agencies are using. Abilene currently has a system for in-car mobile data which includes Panasonic tablet computers and an integrated broadband access which will allow officers to pull data from departmental records as well as access many new search databases from their vehicles. A PD-NET webpage is also operational that will allow officers a “one stop shop” for intelligence/crime trend information from their vehicles. All agencies in the service area will strive to acquire the necessary technology and equipment to be a part of this system.
3. Many agencies are not able to adequately maintain their vehicle fleet. Budget demands are causing agencies to run units to higher and higher mileage than is practical before replacing the unit. As a result, there is more down time to older units, and sometimes this causes insufficient vehicles to be available to all staff positions.

### **Action Plan to Leverage Resources:**

Agencies within the service area will continue to make attempts to obtain necessary funding to address this problem through the normal budget process. With the federal grant system putting out less and less monies for agencies to apply for, the need for more interagency agreements is extremely important. We must be prepared to share resources and combine

grant efforts to maximize the power of these grant purchases. Individual agencies will prioritize their needs to make the most efficient use of available resources.

**Funding Priorities:**

This issue is prioritized as # 3 of 3.

**Goals and Objectives Based on Problems:**

We will continue to update current equipment to stay within the recommended manufacturer usage guidelines by:

1. Evaluating all possible funding sources for revenues that can be applied toward the problem.
2. Prioritize equipment needs and begin the purchase process.
3. Schedule a regular replacement process for equipment.

We will continue to obtain updated technology to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of our agencies by:

1. Reviewing available technology to prioritize needs;
2. Coordinating with other agencies for possible expense/usage cooperation;
3. Purchasing and maintaining technology; and
4. Evaluating the value of technology obtained for future expansion/retention.

**V. JUVENILE JUSTICE ISSUES**

**JUVENILE JUSTICE ISSUE #1**

**Develop treatment focused programming, both counseling and residential, in the West Texas geographic area, with emphasis on increased Mental Health Services.**

- A. Affordable and immediately available residential substance abuse treatment facilities within the local region.**

**Supporting Statistics:**

One of our front-line agencies currently providing adolescent substance abuse prevention and education is the Abilene Regional Council on Alcohol and Drug Abuse, Inc. From September 1, 2012, to August 31, 2013, they reported providing substance abuse prevention/intervention and educational services to 7,248 adults, 12,526 juveniles, and distributed over 114,475 pieces of literature.

Legislature changes in 2022, regarding the THC Vaping, making this offense a felony offense has significantly increased felony drop offenses in 2023 and 2024.

Substance Abuse related referrals to the Taylor County Juvenile Probation Department were reported as follows:

**Taylor County**

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Felony Drugs.....	0	2	3	21	94
“A” & “B” Misdemeanor Drugs.....	9	5	3	3	5
CINS.....	0	0	0	0	0

**Callahan County**

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Felony Drugs.....	0	0	0	0	0
“A” & “B” Misdemeanor Drugs.....	0	0	0	2	0
CINS.....	0	0	0	0	0

**Coleman County**

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Felony Drugs.....	0	0	0	0	0
“A” & “B” Misdemeanor Drugs.....	0	0	0	0	0
CINS.....	2	0	0	0	0

Of the 391 juvenile referrals, 26 were for substance abuse related offenses (7%) in 2023. Which was higher than 2022, and with current stats from 2024, 2024 will have a higher percentage of substance abuse arrest, currently 99, with over a month to go before the end of the year. Juvenile referrals and juveniles on supervision during 2023 there were 76 positive tests for illegal substances, whether it be when being admitted into detention or random drug test while reporting. These youth were referred to Out-Patient Drug and Alcohol Services through local programs such as the Abilene Regional Council on Alcohol and Drug Abuse, Serenity House of Abilene, Teen Narcotics Anonymous, Center for Life Resources Substance Abuse Program, Betty Hardwick Center, Serenity House and Private Licensed Professional Counselors. IF a child is in need of inpatient services juvenile offenders would be placed into Residential Adolescent Substance Abuse Treatment. These placements are accomplished with Unlimited Visions in Pasadena, Texas (365 miles from Abilene), Azleway Substance Abuse Center, Big Sandy Texas ( 291 Miles from Abilene) and Sundown Ranch, Canton Texas (240 Miles for Abilene , Texas. At the present time, there are no Residential Adolescent Substance Abuse Treatment Programs in Taylor, Callahan and Coleman Counties. The state funded cost for Residential Adolescent Substance Abuse Treatment is approximately \$25,000 for a 30-day treatment plan or over \$833 per day. A private placement can cost as much as \$35,000 for a 30-day treatment plan or \$1,167 per day. The state provides some funding to Residential Treatment Programs for the provision of services to Adolescents, however, the demand far exceeds the availability of such services.

**Action Plan to Leverage Resources:**

Agencies will continue to form and sustain collaborations that allow for the development and identification of funding resources to provide such services on the local level.

**Funding Priorities:**

This issue is prioritized as #1 of 5.

**Goals and Objectives Based on Problems & Activities:**

As funds become available, needs will be addressed based on the findings of local, state and federal research and the priorities identified through that research.

**B. More mental health services, both residential and non-residential, for adolescents as well as resources for intellectually developmentally disabled children who commit delinquent acts.**

**Supporting Statistics:**

In the current fiscal period, the Department of State Health Services (DSHS) provided funding for community based mental health services for 91 children and adolescents who met the priority population for mental health services in Taylor, Jones, Callahan, Shackelford and Stephens Counties. Children's mental health priority population includes children ages 3 through 17 with a diagnosis of mental illness who exhibit serious emotional, behavioral, or mental disorders and who:

1. have a serious functional impairment; or
2. are at risk of disruption of a preferred living or childcare environment due to psychiatric symptoms; or
3. Are enrolled in a school system's special education program because of a serious emotional disturbance.

The Local Mental Health Authority (LMHA) is the Betty Hardwick Center (BHC), whose service area includes Callahan, Jones, Shackelford, Stephens and Taylor Counties. The approximate population of the service for Taylor County is 136,535 people. There is an estimated total population of about 33,724 individuals below 18 years of age in Taylor County.

Applying prevalent statistics to our local population, funding provided from DSHS serves only about 25% of children estimated to need public mental health services. The Texas Legislature has funded a few additional slots in each of the last two sessions, increasing availability in small increments in order to avoid waiting lists for indigent persons. Still local demand requires us to be well above that target, in actuality; the Center has been serving almost double the funded amount. Even so, the numbers indicate that many more children and adolescents in the service area are in need of mental health services that they are not currently receiving.

Approximately 25% of the 346 children and adolescents currently being served by the Betty Hardwick Center are referrals from the Juvenile Justice System. This population has serious challenges in maintaining compliance with a voluntary out-patient treatment modality. Voluntary out-patient treatment is often identified as being appropriate in keeping with the philosophy of treating persons in the least restrictive modality; however, due to the lack of motivation to participate and difficult challenges with family and support systems, there is a definite need for residential services for some adolescents that are not readily accessible.

Outpatient services include case management, skills training, counseling, parent support, family support and psychiatric care. When residential service is required, the primary service option for Betty Hardwick Center's MH Child & Adolescent division is the Waco Center for Youth.



Services are also available to adolescents with intellectual and developmental disabilities as defined by the Texas Health and Safety Code 591.003, with pervasive developmental disorders, or autism spectrum disorders. The local service system is typically able to serve intellectually or developmentally disabled adolescents in outpatient services, but an ever-increasing number of families are seeking residential services which are difficult to obtain for children, particularly when criminal involvement becomes a factor in their care. In previous years, there has been some success in securing placement in State Supported Living Centers (State Schools) and ICF/IID (Group Homes). However, with a shifting emphasis toward not placing adolescents in State Supported Living Centers and with ICF/IID's becoming more selective on their admissions, residential services for adolescents are extremely limited. Program eligibility also tends to limit the availability of residential services.

Outpatient services include service coordination, skills training, afterschool and summer day habilitation and respite care. When residential service is required, Betty Hardwick Center's IDD division explains and explores options for ICF-IID, Home and Community Based Services Waiver, and State Supported Living Centers.

#### **Action Plan to Leverage more Resources:**

In past legislative sessions, significant funds were allocated to improve Crisis Mental Health services and while that has been very beneficial, there remain issues with funding to provide service to persons on the waiting list, who need services, qualify for them, but for whom there are not adequate public resources to serve.

Additionally, there are local shortages in private child psychiatry practices. The Center provides telemedicine technology to bring those services to the region.

#### **Funding Priorities:**

This issue is prioritized as #1 of 5

#### **Goals and Objectives Based on Problems & Activities:**

The goal is for Taylor, Callahan and Coleman Counties to provide appropriate out-patient mental health services to children ages 6-17 regardless of the ability of the family to pay for the services. To accomplish this, agencies within our jurisdiction will need to maximize those resources currently available while, at the same time, seeking new funding sources to help the community meet the growing mental health needs in an environment where traditional services have either been reduced significantly or eliminated completely.

- C. Affordable residential services for adolescent sex offenders outside of Texas Juvenile Justice Department (TJJD) commitment.**

#### **Supporting Statistics:**

According to Taylor County Juvenile Probation Department 2023 statistics for Taylor, Callahan and Coleman Counties, 7 juveniles were referred for a felony sex offense. Five (5) children were placed into residential sex offender treatment. The average cost per day for Residential Sex Offender Treatment for 2023 is \$238.85 or \$87,178.43 for twelve (12) months. With this cost increasing for FY 2024 to \$ 278.85 or \$101,778.43 for twelve (12) months. For FY 2024 TJJD Grant "A" Funds have been designated in Taylor, Callahan and

Coleman County for the purpose of residential treatment. Callahan County received \$29,564.81 and Coleman County received \$27,322.81 in Grant "A" funding while Taylor County receives \$ 241,160.08 State funds have increase since FY 2019, but so have the cost per day for youth to be placed into Residential programs. The Callahan and Coleman County Grant "A" funds were allocated in will only provide for 106 days for Callahan County and 98 for Coleman County days of placement for each county while Taylor County has funding for placement of two children for a period of twelve months each.

**Action Plan to Leverage Resources:**

Higher placement costs and limited revenues will mean that local agencies will need to continue to carefully screen children considered for placement while negotiating the best available price for services. Additionally, agencies will work together to establish best practices for the placement process as well as continuing to seek funding.

**Funding Priorities:**

This issue is prioritized as #1 of 5.

**Goals and Objectives Based on Problems & Activities:**

The goal of Taylor, Callahan & Coleman Counties is to provide appropriate and affordable residential services for adolescent sex offenders (ages 10-17 years) outside of TJJD commitment.

**D. Affordable residential basic care, vocational, independent living programs for adolescents.**

**Supporting Statistics:**

Since 1988, the Texas Health & Human Services Commission has raised the maximum allowable rates for placement by 56% while state and local funding has only increased by 29%. The results of this reduction in resources are children prematurely being placed back into the home, placed with a relative, or committed to the Texas Juvenile Justice Department. Changes in 2019 in eligibility criteria have all but eliminated Title IV-E funding as a resource for juvenile justice residential placement.

As the needs of juvenile offenders grow and the cost for residential childcare increases, the Taylor County Juvenile Probation Department anticipates that fewer children will receive residential childcare placement services. With increasingly strict reduction requirement in Texas Juvenile Justice Department commitment numbers imposed by the Legislature in the past sessions more burden will fall on communities to provide alternative funding or resources to meet the needs of these offenders.

**Action Plan to Leverage Resources:**

As resources continue to be reduced and costs increase, it becomes incumbent upon local agencies and authorities to maximize those resources at hand while, at the same time, seeking out new intervention strategies as well as funding mechanisms.

**Funding Priorities:**

This issue is prioritized as #1 of 5

**Goals and Objectives Based on Problems & Activities:**

The goal of Taylor, Callahan & Coleman Counties is to provide appropriate residential services to children, ages 10-17 years of age, within our jurisdiction. Increased funding for residential childcare services is critical to our effort in insuring that no child would be subjected to neglect, abuse, or placed “at risk” for continued delinquent conduct as a result of funding shortfalls.

**JUVENILE JUSTICE ISSUES PROBLEM #2:**

**Develop partnerships with current providers to facilitate expansion of community-based youth activities and intervention programs to year-round scheduling, which will include services to address self-esteem issues through activities (not just counseling) for adolescents.**

- A. More free community activities for juvenile age children throughout the school year.**

**Supporting Statistics**

Taylor County Juvenile Probation Department has seen an increase of single household where juvenile offenders have been referred. Youth are now living with grandparents, aunts, uncles, and kinship placement due to parent not being in the home.

**Action Plan to Leverage Resources:**

With a decrease in funding and increased emphasis on community-based programs, the local community has been forced to become creative and innovative in the manner in which funding is obtained. Communities working together to meet a common need will be the only way we can hope to address the growing needs of our children. To accomplish this, communities will need to continue to seek state and federal funding that addresses the issues defined in this section and, as appropriate, collaborate with other local agencies to ensure the greatest impact feasible. Funds received will be further leveraged through project design that not only addresses the identified needs but also allows for continuous and future improvements. Cities and Counties will continue to share the fiscal burden locally as feasible.

**Funding Priorities:**

This issue is prioritized as #2 of 5.

**Goals and Objectives Based on Problems & Activities:**

Through creativity and innovation, we hope to provide structured, well supervised, and constructive activities for those children within our communities who would be considered “at-risk” due to their personal circumstances.

**B. Gang intervention programs that operate throughout the year.**

**Supporting Statistics:**

According to the Taylor County Juvenile Probation Department, statistical analysis of those crimes typically associated with Juvenile Gang activity showed a consistent level of activity from 2000 to 2010. Gang related activity has dramatically declined in the last several years.

Despite numerous efforts since 1988, Abilene has been unable to sustain a significant gang intervention/prevention program due to a lack of funding. To help address the problem of gang related graffiti, the City of Abilene and Taylor County jointly fund a Community Service Officer position at the Taylor County Juvenile Probation Department to coordinate graffiti eradication and other community efforts. This program does operate year-round but is limited to serving only those youth who have been referred for unlawful conduct.

**Action Plan to Leverage Resources:**

As a community, we will continue to monitor the level of referrals commonly identified as "Gang Related." We will seek state and federal funding sources to address the socio economic issues that lead children into gang affiliation. As funds become available, needs will be addressed based on local, state and federal research and the priorities identified through that research.

**Funding Priorities:**

This issue is prioritized as #2 of 5.

**Goals and Objectives Based on Problems & Activities:**

The goal of communities within Taylor, Callahan and Coleman Counties is to provide to children structured; well supervised activities designed as an alternative to the need for juvenile gang affiliation.

**JUVENILE JUSTICE ISSUES PROBLEM #3:**

**Programs that encourage parental involvement in the lives of their children at school, counseling, etc.**

**Action Plan to Leverage Resources:**

The agencies within our communities will continue to offer opportunities for parental involvement and skills development through local programming as long as sufficient funds are available. We will continue to maximize what resources we have in order to provide some impact to the growing need for appropriate adult influence in the lives of the children of our communities.

**Funding Priorities:**

This issue is prioritized as #3 of 5.

**Goals and Objectives Based on Problems & Activities:**

The goal of communities within Taylor, Callahan and Coleman Counties is to provide children an opportunity for appropriate interaction with parents, and other significant adults. Regular coordination and dissemination of information throughout local agencies and organizations will be very important as we leverage every opportunity from our current resources.

**JUVENILE JUSTICE ISSUES PROBLEM #4:**

**More resources to address the need for adult mentoring of children who come from single parent homes or homes where biological parents are absent.**

**Supporting Statistics:**

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, one out of every four children in America, under the age of 18, lives in a single-parent home. Based on the Texas Education Agency estimates, 43,791 children are enrolled in public school in the Taylor, Callahan and Coleman counties. Following the U.S. Census Bureau's estimates, that would mean that over 10,948 children in the three-county area come from a single-parent household. Additionally, the Texas Education Agency estimates that over 55.1% of the children in Taylor, Callahan and Coleman counties can be classified as economically disadvantaged.

Children growing up in single parent homes are more likely to become involved in illegal behavior, perform poorly in the academic arena, and suffer from depression and mental health issues. Economic conditions take parents out of contact with their children for longer periods of time as the parent seeks to provide for their families by working two or more jobs. Who is it that fills the vacuum left by either a permanently absent parent or a parent temporarily absent? These are the dynamics that result in a child becoming identified as "at risk" and in need of appropriate adult mentoring and guidance.

**Action Plan to Leverage Resources:**

Agencies will continue to form and sustain collaborations that allow for a greater number of children to be placed in supported, one-to-one mentoring relationships. Mentoring agencies will seek and apply for match funding for government grants and will issue challenge fund requests to local foundations to leverage government resources.

**Funding Priorities:**

This issue is prioritized as #4 of 5.

**Goals and Objectives Based on Problems & Activities:**

The primary goal is to place a caring, screened and fully trained adult mentor in a one-to-one match with those children from single parent or alternative parent households that wish to participate in a mentoring match. At the present time, we lack sufficient funds to adequately address the need for mentors for children from single parent or alternative parent households within Taylor, Callahan and Coleman Counties.

## **JUVENILE JUSTICE ISSUE #5:**

**Expand availability and accessibility of essential, professional, human services for rural families and children as well as providing transportation to access those services.**

### **Supporting Statistics:**

According to the Texas Department of Rural Affairs, the Status of Rural Texas Report 2002, Callahan and Coleman Counties are both classified as rural counties. Taylor County, while not classified as a rural county, by definition of its rural areas, shares many of the same following characteristics and deficiencies:

Coleman County 2022 Census information:

1. Per Capita income \$31,249 (poverty rate 18.0%)
2. Higher Rates of Unemployment
3. Aging Population (25.5% are 65 years and older)
4. Provision of Education is more expensive and difficult (88.2% graduate high school with 20.7% going on to college)
5. Population is dispersed over a larger area with limited transportation and infrastructure.
6. No hospitals
7. Few Dental providers accept Medicaid patients.
8. Limited Internet Access.

These factors result in many services being brought in by agencies of neighboring counties.

### **Action Plan to Leverage Resources:**

Communities will seek state and federal funding available to address the rural issues identified in this section and as appropriate will collaborate with neighboring areas to ensure the greatest impact feasible. Funds received will be further leveraged through project design that addresses multiple areas of need and will allow for continuous and future improvements. Cities and counties will continue to share the fiscal burden locally as feasible for needed improvements while seeking state and federal funds.

### **Funding Priorities:**

This issue is prioritized as #5 of 5.

### **Goals and Objectives Based on Problems & Activities:**

Communities within these counties will continue to cooperate with state and federal studies to document the need for additional resources. As funds become available, needs will be addressed based on the findings of local, state and federal research and the priorities identified through that research.

## **VI. VICTIM ISSUES**

### **Victim Issue #1**

**Survivors of violent crime need continued assistance, awareness and involvement throughout the criminal justice process.**

**Out of 44 individuals surveyed this continues to be the #1 priority in meeting crime victim issues.**

### **Supporting Statistics:**

**Noah Project** assists primary and secondary victims of domestic violence and sexual assault in Abilene and the nine contiguous counties (Taylor, Eastland, Stephens, Callahan, Jones, Shackelford, Haskell, Knox, Stonewall, and Throckmorton). For Noah Project clients, services are provided free of charge, without regard to income. Noah Project provides services to victims of family violence, dating violence, intimate partner or stranger sexual assault. Services are available to adult women and men, children accompanied by a parent, as well as unaccompanied youth (aged 12-17). Services include a 24-hour crisis line/hotline, residential protective shelter, domestic violence/sexual assault intervention, crisis counseling, emergency protective order advocacy, legal accompaniment, medical accompaniment, transportation, educational support, survivor support groups, children's programs, employment and vocational training assistance, justice support, sexual assault services, on site professional counseling, and assistance with crime victim's compensation. Noah Project makes considerable and effective use of volunteers and student interns in addition to full and part-time staff. In addition, Noah Project also operates an outreach office in Haskell, Texas, offering the same services/advocacy, including emergency protective shelter through local resources or by transporting to the Abilene protective shelter. The Noah Project office in Haskell provides life-saving services and advocacy to the five northern-most counties in Noah Project, Inc.'s ten-county service area including Haskell, Jones, Throckmorton, Stonewall, and Knox counties.

During the most recent fiscal year 2024 (October 1, 2023 – September 31, 2024) Noah Project provided protective shelter to 920 women, children and men who identified as victims of family violence, sexual assault, or human trafficking. Additionally, 13,520 services were provided in outreach to children and adult victims. We received 3136 hotline calls from victims during the year in review. In addition to providing direct client services, Noah Project staff conducts primary professional prevention and community presentations. These presentations are targeted at preventing violence before it starts, and to give participants the tools necessary to stop the cycle of violence. During the same fiscal year 2023-2024 our Primary Presentation program provided 255 prevention presentations to 36025 individual students. In addition, 126 essential training and awareness programs were provided to 18230 adults.

<b>Noah - Victim Services</b>	<b>2019-2020</b>	<b>2020-2021</b>	<b>2021-2022</b>	<b>2022-2023</b>	<b>2023-2024</b>	<b>5 Year Totals</b>
Hotline calls received	2,670	2,496	2,761	2,810	3,136	<b>13,873</b>
Total victims served	919	837	910	977	920	<b>4,563</b>
Total number of services for victims	74,783	78,107	85,474	72,876	55,581	<b>36,6821</b>
Outreach services	18,548	21,850	24,061	18,898	13,520	<b>96,877</b>
Residential services	53,326	56,047	60,706	52,533	39,456	<b>262,068</b>

Continued funding is vital to maintain present services throughout the Big Country. Additional funding would enhance the ability of the project to provide comprehensive services.

**Regional Crime Victim Crisis Center dba Regional Victim Crisis Center (RVCC)** victim services include a 24/7 telephone crisis line and 28 certified volunteer victim advocates who stand by as emergency responders to crime scenes or the trauma center at the request of law enforcement or medical personnel to assist crime victims. Professional staff provide trauma-informed mental health care and counseling, advocacy and criminal justice support throughout the crisis. Specialized, age-appropriate, evidence-based counseling, individualized case management and comprehensive victim services are confidential and provided free of charge. During FY 2024 RVCC was able to add a full-time attorney to the professional staff. This is the first staff attorney in RVCC's history. The primary goal of this position is to aid in securing protective orders and to help educate crime victims, their loved ones, other service providers/partners, and the community, on the justice system.

RVCC provides services to Taylor, Jones, Shackelford, Callahan, Coleman and Haskell Counties, as well as other nearby counties when as requested, totaling 19 counties in this region. RVCC's VOCA funds were used to provide service to victims in the following categories:

<b>RVCC - Victim Services</b>	<b>FY 2020</b>	<b>FY 2021</b>	<b>FY 2022</b>	<b>FY 2023</b>	<b>FY 2024</b>	<b>5-Year Totals</b>
Crisis Counseling and Advocacy Interactions	10,405	8,885	11,393	7,400	8,099	<b>46,182</b>
Total primary victims served	604	861	748	772	880	<b>3,865</b>
Total number of services for primary victims	10,515	8,990	11,516	12,918	8575	<b>52,514</b>
Outreach services	4,688	11,772	12,159	12,146	15,400	<b>56,165</b>
Justice System Support/Advocacy	110	105	123	135	476	<b>949</b>

In collaboration with law enforcement, justice, and other service providers in our region, RVCC provided the following services to victims through VOCA funding during the year in review:

Child physical abuse, Crisis counseling, Child sexual abuse, Client and Family Follow-up services, Adult sexual assault, Information/referral (in-person)/Telephone contact info/referral, Adults molested as children, Justice support/advocacy and Legal Advocacy, Personal advocacy, Survivors of homicide victims, Assistance filing crime victim compensation claims.

RVCC operates with 8 licensed counselors with continuing education and training in trauma informed therapy models. Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT) is an



evidence-based treatment model designed to help children overcome traumatic stress due to child sexual abuse, exposure to domestic violence or other serious trauma(s). Certification requires successful completion of a year-long learning collaborative (supported by TXCAC and ATCAC) several RVCC counselors working with children have completed or are in a TF-CBT learning collaborative. In addition, training in Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), an evidenced based method to treat victims of trauma is underway. RVCC will also collaborate with Mental Health Association of Abilene and other mental health professionals, along with the Abilene/Taylor County Child Advocacy Center, to encourage more Trauma Informed Care certification among local mental health care providers.

Continued additional funding will sustain the standards of care and enhancement of services and number of clients that can be served.

The **Abilene/Taylor County Child Advocacy Center (CAC)** works with law enforcement, including **Child Protective Services**, and victim service agencies to provide services to child victims of violence and their non-offending family members. During the last two years, Abilene / Taylor County Child Advocacy Center provided services to:

#### **FY 2024**

The total number of children served **387**. Reasons for care include sexual abuse, physical abuse, both sexual and physical abuse, at-risk of harm due to physical or sexual abuse, neglect or drug exposure, witnesses to violent crime and Commercial Sexual Exploitation.

**FY 2025 to date:** The total number of children served **104**.

In addition, the Abilene/Taylor County Child Advocacy Center provided services to the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, and law enforcement agencies from a variety of local and county jurisdictions throughout Texas, the Texas Rangers, the US Air Force OSI, and various local, county and state law enforcement and child welfare agencies from around the country.

Furthermore, the Abilene / Taylor County Child Advocacy Center provides referral to therapeutic and crisis counseling services to victims and their families as necessary. The CAC presently provides services off-site through collaboration with Regional Victim Crisis Center (RVCC) and Noah Project. Children, and their siblings and non-offending caregivers, receive counseling and family violence service referrals at the time of their visit. The CAC also facilitates and provides funding for training that allows therapists to become certified in Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy.

In addition, RVCC's counselors and Noah Project advocates have participated in multidisciplinary team (MDT) case reviews. This has served to dramatically strengthen the quality, continuity and overall integrity of services the Center provides to victims and their families.

**Child Protective Services** responsibilities include:

- Investigating reports of abuse and neglect of children
- Providing services to children and families in their own homes
- Placing children in foster care
- Providing services to help youth in foster care make the transition to adulthood

- Placing children in adoptive homes

Child Protective Services is a program of the Texas Department of Family & Protective Services.

**Adult Protective Services** investigates allegations of abuse, neglect, and exploitation of the elderly or adults with disabilities. When reports are confirmed and protective services are appropriate, APS caseworkers provide or arrange for services to alleviate or prevent further maltreatment. Services may be provided directly by case workers, through arrangements with other community resources, or purchased by APS on a short-term, emergency basis.

Types of services provided include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Financial assistance for rent and utility restoration
- Social services
- Health services
- Referrals to the Texas Department of Aging and Disability Services (DADS) for guardianship services
- Referrals to other state or community services

Adult Protective Services is a program of the Texas Department of Family & Protective Services.

**D.A.'s Victim/Witness Coordinators** in Taylor, Callahan and Coleman Counties handle all felony and misdemeanor cases that flow through the District Attorney's Office for criminal prosecutions. They handle victim notifications of hearings, communications between victims, witnesses, and the D.A.'s Office prosecutorial staff. They provide court accompaniment and deal with protective orders. Similar services are also provided by the counties' Juvenile Probation Departments to victims in juvenile cases.

**Action Plan to Leverage Resources:**

Communication, with appropriate authorizations to release/exchange information from crime victims and witnesses, survivors of homicide victims, will enhance cooperation with law enforcement and the D.A.'s Offices for prosecution of violent crimes. This ensures that the priorities of victims' rights, Crime Victims' Compensation, and the Victim Impact Statement are as seamless as possible to reduce additional trauma to survivors. Enhancing communications and protocols in victim service referral processes among collaborating agencies will reduce victim frustration in getting appropriate professional crime victim services and encourage victim's utilizing victim services and resources.

**Funding Priorities:**

This issue is prioritized as #1 out of 5.

**Goals and Objectives Based on Problems & Activities:**

- Ensure that victims and witnesses are well informed regarding victim rights, services and resources in a timely manner.
- Ensure that victims know who the detective is that is assigned to their case.

- Maintain the relationship with victims and witnesses once the case is transferred from law enforcement to the prosecutorial staff.
- Introduce and/or accompany crime victims to pre-trial hearings and the pre-trial conference with the assigned D.A. or Assistant D.A. and Victim-Witness Coordinators.
- Accompany victims and witnesses to trial on an as-needed basis.
- During criminal prosecutions, victims need assistance at every stage of the proceedings. Victims need adequate notice of all hearings and time to prepare for those hearings. Victims need support in attending hearings and in preparing to testify. Plea agreements, criminal penalties, early release procedures, crime victims' compensation benefits and the right to a victim impact statement should be thoroughly explained. Collaborative efforts are in place with Noah Project Victim Advocates, Regional Crime Victim Crisis Center dba Regional Victim Crisis Center (RVCC) advocates, and D.A.'s Victim/Witness Coordinators with appropriate authorizations to exchange information, to work toward realization of this goal.

## **Victim Issue #2**

**Prevention awareness is needed for parents, schools and neighborhoods.**

**Out of 44 individuals surveyed this continues to be tied as the #2 priority in meeting crime victim issues/needs.**

### **Supporting Statistics:**

**Noah Project, Inc.** promotes awareness of family violence issues through many avenues. Primary Prevention (as defined by the Centers for Disease Control and Health and Human Services) training has become a significant focus for Noah Project. Primary Prevention presentations and training are provided to schools, church and civic groups, law enforcement, judiciary, health care, employee groups, and professionals. Specialty programs, mandated by the Texas Legislature through HB 121, provided by Noah Project include the Bullying Prevention Program, Teen Dating Violence Program and Healthy Relationships. These training opportunities are age-appropriate presentations on prevention of violence, existing family violence, bullying, and relationship/dating issues to students from kindergarten through college.

Today our RVCC Primary Prevention Education and Community Outreach and volunteer training are funded through the Office of the Attorney General of Texas. These programs are evidence-based curricula designed to stop the cycle of sexual violence, bullying and other forms of violence. A primary focus is educating traditional college age individuals and groups to understand the importance of being an interested bystander that will have knowledge-based skills to intervene in a safe way when possible, to stop violence and potential violence among peers and others.

In addition, RVCC is facilitating advocacy programs for both sexual assault advocates and legal advocates. These trained individuals are ready to assist victims of violent crimes 24 hours a day.

### **Action Plan to Leverage Resources:**

Agencies will continue collaborative efforts to educate the community concerning Bystander Intervention, the prevention of child abuse and facilitating communication between children, teens and authority figures such as school personnel, clergy, parents, and other trusted adults

to reduce the incidence of child abuse in our communities. Parent education and appropriate responses to outcries of abuse are also emphasized.

Children who enter care and protection at Noah Project have been clearly affected emotionally and often physically by the consequences of family/domestic violence. The agency will continue to provide services through victim advocacy and counseling programs and will increase efforts to collaborate with agencies that have services available to victims of violence including children of family/domestic violence. These intervention efforts work toward ending the cycle that accompanies family/domestic and/or dating violence.

Given that the Regional Victim Crisis Center continues to assist adults molested as children who are coming for counseling support, it is incumbent upon us to also provide the community education and support children and teens need for early disclosure and early intervention as opposed to adult lifestyles of substance abuse and family dysfunction that may be cyclical when childhood abuse remains undisclosed into adulthood. Prevention of social norms that perpetuate sexual violence, child abuse and victim blaming/shaming are also targeted by awareness and primary prevention programs.

### **Victim Issue #3 – Identified as Priority #2 in a tied with Victim Issue #2**

**Current funding sources are at risk of continued reduction or elimination. Funding is a continued concern for crime victim services.**

**Out of 44 individuals surveyed this continues to be tied as the #2 priority in meeting crime victim issues/needs.**

### **Supporting Statistics:**

All funding sources (federal, state, county, city) are facing heavy demands for funding. This in turn has a dramatic impact on virtually every victim assistance agency throughout the region. Noah Project and Regional Crime Victim Crisis Center dba Regional Victim Crisis Center (RVCC) continue to increase their services while facing funding reductions. With ever increasing pressures due to various funding streams with a variety of prioritizations at the state and national levels, funds may be further restricted while the numbers of crime victims needing supportive services continues to grow.

Given that VOCA funds are restricted for use to only direct crime victim assistance services, these reductions have, in turn, a direct impact on the level of services available to meet the growing numbers of victims requiring those services. Local foundation grant limitations and the stress on our economy has affected the supplemental funding that are critical to supporting victim assistance, awareness and prevention programs and resources.

### **Action Plan to Leverage Resources:**

With shrinking financial resources, agencies must work harder and for fewer financial resources, which becomes increasingly difficult in view of the policies of the current federal administration. The Action Plan includes victim service providers continuing to collaborate to prevent duplication of services, to increase collaborative service to victims, to formulate strategies to diversify funding sources and enhance governmental awareness that termination of funding sources and decreased financial incentive for charitable donations results often in a lack of services for victims of violent crimes.

### **Funding Priorities:**

This issue tied as priority #2 of 5.

### **Goals and Objectives Based on Problems & Activities:**

Continue to recruit and utilize highly trained and effective paraprofessional volunteers and interns.

- Establish a centralized basic training program for victim service providers, to maximize resources and avoid duplication of efforts.
- Continue to collaborate with other service providers and agencies.
- Evaluating current funding sources for available revenue.
- Direct resources to fund development and more diversification of funding sources.
- Educate legislators of the imperative need for funding for victim services and incentives for charitable donors.

### **Victim Issue #4 (#3 due to the previous tie)**

**Training for victim assistance and crisis intervention volunteers is imperative, as well as training for professionals with whom victims of violent crimes come into contact.**

**This crime victim issue is priority #3 of the 44 individuals surveyed due to the previous tie for issue #2.**

### **Supporting Statistics:**

**Noah Project, Inc.**, the regional domestic/family violence crisis center and protective shelter, seeks every opportunity to provide Primary Prevention training and education to victim advocates, criminal justice personnel, health care providers, faith communities, businesses, advocacy organizations, service providers and allied professionals in communities throughout this area of West Central Texas and the state. Noah Project schedules trainings that are designed to help organizations and communities work to end violence against women, men and children. Workshop topics cover a variety of issues including, but not limited to: advocacy, battering intervention and prevention, legal issues, working with communities of faith and assisting law enforcement. Trainers focus on issues related to preventing the onslaught of violence, the immediate response to a family violence situation, as well as barriers facing victims and the necessary continuum of advocacy through restoration. During October, Domestic Violence Awareness Month, Noah Project strives to offer several opportunities to raise awareness regarding the issue of family violence and solutions to create safe homes and safe communities. Finally, Noah Project provides ongoing recruitment and training of volunteers. This specialized training prepares those willing to give of their time and skills to the service of victims of family/domestic and dating violence and training for specific professional groups in our service area. Training opportunities in the past have included; Criminal Justice Response Training for all area law enforcement personnel, training with APD Academy students, and local nursing students. Topics are focused on family and domestic violence issues.

**Regional Crime Victim Crisis Center dba Regional Victim Crisis Center (RVCC)** helps with in-service training for the Abilene Police Department and Taylor County Sheriff's

Office, as well as offering it to other law enforcement agencies in our region. RVCC also offers sexual assault investigations training for victim interviews that includes victim sensitivity training for both the WCTCOG Regional Police Academies and Hendrick Trauma Center. RVCC conducts intensive training for volunteer victim advocates in collaboration with law enforcement and criminal justice. RVCC has recently added a full-time attorney to the professional staff. This attorney assists in training and educating agency partners, community members, education partners, and crime victims.

In addition to RVCC volunteer advocates and staff, other victim service agencies send volunteers and staff to attend the RVCC training. RVCC certified advocates attend continuing training to remain current on minimum standards for direct victim services and emphasis on trauma informed approach for service providers and victims, including self-care, compassion fatigue, and psychoeducation regarding post traumatic and acute stress response system.

#### **Action Plan to Leverage Resources:**

Training will be continued for law enforcement, mental health, medical, educators and victim service providers and crime victims throughout the region at any given opportunity.

#### **Additional Goals and Objectives Based on Problems & Activities:**

- Establish a centralized, standardized training academy for basic training in victim assistance and crisis intervention for professionals and volunteers.
- Continue to actively pursue liaison relationships with law enforcement educational providers to provide training in crisis intervention and victim assistance.
- Continue to update training materials and other informational resources concerning domestic violence batterers, victims, and sex offender dynamics as well as victimology, child abuse and trauma-informed care and systems.
- Continue to pursue opportunities for cross training among disciplines and agencies to enhance trauma informed systems and community response and collaborations for victim services.
- Continue to include training on utilizing statutory penalty enhancements in charging and punishing re-offenders, and to properly distinguish between misdemeanor and felony assaults. Pursuant to Texas Law, training may also include identifying primary aggressors in family violence crime and avoiding double arrests for “mutual combat.”

#### **Supporting Statistics:**

**Noah Project, Inc.**, the regional domestic/family violence crisis center and protective shelter, seeks every opportunity to provide Primary Prevention training and education to victim advocates, criminal justice personnel, health care providers, faith communities, businesses, advocacy organizations, service providers and allied professionals in communities throughout this area of West Central Texas and the state. Noah Project schedules trainings that are designed to help organizations and communities work to end violence against women, men and children. Workshop topics cover a variety of issues including, but not limited to: advocacy, battering intervention and prevention, legal issues, working with communities of faith and assisting law enforcement. Trainers focus on issues related to preventing the onslaught of violence, the immediate response to a family violence situation, as well as barriers facing victims and the necessary continuum of advocacy through restoration. During October, Domestic Violence Awareness Month, Noah Project strives to

offer several opportunities to raise awareness regarding the issue of family violence and solutions to create safe homes and safe communities. Finally, Noah Project provides ongoing recruitment and training of volunteers. This specialized training prepares those willing to give of their time and skills to the service of victims of family/domestic and dating violence and training for specific professional groups in our service area. Training opportunities in the past have included; Criminal Justice Response Training for all area law enforcement personnel, training with APD Academy students, and local nursing students. Topics are focused on family and domestic violence issues.

**Regional Crime Victim Crisis Center dba Regional Victim Crisis Center (RVCC)** offers assistance with in-service training for the Abilene Police Department and Taylor County Sheriff's Office, as well as offering it to other law enforcement agencies in our region. RVCC also offers sexual assault investigations training and victim sensitivity training for the WCTCOG Regional Police Academies and Hendrick Trauma Center. RVCC conducts intensive training for volunteer victim advocates in collaboration with law enforcement and criminal justice. In addition to RVCC volunteer advocates and staff, other victim service agencies send volunteers and staff to attend the RVCC training. RVCC certified advocates attend continuing training to remain current on minimum standards for direct victim services and emphasis on trauma informed approach for service providers and victims, including self-care, compassion fatigue, and psychoeducation regarding post traumatic and acute stress response system. Also, since 2022, RVCC is the designated Victim Services provider to lead the Taylor County Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) and Care Coordination for commercially sexually exploited young adults, youth and children.

#### **Action Plan to Leverage Resources:**

Training will continue for law enforcement, mental health, medical, educators and victim service providers and crime victims throughout the region at any given opportunity.

#### **Goals and Objectives Based on Problems & Activities:**

- Establish a centralized, standardized training academy for basic training in victim assistance and crisis intervention for professionals and volunteers.
- Continue to actively pursue liaison relationships with law enforcement educational providers to provide training in crisis intervention and victim assistance.
- Continue to update training materials and other informational resources concerning domestic violence batterers, victims, and sex offender dynamics as well as victimology, child abuse and trauma-informed care and systems.
- Continue to pursue opportunities for cross training among disciplines and agencies to enhance trauma informed systems and community response and collaborations for victim services.
- Continue to include training on utilizing statutory penalty enhancements in charging and punishing re-offenders, and to properly distinguish between misdemeanor and felony assaults. Pursuant to Texas Law, training may also include identifying primary aggressors in family violence crime and avoiding double arrests for "mutual combat."

#### **Funding Priorities:**

This priority is #3 / #4 out of 5.

#### **Goals and Objectives Based on Problems & Activities:**

- Continue to enhance educational efforts and prevention programs throughout our community concerning child physical/sexual abuse and violence prevention.
- Continue in education of appropriate reporting mandates and responses to child and elderly abuse.
- Maintain updated educational materials and disseminate to parents, schools, and community professionals.

### **Victim Issue #5**

**Insufficient programs to adequately address the growing problems faced by victims of violent crime, including a need to expand mental health services, particularly, for victims who are mentally ill.**

### **Supporting Statistics:**

In our urban areas an adequate number of programs, as detailed previously, are available among the various agencies that serve victims of violent crime. What is needed is further enhancement and expansion of the current programs, particularly in our rural areas, as well as continued support and funding for collaboration among the various victim services entities and communications among the communities regarding available resources and victim services.

### **Action Plan to Leverage Resources:**

Continued collaboration among the various agencies and organizations to provide training for professionals and volunteers, and to provide awareness of services available to victims of violent crime will help ensure that victims receive the assistance they need to recover from the trauma resulting from violent crimes.

### **Funding Priorities:**

This issue is prioritized as #5 of 5.

### **Goals and Objectives Based on Problems & Activities:**

We will continue to meet regularly in an interdisciplinary setting to ensure victim services are provided at a comprehensive level and that no victim or survivor “falls through the cracks.” In order to maximize services, resources, and avoid duplicity of services, we will continue pursuit of the following:

- Enhancing legislative and community awareness of services and support required in fulfilling service needs.
- Continuing community agency collaboration through timely meetings and services coordination.
- Attempting to reduce the incidences of violent crime in our communities.



## **Abilene Palm House Community Plan Contribution**

The goal of the Abilene Palm House VAWA Grant Project is to help women who have been victims of violent crimes move past their trauma and decrease the rate of repeat victimization. We use proven mediation techniques and communication tools to address the challenges women face post-trauma. Supplemental training focused on communication and conflict resolution is also offered to organizations that support victims.

We do not duplicate the tremendous efforts of the existing organizations but address the subject from a unique perspective. As therapists, psychologists, and mediators, we interviewed many victims and found the universal need not being met was that the women felt like they did not have a voice post-trauma. They felt like they were not believed, heard, or listened to and their trauma has caused them to question trust. As a result of our weekly empowerment group, we are building a strong community helping victims move forward by giving them a safe environment to realize that the Big Country community does care. We teach specific conflict resolution skills to help them feel empowered again and learn to trust the system. We train professionals and volunteers from the perspective of the victim by using communication and conflict resolution techniques when helping victims at the time of crisis or later during the recovery process. We offer one-on-one communication coaching for trauma victims.

The challenges that we face are the other community organizations becoming aware of the Palm House and the services offered to women and children. Because victims tend to have trust issues due to the nature of their trauma, they are at times unwilling to take advantage of the services offered at other local organizations. We have seen that because we are not associated with law enforcement/CPS, they seem to be willing to come to Palm House because we are "outside the typical victim services system." We find some victims are more willing to come and build community and trust at Palm House, which is one of the best ways to start to be able to meet the needs they have and provide the services that they require. We seek to fill a gap because some victims want a place that may be less stigmatized, or they are unwilling to accept the help offered at organizations that focus primarily on victims. Our services seek to complement the services victims receive at other organizations or professional agencies. Another challenge that we faced was convincing the first responders to participate in our seminars. The number of people we have served every month has gone up as the word is getting out about our programs.

With the help of Abilene Family Counseling, our contractors, to execute the training portion of the grant, these challenges are being addressed through the VAWA grant providing the best training, resources, and support to victims and service providers. The Palm House gives victims one-on-one and group support and offers professionals and volunteers training and professional development to be able to serve victims effectively. The Palm House facilitates a weekly Communication Group for women who have been victims of violent crimes. Two professional Communication Coaches lead the group, and a Licensed Family Counselor attends to help facilitate intermittently. Professionals and volunteers also learn conflict resolution skills and communication skills to use with victims and their families so that revictimization rates are reduced and to prevent further trauma to victims. In some instances, we were able to offer continuing education credits that have been provided to service agencies and organizations throughout workshops for the busy first responders.

Victims of violent crime report having trouble with effective communication in personal relationships and employment relationships but also with the justice system. We work with

them individually teaching communication skills, assisting them in recognizing their triggers and other issues post-trauma. Also, we work with victim advocates on trauma-informed care so they will be better equipped to work with the victims in building trust and not causing revictimization. Monitoring the intended and unintended consequences of the training or interventions is part of the communication training approach. Formal evaluation of intervention effectiveness, especially using qualitative techniques, is a problematic component when working with post-trauma women; however, our surveys and interviews, although confidential, allow us to determine the effectiveness of the training. One victim statement regarding how our services have impacted her was, "Thank you so much. You have given me so much hope. I was so afraid of doing this on my own."

Our training sessions include interactive role plays involving all participants. These are tailor-made for each population we are serving. This assists the participants in making changes in reactions to circumstances and situations, improving decision making in the moment, and increased communication skills. These methods have been proven to empower the client to employ problem-solving strategies, increase the client's ability to communicate more effectively in the future, and leads to a more effective personal and working environment, which will help reduce revictimization.

During this current grant cycle 2024-2025, we plan on training 150 criminal justice professionals, training 150 non-criminal justice professionals, providing 17 training events, and offering 40 victims or survivor trainings.

Last year, our agency made immense progress towards meeting our goals and objectives laid out in the grant. For our grant project 2023-2024 we provided 10 trainings for criminal justice and non-criminal justice and trained 125 individuals in these fields. We offered 46 training events for victims and had 554 attendances by victims.

The Palm House is on the 211 network for victims to contact us. The following are some organizations we have worked with through the grant. We have provided either workshops, groups, or services for them. We have worked with victims they serve, or their staff, First Responders, or volunteers. Services for victims involve Communication Groups, Anger Management Courses, one-on-one personal Communication Coaching.

Abilene Regional Drug and Alcohol Council  
Council of Governments  
180 House  
Stop the Violence Abilene  
Oxford House  
New Beginnings  
Regional Victim Crisis Center  
Noah Project  
ARK Domestic Violence Shelter  
Hope Haven  
Abilene PD  
Abilene Law Enforcement  
Eastland Law Enforcement  
Dyess Air Force Base  
Mental Health America  
Heavenly Rest Abilene  
Sweetwater Law Enforcement

Aspermont Stonewall Law Enforcement  
Snyder Law Enforcement  
Sweetwater Law Enforcement  
Santa Anna Law Enforcement  
Breckenridge Law Enforcement  
Hardin Simmons University  
Cogdell Memorial  
Brownwood Law Enforcement  
Baird Law Enforcement  
Hendrick Medical Center

**2023-2024 our team worked with the following:**

CASA  
Champion for Children  
Abilene Police Department  
Taylor County Probation  
2Ingage  
Taylor County Substance Abuse  
Abilene Parol Office  
SAFT Abilene

Our services are open to all women in the community who have been victims of violent or sexual crimes. We involve community first responders by providing training to them several times a year. We allow people in the community to volunteer to help in the services we provide. We promote our training and services throughout the community in hopes that people in the community can point others to our organization.

- **Thursday Communication Group for Women/ Domestic Violence Shelters and Transition Houses for Women Groups/ 1 on 1 Victim Communication Coaching Sessions:** the team has implemented several programs to ensure victims have available service outside of the criminal justice system and traditional therapy. Every Thursday at the Abilene Palm House, we facilitate a Communication Coaching group for women who have been victims of crimes. In the group, we do various communication exercises and activities to help women learn to communicate through their trauma more effectively. This equips them with the ability to express what they have gone through and potentially decrease communication conflicts in their lives. The hope is that their ability to express what has happened and express what they want/do not want moving forward would enable them to have tools to prevent revictimization in the future.
- Have set up similar periodic programs at local organizations that work with victims. The programs are communication-based, and we use communication tools to help victims learn to express themselves in an effective way to decrease trauma and conflict in their lives.
- We have also set up One on One Communication Coaching Sessions with women who desire or need more individualized support. Through communication activities and tools, women can express emotions or situations, and we help equip them with long term tools for specific instances in their lives.
- Programs have been more effective in addressing and fulfilling what we outlined in our problem statement. Our programs offer different services than what victims may typically

receive through traditional counseling or therapy. We have seen how having proper communication tools can decrease the effects of trauma and equip victims to lessen the potential of becoming a victim again.

- **First Responders Training:** Training focuses on “The Importance of Trauma Informed Care”

Goals of this training:

- To help first responders recognize, utilize, and understand the importance of trauma informed care when interacting with victims of crime
  - Trauma and how it can impact behavior, including how helpful it can be for first responders to react in a trauma-informed way
  - Principles of trauma-informed care
  - Communication strategies
  - Suicidality
  - How to respond to a victim of a crime who is experiencing suicidal thoughts or behaviors in a trauma-informed way
  - How to care for yourself when witnessing trauma or the impact of trauma
- We have had great success in adding an element of self-care to our training seminar for First Responders and people who work with victims. We have found that this can lead to less turnover, higher job satisfaction and reducing secondary trauma.
  - We found that giving professionals insight into what happens to victims neurologically because of their trauma, and how that affects their behaviors, has provided professionals a better understanding and empathy for how to respond to them.

Name \*

Emery Bost, grant administrator

Company \*

Abilene Palm House

Email \*433palmhouse@gmail.com

325 338-9141

**Victim Issue Survey requests were emailed and or mailed to stakeholders in the following professions and other community members.**

Education

Health

Allied Health - Mental Health, Health and Substance Abuse

Juvenile Justice

Criminal Justice

Prosecution

Law Enforcement

Crime Victim Services

Nonprofit Sector

Business Sector

Child Welfare

Faith Based

Private Sector

## **Beyond Trafficking**

Since 2017, Beyond Trafficking has been a tireless advocate for human trafficking survivors in the Big Country. Our mission is simple yet profound—to restore dignity, provide healing, and ensure justice for some of the most vulnerable among us. Rooted in compassion and guided by excellence, we deliver trauma-informed care to survivors while working tirelessly to educate, prevent, and heal communities plagued by trafficking.

### **A Holistic Approach to Victim Support**

Beyond Trafficking is dedicated to providing individualized, wrap-around case management that meets each survivor's unique needs. Our advocates, who are trauma-informed and TAASA-trained, take a compassionate and certified approach under the **Institute for Shelter Care** guidelines. Every life we touch is a testimony to our commitment to healing.

- **Housing as a Priority:** Housing is often the most urgent need for survivors, and Beyond Trafficking focuses heavily on securing safe, stable living environments.
- **Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI) & Trauma-Informed Models:** We utilize cutting-edge therapeutic techniques to address the deep wounds of exploitation.
- **Expert Clinical Leadership:** Our clinical director, equipped with a nursing degree and a doctorate in leadership and education, ensures the highest standards of care.
- **Certified Advocacy:** Our head advocates are recognized by the **National Organization of Victim Advocates (NOVA)** and are trained to stand beside survivors, particularly as they confront traffickers in the justice system.

### **Making Justice Accessible**

At the heart of Beyond Trafficking's work lies an unwavering resolve to bridge the gap between survivors and the justice they deserve.

- **Courtroom Advocacy:** Traffickers often rely on fear to silence survivors. Our advocates stand by survivors in court, ensuring their voices are heard and their courage sustained.
- **Crime Victim Compensation:** We assist survivors in accessing financial restitution to support their recovery. This service empowers survivors to reclaim agency over their lives.
- **Systemic Advocacy:** Beyond Trafficking collaborates closely with law enforcement and the justice system to ensure traffickers are prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

### **Preventing Trafficking Before It Begins**

Prevention is just as vital as aftercare. We firmly believe that education is a powerful tool to combat human trafficking, particularly among vulnerable youth.

- **Educational Outreach:** By partnering with schools, youth organizations, and community centers, we provide training to help at-risk juveniles identify and avoid trafficking situations.
- **Advocacy for At-Risk Youth:** We intervene in complex situations, offering resources, mentorship, and a lifeline for those on the brink of exploitation.

### **Stories of Impact**

Every success story fuels our mission. Here are just a few examples of the lives transformed through Beyond Trafficking's efforts:

### **Case Study 1 – A Survivor's Journey to Independence**

A 17-year-old girl trafficked for labor in a local factory came to us through the intervention of a concerned teacher. Beyond Trafficking helped her find safety in a secure home, tailored therapy to heal her trauma, educational support for her academic dreams, and vocational training to secure her future. Today, she is not just surviving but thriving—living independently, pursuing her high school diploma, and working part-time in a healthy workplace.

### **Case Study 2 – Justice and Empowerment**

A woman in her mid-20s, a victim of sex trafficking, found unwavering support through Beyond Trafficking as she faced her trafficker in court. Armed with guidance from a NOVA-certified advocate, she successfully navigated the justice system, claimed compensation for her suffering, and emerged as an advocate for others like her, proving that a survivor's courage can spark societal change.

### **Case Study 3 – Preventing Trafficking in Youth**

After attending one of our educational workshops at a local school, a 15-year-old boy reached out, suspecting his friend was being coerced into trafficking. Our team intervened immediately, supporting both the victim and their family while working with local law enforcement to dismantle the trafficking operation. This intervention not only saved lives but also underscored the importance of proactive education.

### **A Unified Community Effort**

Human trafficking is not a battle fought by one organization alone. Beyond Trafficking places immense value on building strong partnerships with local law enforcement, community leaders, and organizations. By working together, we create a powerful network that ensures every survivor receives the care and justice they deserve. As part of the 211 community, we have bridged the gaps in the antitrafficking arena.

### **Measurable Success**

The impact of Beyond Trafficking's initiatives is reflected in tangible results:

- **More Survivors Reclaiming Their Lives:** We're proud to see an increasing number of trafficking survivors accessing and completing our aftercare programs, gaining independence and resilience.
- **A More Aware and Engaged Community:** Through outreach efforts, we've reached thousands with education on trafficking, empowering them to be advocates and protectors within their spheres of influence.
- **Justice Delivered:** More survivors are supported through court cases, with traffickers held accountable for their crimes.
- **Youth Prevention in Action:** Hundreds of at-risk juveniles have benefited from our prevention programs, gaining tools to avoid exploitation.

## **The Ark Domestic Violence Shelter**

The Ark Domestic Violence Shelter cared for 336 clients from September 1, 2023, to August 31, 2024. We provided 34,424 unique services to these clients. This totaled 17,319.93 hours of direct client comprehensive care, advocacy, and support. Please see the following details outlining all the services. This is only a portion of a lengthy report.

Blackout Date: 9/1/2023  
 Start Date: 9/1/2023  
 End Date: 8/31/2024  
 Client ID/Client Name: Client ID

Client Service records between September 01, 2023 and August 31, 2024

Date	Client	Funding Stream	Core Service	Duration (hrs)	Staff Member
<b>Services:</b> 34424	<b>Clients:</b> 336			<b>Hours:</b> 17319.93	

**REPORT DETAILS**

**New/Returning:**

	Total
New	336

**Client/Child (Age):**

	Total
Child/Secondary	118
Client	218
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>336</b>

**Client/Child (Record Type):**

	Total
Child/Secondary	103
Client	233
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>336</b>

**Age Bands:**

	Total
0 - 6	54
07 - 12	30
13 - 17	26
18 - 24	38
25 - 59	170
60+	10
Not Reported	8
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>336</b>

**Funding Stream > Core Service**

Funding Stream	Service	Sessions	Clients (Unique)	Duration (hrs)
----------------	---------	----------	------------------	----------------



Missing	Life Skills Training	2	1	1.25
	Transportation	3	1	1.00
Missing Total		5	2	2.25
CJD VOCA	Assistance with a victim compensation application	5	5	3.00
	C/CJSA - Civil advocacy/accompaniment	4	4	5.50
	C/CJSA - Civil legal attorney assistance in obtaining protection	46	24	15.75
	C/CJSA - Civil legal attorney assistance with family law issues	34	19	8.75
	C/CJSA - Criminal advocacy/accompaniment	6	6	5.25
	C/CJSA - Immigration attorney assistance	1	1	0.25
	C/CJSA - Notification of criminal justice events	2	2	1.00
	C/CJSA - Other civil legal attorney assistance	11	6	4.50
	C/CJSA - Prosecution interview advocacy/accompaniment	1	1	1.5
	C/CJSA - Victim Impact statement assistance	3	2	0.75
	ES or SS - Crisis Intervention	1783	189	822.22
	ES or SS - Emergency financial assistance	405	105	197.25
	ES or SS - Hotline/crisis line counseling	49	35	20.25
	ES or SS - Individual counseling	19	11	9.75
	ES or SS - On-scene crisis response	30	17	28.75
	ES or SS - Support groups	252	56	206.68
	ES or SS - Therapy	390	89	375.50
	I & R - Information about the criminal justice process	29	25	13.75
	I & R - Information about victim rights, how to obtain records	45	35	34.50
	I & R - Referral to other services, supports, and resources	589	173	359.83
	I & R - Referral to other victim service programs	202	109	152.00
	PA/A - Child or dependent care assistance	85	28	82.75
	PA/A - Immigration assistance	5	5	1.75
	PA/A - Individual advocacy	3019	191	1346.38
	PA/A - Interpreter Services	12	4	7.75
	PA/A - Intervention with employer, creditor, landlord, or	49	19	16.75
	PA/A - Law Enforcement Interview advocacy/accompaniment	16	15	18.75
	PA/A - Transportation assistance	340	61	170.25
	PA/A - Victim Advocacy/accompaniment to emergency medical	4	4	4.00
	PA/A - Victim Advocacy/accompaniment to medical forensic	16	15	42.25
	S/HS - Emergency Shelter or Safe house	68	45	49.75
	S/HS - Relocation assistance	39	25	16.00
S/HS - Transitional Housing	131	40	53.75	
Safety Planning	409	161	322.17	
CJD VOCA Total		8099	252	4399.03
HHSC	Child Recreation or Social Group	100	39	101.75
	Child Services	1721	91	843.26
	Client Assistance	65	37	44.75
	Counseling/Therapy	14	8	9.75

	Crisis Intervention	246	62	173.00
	Groups (Support, Therapeutic)	84	20	80.50
	Individual Counseling	192	39	188.75
	Information & Referral	312	59	191.75
	Lodging	26	17	16.25
	Other Direct Victim Services	84	35	90.00
	Peer Support Services	354	74	237.25
	Shelter Based Services	45	17	23.00
	Transportation	44	19	35.00
SAPCS State (Sexual Assault) (OAG) Total		1659	103	1293.50
SASP (CJD)	Crisis Intervention	31	21	28.00
	Employment counseling	1	1	0.25
	Hospital/clinic/other medical response	3	3	9.0
	Material assistance	4	4	12.25
	Transportation	4	4	2.75
	Victim/survivor advocacy	13	10	12.00
SASP (CJD) Total		56	24	64.25
TX CID VOCA/VAW/VAWA	Advocacy/accompaniment for medical care	12	12	19.50
	Advocacy/accompaniment/assistance for Criminal Justice	7	7	13.50
	Case Management	390	139	303.50
	Case Management: Aftercare	24	16	18.50
	Casework	477	174	376.75
	Licensed Trauma Informed Therapy	158	55	150.00
	Multi-Disciplinary Care	18	15	12.75
	Peer Support	4887	226	2071.91
	Permanent Housing Referred	3	3	0.75
	SAFE (Sexual Assault Forensic Exam) Performed by SANI	17	17	40.00
	Safety Planning	212	114	153.08
	SART Coordinated Care	7	7	14.50
	Transitional Housing Referred	120	43	51.25
	Transportation to Services, Housing, or Criminal Justice /	293	58	140.63
TX CID VOCA/VAWA Total		6625	252	3366.62
Grand Total		34424	336	17319.93

## VII. Behavioral Health Issue #1:

Plan for a Diversion or Sobering Center

### Supporting Statistics:

Today, the community applies resources to divert people with behavioral health conditions from jail and emergency rooms as possible. Our local hotline receives approximately 4,500 calls per year, and Mobile Crisis Outreach staff respond to 1,420 Calls. Law enforcement officers are trained to identify and respond to mental health needs, the Center, County and City partner to employ Jail Navigators who are able to assist with pre and post booking diversion efforts, the Center has Mobile Crisis Outreach Team staff working 24/7 available to

support law enforcement with assessment and diversion, the City partners on two Community Response Teams made up of a police officer, fire department paramedic and Center MCOT worker to respond to 911 calls. In 2023, they responded to 3000 calls, 1782 of which involved 911 calls. The 911 calls are in addition to the Hotline calls.

Still, we have several citizens arrested and booked into jail with low level misdemeanors who also have behavioral health conditions. Often, that arrest can be an opportunity to divert to treatment when resources are applied appropriately.

**Action Plan to Leverage Resources:**

Abilene has a Behavioral Advisory Team (BAT) that is Co-Chaired by Taylor County Sheriff, Ricky Bishop and Betty Hardwick CEO, Jenny Goode. This group continues to govern the community stakeholder work to improve behavioral health partnership and services in our community. Following July 2023 SIM, a workgroup began exploring local planning efforts for a Diversion Center in our community.

**Funding Priorities:**

This issue is prioritized #1 of 3.

**Goals and Objectives Based on Problems:**

We will seek to create a plan to use for funding applications in the 2025 grant cycle. We will work with the Texas Judicial Commission on Mental Health to educate local stakeholders about best practices in community diversion practices, and to identify solutions and resources to implement good ideas locally.

**Behavioral Health Issue #2**

Expanding Shelter and Housing Options in the Area

**Supporting Statistics –**

The Center is very involved in the Local Homeless Coalition (West Texas Homeless Network) and recognizes the significant challenges that people with serious behavioral health challenges often face in securing and remaining in safe and affordable housing.

Locally, the 2-1-1 Texas A Call for Help information and referral service tracks incoming calls for citizen needs. Consistently, for several years, Housing, Rental and Utility bill assistance have ranked among the highest requested needs and often, the top unmet needs in our community. This is true for the broader community, but we recognize that some of our neighbors struggling with behavioral health conditions are challenged by lack of consistent income, unemployment, and other social issues that can serve as barriers. This is complicated by the lack of affordable housing in the community.

The HUD definition for chronically homeless persons states that the individual must have a disabling condition to include a diagnosable substance abuse disorder, a serious mental illness, a developmental disability, or chronic physical illness or disability, including the co-occurrence of two or more of these conditions with being continuously homeless for a year or more (HUD, 2016). In the most recent Point in Time Count, a count of unsheltered persons

experiencing homelessness on a single night in January, Abilene counted 129 individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness with 69% identifying as having mental health issues or mental illness diagnosis and 54% identifying as having a substance use disorder (PIT, 2024)

**Action Plan to Leverage Resources:**

Abilene has a Behavioral Advisory Team (BAT) that is Co-Chaired by Taylor County Sheriff, Ricky Bishop and Betty Hardwick CEO, Jenny Goode. This group continues to govern the community stakeholder work to improve behavioral health partnership and services in our community. Following July 2023 SIM, a workgroup involving West Texas Homeless Network members began exploring local planning efforts for expanded housing opportunities. This has involved not only expansion of HUD funded projects, but also education about homelessness, problem solving emergency and transitional shelter needs, and consideration of partnerships with government and Housing Authority partners to pursue opportunities for development of more low-income housing options in the community.

**Funding Priorities:**

This issue is prioritized as #2 of 3.

**Goals and Objectives Based on Problems:**

Collaborate with local stakeholders to create strategies to expand housing across the continuum (emergency shelter, transitional housing, supported housing programs, permanent supportive housing facilities).

**Behavioral Health Issue #3:**

Formalize and Expand Jail In Reach and Navigation and begin planning for alternatives to inpatient competency restoration

**Supporting Statistics:**

County jails across Texas are currently housing people that are awaiting competency restoration so that they can move toward an outcome for their charges. There are on average 12 people waiting in Taylor County Jail for a bed at Big Spring State Hospital for a competency restoration at any given time. The person that has been waiting the longest for restoration services has been on the list for 553 days with the most recent addition occurring 22 days ago. There are also six individuals awaiting competency restoration at a maximum-security state hospital for the past 3-6 months. Delays in treatment for mental health issues are proven to result in poorer outcomes for individuals and longer stays at state hospitals. The current average length of stay for restoration is 55 days at an estimated cost of \$412 per day. The average estimated cost of jail-based competency per day according to the Harris Center is \$343.70. Harris Center has a robust jail based competency restoration program and reports 90% success rate with the Hogg Foundation reporting a statewide success rate of 66%. Betty Hardwick Center partners with county jails and the city of Abilene to fund two jail navigator positions that are located inside the jail. These positions primarily focus on addressing mental health crises inside the jail, pre-booking diversions, and assisting individuals diagnosed with serious and persistent mental illness access psychiatry and mental health medications while incarcerated. On a small scale, jail navigators have been able to

assist in the restoration of a handful of individuals. A formal/expanded jail in-reach program would allow dedicated staff to work with individuals on the waitlist while incarcerated to regain competency to stand trial. This would assist with reaching the community and state's ultimate goal of eliminating the waitlist for these necessary services.

**Action Plan to Leverage Resources:**

Abilene has a Behavioral Advisory Team (BAT) that is Co-Chaired by Taylor County Sheriff, Ricky Bishop and Betty Hardwick CEO, Jenny Goode. This group continues to govern the community stakeholder work to improve behavioral health partnership and services in our community. The Jail Diversion Task Force is the group tasked with leading this effort. This may include applying for funding to expand the work in jails and reentry services.

**Funding Priorities:**

This issue is prioritized as #3 of 3.

**Goals and Objectives Based on Problems:**

The community desires to reduce inmate wait time for competency restoration by offering better, more efficient local services to restore mental health more quickly.

**Additional Priorities**

There are other projects the community has identified –

- SIM workshop participants discussed exploring options for specialty courts or docket
- Community and LMHA identifies a need to continue to expand and grow substance use services for youth and adults
- LMHA identifies a need to continue to expand options for integrated physical health care beyond basic screenings for clients with mental illness
- Local Crisis Stakeholders identify a need for expanded crisis options for clients with IDD and MH needs

**Additional Resources:**

- 2022 Regional Needs Assessment, Region 2, Abilene Regional Council/Prevention Resource Center,
- [www.prc2.org](http://www.prc2.org)
- Hendrick Community Health Needs Assessment 2022, Community Health Needs Assessment Hendrick Health System
- 2024 Abilene West Texas Homeless Network Point In Time Count

### **Community Input:**

Throughout the year, numerous stakeholder meetings take place to review and discuss not only current service and collaboration, but the gaps and needs identified here. These include West Texas Homeless Network, Recovery Oriented Systems of Care, Behavioral Action Team, SIM Workgroups, and other health related meetings.

The collective input from those various groups, reports, meetings and surveys were included in this report.

## **VIII. LONG-TERM EVALUATION PLAN**

The Taylor, Callahan and Coleman Counties Community Planning Committee resume pre-covid annual meetings annually to coordinate meetings designed to revisit the issues addressed within this Community Plan. Information will be updated and evaluated as to each identified issue to determine status. Any new service issues identified each year will be documented on the Community Plan.

Via group e-mails, facilitated by the chairman, the Community Planning Committee will continue to communicate about issues addressed in the plan. Through interdisciplinary team meetings, client satisfaction surveys, and an assessment of results concerning individual client cases through professional clinical staffing, progress on long term goals can be assessed.

It is the goal of the Community Planning Committee to reduce the number of identified issues through encouraging, promoting, supporting, and coordinating application for funding that will impact the identified issues of the Community Plan.

## **IX. CONCLUSION**

American society has experienced three great revolutions: the political revolution of the eighteenth century, the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century, and the urban revolution of our time. Each period has had its characteristic problems. We now possess the ingenuity to contain and direct, within limits, the effects of a particular social problem once we have identified it and developed resources to impact and impede its progression. On September 9, 2001, a significant event of terrorism resulted in ordinary people, who had little to nothing in common, responding in an extraordinary way for the common good. History may very well reflect that the attack on the World Trade Center was less about the crumbling of buildings and loss of life, but more about the defining of the character of community.

As we review our progress over and through the past twenty plus years, we see success. We have experienced the exhilaration that comes with challenge and the strength of achievement.

Together, we have and will continue to build a community where every comprehensive services to support the judicial system of care, all law enforcement, mental health and expansive crime victim services, we will equip individuals and communities to thrive! A community where hope replaces fear and resilience conquers trauma!

Continued and increased support is essential to “Building the Texas of Tomorrow”. Through collaboration and necessary funding, we will address the primary issues and concerns in this report/community plan.

### **1. Promoting Healing and Recovery**

Comprehensive trauma-informed services provide victims with the necessary support to heal from their experiences. By offering counseling, legal advocacy, and medical assistance, these services empower individuals to reclaim their lives, restore their sense of agency, and foster resilience. A community that invests in healing not only supports victims but also helps reduce the long-term psychological and emotional impacts of trauma. This care often leads to more positive outcomes throughout the judicial process.

### **2. Enhancing Community Safety**

Investing in services contributes to the overall safety of the community. When programs receive appropriate support and resources, they are able to offer swift care to victims of crime. This allows crime victims to be more likely to report their experiences, which can help identify and address patterns of violence. Furthermore, comprehensive services include prevention education, which equips community members with the knowledge to recognize and intervene in potentially violent situations, thereby fostering a safer environment for everyone.

### **3. Reducing Recidivism**

Effective and proactive services can help break the cycle of violence. By addressing the root causes of trauma and providing support, victims are less likely to experience repeated victimization or engage in retaliatory violence. This, in turn, can lead to lower crime rates and decreased pressure on law enforcement and judicial systems.

### **4. Building Community Resilience**

When communities prioritize multidisciplinary care in the justice system, they foster an environment of empathy, understanding, and support. This culture encourages individuals to seek help and speak out about violence, creating a stronger, more resilient community. By investing in this work, communities can promote social cohesion and empower residents to support one another.

### **5. Economic Benefits**

Investing in justice services can lead to significant economic benefits for the community. Supporting victims can reduce healthcare costs associated with untreated trauma, lower the burden on the criminal justice system, and enhance workforce participation by enabling survivors to heal and reintegrate into society. A healthier, more engaged community ultimately contributes to economic growth and stability.

### **6. Addressing Systemic Issues**

Comprehensive services also play a vital role in addressing systemic issues related to violence, such as poverty, inequality, and lack of access to resources. By investing in these

services, communities can work toward dismantling the social structures that contribute to violence and trauma, creating a more just and equitable society.

## **7. Upholding Community Values**

Aligns with the fundamental values of compassion, justice, and support for the vulnerable. By providing care for victims of violent crime, communities demonstrate a commitment to protecting the rights and dignity of all individuals, ensuring that no one is left to suffer alone.

The investment in the Criminal Justice System through supporting multidisciplinary partners that offer comprehensive crime victim services, and mental health care is vital for promoting healing, enhancing safety, and fostering resilience. We will create a supportive environment that empowers crime victims, supports law enforcement, reduces violence, and contributes to a healthier, more just society for all.

In 1974, digital anything was considered cutting edge technology yet, today, it seems that virtually everyone has a digital something or other. In the ninety's, the Internet was a new experience for most. Today, it is commonplace. It is not only in homes, but also literally in the hands of most people, including our youth and Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a reality. Scientists are decoding the blueprint of human life. Cures for our feared illnesses seem close at hand. Of course, this ingenuity encourages further ingenuity. But just as progress brings with it wonders and benefits, it also brings challenges, complications, and often criminal acts.

Anticipating and planning for not only advances in technology but the accompanying problems become paramount to maintaining the overall health of our communities. In the days to come, the socio-economic conditions of Taylor, Callahan and Coleman Counties will pose tremendous challenges to the community of service providers as it relates to the manner in which we will effectively and efficiently meet the mission, mandates, performance standards, and expectations of our communities, the state, and federal governments. This is especially difficult, given the limited resources at our disposal in an era of exponentially increasing demands. With the emergence of the issue of special needs populations, the lack of resources, internal and external to service providers, will require continued innovation and re-engineering to keep pace in the context of a rapidly changing socio-economic environment.

Throughout our history, America's mission has been to widen the circle of opportunity, to deepen the meaning of freedom, and to strengthen the bonds of community. With different purposes and mission statements, we may not all agree, and we may have very different views about the character of the community, but we realize that we will all do better when we work together. Thank you!