

Harris County



Community Plan 2014-2015

Fall 2014

Harris County Community Plan

What Is a Community Plan?

This plan is formally known as the Harris County Criminal Justice Community Plan, the purpose of which is to identify gaps in services regarding criminal justice issues. The Criminal Justice Division of the Governor's Office (CJD) requires that each county in Texas have a Criminal Justice Community Plan.

The document that is represented here reflects the efforts of many in Harris County that are concerned with assuring that any gaps in services that are identified are closed in a way that will both solve the problem and provide as great a benefit to the community as possible. It is with grateful acknowledgement that the Harris of those involved in the process of developing this plan are listed in the following page(s) under Part II (Community Planning Group).

Though the final draft of this plan has been completed, this is a work in progress. New criminal justice goals are identified, the Planning Group changes as a result of individual and agency circumstances, and requirements concerning the makeup of the Plan are subject to change from year to year. Thus, Harris County is interested in keeping up with these changes, and including such in updates that will be posted from time to time.

If you are reading this Plan and have not been involved in its development, you are invited to join in this ongoing effort. Any questions you may have can be addressed to either Harris, Community Plan Coordinator for Harris County, or to the Criminal Justice Program of the Houston-Galveston Area Council. Contact information is provided within this document.

The Harris County Commissioners Court supports the concept of community planning by providing staff support and resources for development and implementation of the Harris County Community Plan. Additionally, the Commissioners Court supports grant applications from county departments as well as community organizations that address gaps in services identified in the Community Plan.

HARRIS COUNTY COMMUNITY PLAN

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Introduction

Harris County is the largest county in Texas, the third most populous county in the country, and is often perceived as the economic opportunity “Mecca” of the state. Harris County covers a geographic area of approximately 1777 square-miles, within which there are at least 40 unincorporated areas and about fourteen cities. The growth rate of Harris County has strained local city and county budgets to their limits. Economic slumps, business down-sizing, and reduction in federal budgets have translated into hardships for the community, schools, and families. The county also faces increasing problems of violence and drug-related crimes with insufficient resources to adequately address these needs.

Identification of Community Problems

General Public Safety Needs and Issues

- I. Primary Prevention for Juvenile Justice
 - A) Delinquency, crime, and violence are often rooted in child abuse and neglect, poor schooling, and family violence.
 - B) Texas is among the top 10 states with the largest percentage of child poverty.
 - C) Texas has the nation's third highest drop-out rate.
 - D) Texas has spent less than \$1 million dollars on new substance abuse programs to treat young people, but it has spent over \$100 million to treat adult prisoners.
 - E) Texas ranks 45th of all 50 states in providing mental health services.
- II. Juvenile Justice Issues
 - A) Gang-related activities.
 - B) Increasing drug use (alcohol, tobacco, inhalants, & narcotics).
 - C) High recidivism rates of juvenile offenders.
 - D) Delinquent activity.
 - E) Lack of adequate prevention/awareness, intervention, and treatment for at-risk youth.
- III. Crime Victim Issues
 - A) Volume of domestic abuse crimes.
 1. Increase in crimes of domestic abuse.
 2. Shortage of shelters/services for victims.
 3. Need for legal assistance and advocacy, especially including custody issues that arise from domestic violence situations.
 4. Need for intervention/counseling.
 5. Need for prevention/awareness/education.
 6. Need for accessible and affordable health care.
 7. Need for increased law enforcement/prosecutorial response.
 8. Need for transportation assistance for victims.
 9. Need for special services for special populations such as mail sexual assault victims, elderly victims, gay or lesbian victims, and victims with disabilities.
 10. Need to improve the processing of protective orders.
 11. Need for mental health services.
 - B) Volume of sexual assault crimes.
 1. Adult victims.
 - Regarding reported rapes in Harris County, there is a:
 - a) Need for prevention, awareness, and education.
 - b) Need for counseling.

- c) Need for intervention.
 - d) Need for accessible and affordable health care.
 - e) Need for legal advocacy.
 - f) Need for special services for special populations such as male sexual assault victims, elderly victims, gay or lesbian victims, and victims with disabilities.
 - g) Need for transportation assistance for victims.
 - h) Need for victim-empathy programs.
 - i) Need to increase awareness and prevention of the use of date rape drugs.
 - j) Need for mental health services.
2. Child victims
- Regarding child sexual abuse in Harris County, there is a:
 - a) Need for prevention, awareness, and education.
 - b) Need for counseling.
 - c) Need for intervention.
 - d) Need for accessible and affordable health care.
 - e) Need for legal advocacy.
 - f) Increase in prosecution for child sexual assault offenders.
 - g) Need for mental health services.
- C) Regarding victims of violent crime, there is a:
1. Need for assistance through the criminal justice system.
 2. Need for mental health and medical services.
 3. Need for crisis counseling/intervention.
 4. Need for bereavement services.
- D) Regarding an increase in child abuse crimes, there is a:
1. Need for treatment, intervention, and education.
 2. Need for legal advocacy.
 - When sexual abuse cases are not coordinated and processed with sensitivity and collaboration, a systemic breakdown resulting in failure to protect the child, convict the alleged offender, and stop the abuse.
 - The expertise in investigators and specialized prosecutors in handling the complex nature of child abuse cases is imperative.
 3. Need for prevention/awareness.
 - Provide legal advocacy to defend the rights of abused and neglected children through the court, educational, and children's protective systems.
 - Provide assurance of legal, medical, social, and educational services for abused children.
 - Provide crisis intervention and therapy for child victims of sexual and/or physical abuse and neglect.

- Provide for multi-disciplinary approach to provide intervention and recover for sexually abused children.
- Provide specialized training and increased staffing of specialized law enforcement officers and prosecutors to handle these sensitive and complex cases.
- When sexual abuse cases are not coordinated and processed with sensitivity and collaboration, a systemic breakdown resulting in failure to protect the child, convict the alleged offender, and stop the abuse.
- The expertise in investigators and specialized prosecutors in handling the complex nature of child abuse cases is imperative.

E) Regarding elderly victims issues, there is a:

1. Need for education about and prevention of fraud schemes targeting the elderly population.
2. Need for legal advocacy of elder law issues.

IV. Targeted Criminal Activity: Drugs, Gangs, and Violent Offenders.

A) The Harris County area is a major trafficking and distribution center for vast amounts of illegal drugs.

- Major increase in Harris County of major methamphetamine labs and delivery of large quantities of methamphetamine.

B) Increasing numbers of persons who abuse or experiment with drugs.

- Statewide increase in abuse of heroin, methamphetamine, and prescription drugs from Mexico.
- In Harris County, all forms of cocaine have overtaken alcohol as the drug people seek treatment for the most.

C) Introduction of new drugs on the street.

D) Relationship between alcohol and crime.

E) Proportion of crimes related to drugs.

F) Gang-related crimes.

G) Increasing recidivism rates in Harris County.

H) Lack of consistent training in many agencies for dealing with drug/gang crimes.

- Gangs are forming alliances, “gang nations”, which have broader ranges of criminal activity including money laundering, drug trafficking/distribution, weapons violations, and murder.
- Gang members are better educated about hiding gang membership or gang connections.
- Gang members are better educated in how to avoid the drug prosecution thresholds used by the US Attorney’s Office.

I) Inadequate coordination of law enforcement and criminal justice agencies.

- Coordinated response needed to increasing cooperation and merging of prison gangs with criminal street gangs.

V. Community Issues.

- A) Increase awareness of resources/programs available.
- B) Supporting changing family structure.
- C) Increase positive influences upon juveniles.
- D) Readily accessible emergency funds for all crime victims.
- E) Address changing demographics and divers cultures in Harris County.

In each of the areas below, problems are identified and data is included that supports both the existence and severity of the problems as they are found in Harris County. Below is a discussion of the problems, the manner in which the problems are being addressed, and strategically how responses to these community problems could be improved.

I. Primary Prevention for Juvenile Justice

Introduction: The Importance of Primary Prevention

Historically, community response to the problems of children have consisted of a series of interventions after difficulties arise which (a) are too late to repair damage already done to the victims, (b) often cannot prevent repetition of the problem (“the cycle”), and (c) are often hindered by insufficient funding, manpower, and inconsistent laws. Public perceptions of the dilemma are hugely diverse, which make congruent operations nearly impossible. This dilemma is not reassuring when the inescapable logic is faced: if there is an epidemic that places children in the juvenile justice system now, there is likely to be the corollary epidemic of violent crime, substance abuse, teen pregnancy, and other detrimental problems following inexorably behind. If sufficient attention and resources for understanding and solving this problem are not committed now, even more significant resources (both in dollars and in human costs) will be demanded in the future. Most compelling of all arguments for implementation of primary prevention in this community is that, according to all valid indicators, the problem is not getting better.

Problem Narrative:

Identifying the magnitude of the problem is a first step. Secondly, explaining the extent of the problems to the public, and garnering its support for proactive responses, is critical. Each year, American taxpayers pay an enormous debt for policies with are based on remediation rather than prevention (“*Starting Points: Meeting the Needs of Our Youngest Children*”, The Carnegie Corporation of New York, April 1994). The evidence that delinquency, crime, and violence are often rooted in child abuse and neglect, poor schooling, and family violence cannot be ignored. Escalating crime rates (especially juvenile crime). Physical deterioration of neighborhoods, family crisis, and poverty are symptoms of disinvestment by city government and financial institutions. The result has been disintegration of the traditional social structure. As these institutions have weakened, the social networks within neighborhoods have broken down. This had directly affected neighborhoods’ ability to exert control over the development of the social mores of youth. No amount of money poured into the adult criminal justice system will make a

difference as long as very little is done to stem the flood of young people entering the system. The battle against crime and violence needs to be fought on the front-end – in childhood and early teens – when character and attitudes can be shaped and influenced.

The following factors all impact successful development of a healthy child:

Health

Economic/Workforce/Poverty Issues: A large percentage of families with children under age three live in poverty, and the number of children living in poverty is increasing.

Family Structure: The large majority of families in poverty are headed by one parent, usually the mother.

Educational opportunity/Learning readiness/Completion levels: Texas has an extremely high drop-out rate.

Substance Abuse

Teen Pregnancy

Child Abuse:

The life and cost consequences of the current approach to these problems can be measured in billions of dollars in lost wages, governmental and other institutional interventions, health care expenditures, and damaged human life.

How Current Resources Work Together – The Neighborhood as a Context for Solutions:

It is important for children to develop a sense of social connections, to feel attached to a network of relationships beyond family. These social connections are a foundation on which civic responsibility and participation rest. Comprehensive infrastructure should enhance the

development of all children and the functioning of families (*“Children, Families and Communities: A New Approach to Social Services”*, The Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago, 1994).

There has been a significant increase in collaborative efforts in the Houston community during the past five years. Many partnerships now exist as examples of the collaboration among public/private/neighborhood entities. Examples include Initiatives for Children and Corporate Hands; The Healthy Start pilot project at Texas Children’s Hospital; recent state funding for the Healthy Families Houston program requiring matching funds from local sources; the Annie E. Casey Initiative in the Third Ward; and the Heights Early Childhood Collaborative, and example of a neighborhood/school-based effort. The CARE Collaborative (DePelchin Children’s Center, Catholic Charities, and Spalding for Children) assists special needs children in the court system by working to improve the foster care and the adoption processes. Other efforts include the Gulfton Youth Development Project and the Greater Houston Children’s Collaborative. All these activities point to an elevated awareness that change must come from within the community, and be predicated on neighborhood strengths to make change happen.

Gaps in Resources:

At present time, there is great difficulty in determining and obtaining valid data on the status of children before they enter the juvenile justice system. There is also a significant lack of understanding on the part of the general public and public policy leaders of the critical nature of early childhood development and what role early childhood plays in poor life outcomes. Minimal funding at all governmental levels – local, county, state, and federal – for the needs of children in their early years ensures that the community will have to invest heavily in costly, institutional solutions.

Additionally, the Greater Houston area is somewhat unique owing to an expanding immigrant population. This expanding sector of the population adds an additional dimension to the gaps in service arising from the ethnicity and language barriers that exist.

Recent early brain research ties positive child development to events and stimulation occurring during the earliest years of life, the “critical window” period of 0-6 years of age. Identifying children and families at risk, while also providing education and support services to parents from time of birth of a child forward, significantly reduces the risk of losing the children to crime and violence, and contributes to positive, healthy child-rearing practices.

Strategies for Working Together:

Houston’s primary prevention strategy should focus on those neighborhoods in which families and children are identified as a risk. Developing the paradigm for the valuing of children and families, demonstrating the cost/benefit of prevention vs. intervention, is critical. By connecting the disconnected, strengthening parents and families, developing a child-oriented public policy with emphasizes neighborhood collaboration, and promoting responsible parenting, the process of rebuilding the social fabric of the community can begin. Services must be provided for those in need, thus improving life outcomes for adolescent mothers and their children. Quality childcare, which will significantly improve the current status of a large population of children, must be provided. Funding should go to eligible groups with can together provide a comprehensive number of effective programs and services that help bind a neighborhood. Public officials at the highest levels must be supportive of primary prevention.

Forums should be provided for mutual discussion of collective problems and their solutions. Linkages should be made to provide information on, and build partnerships with all organizations involved with primary prevention. Critical to any such program is a cogent communications plan, and consequential outcomes, that can ensure that not only is the community engaged, but that its resources are most effectively distributed and applied.

The City of Houston and Harris County are expanding their efforts to provide meaningful civic collaboration on a wide variety of youth issues, problems, and solutions. Recent successes of the Joint City/County Commission on Children indicate that there is a strong commitment from community leaders to develop “a shared decision-making process in which all parties with a stake in a problem constructively explore their differences and develop a joint strategy for action.”

Conclusion:

No child should suffer physical or emotional harm for lack of a caring and nurturing environment. If the community adopts the concept of prevention as a fundamental community philosophy, and if the community is willing to commit to the necessary resources, a healthy future generation can be achieved through investing now.

II. Juvenile Justice Issues

Problem Narrative:

Despite recent encouraging declines in Harris County juvenile crimes, research studies and experience indicate that today's juvenile offender is more violent than in the past, causing community concern and a need for a strong and aggressive response. An emphasis on supervised community programs and other intervention and prevention strategies is needed along with law enforcement activities to deter at-risk youth from entering the juvenile justice system.

Gang members are using increasingly more powerful weapons to terrorize citizens and settle their own vendettas. Additionally, gang membership in Harris County is showing a trend toward younger and more violent members. In recent years, Harris County District Courts have seen an increasing number of juvenile offenders certified to stand trial as adults for ever more serious crimes such as murder, aggravated robbery, aggravated sexual assault, and even capital murder. Since 1996, an average of 167 juveniles per year have been certified to stand trial as adults.

Gang violence and the disturbing trend of increasing juvenile violence have ties to drug use and trafficking as well. The number of juveniles involved in illegal drug and alcohol use has been a major law enforcement and societal problem for many years.

Drug abuse continues to be a major problem among youth, but there are some positive signs.

The problems of juvenile gang involvement and violent crimes both by and against children have magnified the need for education to help stop these trends. Prevention of juvenile crime begins with AT-RISK youth, which include runaways and truants. Therefore, there is a need for prevention, intervention, and treatment for these children and their families, including family counseling programs and crisis shelter programs for runaway youth. Additionally, there is a continuing need for expanding parent education, prevention, intervention, and treatment concerning drug/alcohol/tobacco abuse and gang violence in the community.

There is an increasing need to provide more services to delinquent youth places greater demands on HCJPD's capacity to effect change in a youth's life while protecting the safety of the community. Therefore, there is an increased need to establish broader linkages with community-based resources and to interface more routinely with outside referral services.

Growing concerns about juvenile incarceration rates, overcrowded facilities, rate of recidivism, and escalating costs of confinement have fueled the development of new programming methods in probation services and aftercare delivery. The juvenile corrections filed recognizes that expansion of existing aftercare programs is needed to reduce repeat offender rates among youth released from secure and non-secure placements. Studies indicate that youth show marked improvement when required to participate in aftercare programming.

How Current Resources Work Together:

There is a vast array of resources in Harris county that when utilized in sync would provide a community based intensive program that would address the variety of needs for high-risk youth probationers. There are multiple service providers in Harris County and the surrounding areas that can provide necessary services to youths both before (prevention) and after (intervention) they are referred to HCJPD.

The Harris county Community Juvenile Justice Education Department (HCCJJED) provides two nationally recognized programs: Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Program (JJAEP) and Juvenile Justice Charter School (JJCS). The JJAEP, an alternative education program for expelled youth, is based on high standards of academic accountability. The JJCS operates a year-

round education program for juvenile offenders residing in a Harris County facility. Both programs focus on mastery of basic academic skills, social development, and vocational skills.

The TRIAD Prevention Program, a consortium of Harris County Children's Protective Services, the Juvenile Probation Department, and the Mental Health Mental Retardation Authority coordinate county resources for youth and families in serving at-risk youth. A consolidated service approach is used through TRIAD to meet the needs of youth charged with status offenses such as truancy and running away.

Services to at-risk youth are provided throughout the state under the leadership of the Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services. Harris County youth receive intensive family counseling services to resolve school problems, family conflict, or violence issues as well as other factors.

Harris County provides a cadre of integrated services for this population including individual and family counseling, education services, and transportation to name just a few. In addition, the county created the Youth and Family Services Division, a consortium of departments that focus on the health and education of youth and families. The following departments are included in this division: Domestic Relations, Children's Protective Services, Community and Juvenile Justice Education Department, Juvenile Probation Department, and the Mental Health Mental Retardation Authority. The division collectively works toward addressing the need of Harris County's youth and families through program collaboration and service delivery.

Another avenue for providing services to youth who have a juvenile justice system referral has traditionally been provided by CJD funding that enables the Juvenile Probation Department to provide necessary services to those demonstrating a need for assistance. Once a youth has been found delinquent, the H-GAC Regional Juvenile Justice Alternative Program works to locate and coordinate services for the youth. The Juvenile Justice Alternative Program performs the service for Harris County and surrounding counties that are part of the Houston-Galveston Area Council of Governments.

Substance abuse assessment, counseling, education, crisis intervention, and community referral services are provided to Harris County youth and their families by The Council on Alcohol and Drug Abuse/Houston Drug Free Youth Program and other Council intervention and prevention programs.

The City of La Porte has produced innovative programs such as City Court Juvenile Anger Management, Mini-DARE for Underprivileged Kids, and DARE for Learning Disabilities. The Harris County law enforcement agencies have many elementary D.A.R.E. programs throughout Harris County.

The City of Tomball Police Department formed the “Juvenile Delinquency Prevention Program.” This program is staffed by one full-time police officer who conducts intervention and prevention programs for students in the Tomball Independent School District. Students are referred from the Student Assistance Teams from Tomball I.S.D. or from the Tomball Police Department. The officer counsels both students and their families. He works with the Tomball Municipal Teen Court and the Tomball High School Cougar Court. In addition, he conducts the Tomball After-School Special Program, the Alternative Directions Program, and the Youth Education Shoplifting Program, and he refers families to numerous other agencies.

The Tomball Independent School District has also established a Community Guidance Center at Tomball Junior High School. The Center is staffed with a Student Assistance Officer from the Tomball Police Department and a Counselor/Instructor. The Center provides prevention programs such as Conflict Resolution: an early intervention program for first time, non-violent, misdemeanor offenders; and counseling programs to juveniles and families referred to the Center by the Tomball Municipal Court.

Harris County Juvenile Probation and Community and Juvenile Justice Education Departments provide many of the services utilized by Harris County at-risk and adjudicated youth who exhibit a need for additional supervision and counseling services for either themselves or for their families. The Gulf Coast Trades Center’s Intensive Aftercare Program and the Centerpointe counseling program targets high-risk youth who exhibit problems involving

family, peer influence, educational deficiencies, individual or family substance abuse, and/or any combination of these external, social factors.

The Harris County Juvenile Probation Department started the Community Youth Services program (CYS) to provide free, voluntary, community-based prevention and intervention services for at-risk youth and their families by forming partnerships with the local school districts. CYS is now a county program of Children's Protective Services and has shared funding agreements with 18 school districts for 62 social workers who have offices on school campuses. They provide crisis intervention and case management services while using the communities' existing resources.

CYS works in cooperation with two other state programs: MHMRA's First-Time Offender program and Texas' Services to At-Risk Youth. The First-Time Offender program provides services for status offenders, while the STAR Youth program targets a larger group of at-risk youth.

As part of the overall mission of Gulf Coast Community Services Association, the agency seeks to direct low-income youth into constructive activities directed to enhance self-perception, interpersonal skill, and orientation toward leadership roles in the community. Among these activities, GCCSA organizes and facilitates Youth Councils throughout Harris County. The Councils are intended to serve as a communication link between this cohort and GCCSA. As such, the Councils assist in the identification of current challenges and needs for youths. Outstanding Youth Council members will be directed toward leadership training. For youths who have dropped out of school, the agency offers ABE and GED classes. In order to encourage students to stay in school and enhance their ability to academically compete, GCCSA offers PSAT, SAT, and ACT test preparation. Furthermore, the agency offers youths a tutoring program when the need arises for additional assistance in the understanding and completion of school assignments. All activities are designed to direct youths in a direction where they recognize their ability to influence change in their own lives.

There is a direct correlation between dropouts and crime. "I Have a Dream-Houston" is a long-range, on-going program that "adopts" students beginning in the third grade and continues

working with them through high school graduation or GED completion, later providing scholarships to college or vocational school.

The Positive Project program (TPP) focuses on collaborative efforts implementing “wrap-around” services to affect conditions inherent to delinquent youth. TPP provides many such programs under a variety of settings – from on-site social service programs in apartment complexes known for high crime rates and high gang activity, to sponsoring after-school and alternative-school programs, home family counseling, and youth empowerment. There remains a need for the development of more comprehensive services such as The Positive Project.

The Fifth Ward Enrichment Program creates a network of school law enforcement agencies, youth centers, business persons, and churches to provide volunteers, site and transportation supports, and curriculum support to educate a cadre of youth peacemakers throughout the Fifth Ward community. The Young Fathers in Families Project and the Teen Enterprise Center offer fresh prevention/intervention avenues for youth development. The Young Peacemakers Project has expanded to teach conflict resolution and peace mediation skills to high risk youth while trained peer health educators provide education in schools, churches, and youth groups regarding the science of healthy living.

Families Under Urban and Social Attack, Inc. offers an after-school prevention program to youth in the Third Ward and the Acres Homes communities. FUUSA uses risk-protective strategies to train youth to identify and resist factors that can result in use of alcohol and other drugs, or violent and delinquent activities.

Harris County has a need to expand the D.A.R.E. Program to include the parenting program which will strengthen the “zero tolerance” message concerning substance abuse (alcohol, tobacco, and illicit drugs) as well as gang involvement (vandalism and violence). Just as English, math and science are taught throughout all twelve years of a child’s education, so too must resistance to substance abuse be taught from elementary school to high school, and from children to adults.

UT-Houston Recovery Campus provides residential adolescent substance abuse treatment services through partnership with the non-profit Golden Eagle Leadership Academy. Statistics show treatment for youth reduces criminal behavior, gang activity, and violence. The Campus serves about 100 youth in a year, about half of them from the Harris County Juvenile Probation Department. More services are needed to help young offenders who are addicted to drugs or alcohol before going back into their home neighborhoods.

The Noah's Ark Project is an after-school life-skills and substance abuse prevention program for youth between the ages of 12 AND 18 in the greater South Park community. The life-skills component is curriculum based and the program also offers academic tutoring as well as an ACT-SAT preparation course.

Easy Does It, Inc. provides level II intensive outpatient chemical dependency treatment services, levels III and IV supportive outpatient chemical dependency treatment services for adolescents and chemical dependency counseling for 250 youth through the Municipal Courts' Juvenile Accountability Program. Services include HIV education/counseling, psychological testing/counseling, job readiness training, on-site schooling, family services and referrals to medical clinics.

The Chicano Family Center (CFC) operates traditional programs for prevention of delinquency including substance abuse prevention, counseling, behavior management/violence prevention programs and after school/summer programs for sports and recreation. CFC works with the Magnolia Park Interfaith Health Alliance through its health education program, *Salud!*

By creating partnerships utilizing Harris County's Youth and Family Services Division and community resources and organizations, these programs will operate as a clearing-house for services targeting the at-risk youth and the chronic offender's problems, and their individualized needs. Through such partnerships, resources are provided for referrals, planning, networking events and activities (i.e., newsletters and meetings), and training. This effort has reinforced working together to expand, improve, and enhance services by maximizing and pooling resources to ensure community sustainability. Examples of these partnerships include the Triad Collaborative of Harris County Juvenile Probation Dept., MHMRA, and Children's Protective

Services; the Harris County Community and Juvenile Justice Education Department; the City/County Commission on Children; the Third Ward Community Cloth Cooperative; and the South Park/Sunnyside Community Planners.

Effective prevention and aftercare programs that focus on at-risk youth, provide intensive supervision to ensure public safety, and provide services designed to facilitate a reintegration process may allow some offenders to be released from incarceration earlier, as well as reduce recidivism among offenders released from residential facilities. Such an impact should reduce institutional overcrowding, reduce the cost of supervision of juvenile offenders, and ultimately, decrease the number of juveniles who develop lengthy delinquent careers and often become the core of the adult criminal population.

Increasing Coordination Among Resources/Strategies:

- Review agencies listed in various community directories to further coordinate efforts with the Harris County Community Plan (i.e.: Community Youth Services Resource Directory, Youth Services Provider Directory; United Way of the Texas Gulf Coast Directory of Services).
- Continue and increase cooperation with the Harris County Department of Housing and Community Development and with the City of Houston.
- Increase efforts in providing prevention/awareness, identification, intervention, and treatment of at-risk youth.
- Increase social work liaisons in Justice of the Peace Courts to perform intensive care management and crisis intervention on truancy and class C ticket dockets.
- Increase provision on individual and family counseling and support services for at-risk and delinquent youth.
- Increase use of Joint City/County Commission on Children to facilitate multi-agency collaborations, innovation, and successful acquisition of external funding for government and non-profit service providers.
- Provide education, training, and support for adults who work with children (teachers, child-care workers, and youth recreation workers).
- Provide education that targets the prevention of sexual behavior and the prevention of early parenthood for youth.

- Implement anger and behavior management, conflict resolution, and violence prevention curriculum for juveniles and their families in school and community settings.
- Provide after-school and summer programs to promote appropriate social activities and supervision for youth and their families.
- Provide job-training programs for at-risk youth.
- Promote and strengthen the family as a unit, building upon existing strengths with parenting classes and other community support.
- Provide multi-cultural, multi-disciplinary training and coordination of services among agencies.
- Provide mentor services to at-risk youth and their families.
- Promote services that develop help-seeking behavior.
- Increase availability of medical treatment for neurological disorder and mental illness.
- Increase efforts in providing Mental Health education, identification, prevention, intervention and treatment of at-risk youth.
- Increase efforts to link mental health resources.
- Increase resources for youth requiring long-term residential treatment.
- Implement programs to educate parents, educators and law enforcement on mental health issues.
- Promote HIV/AIDS awareness with testing, education and early intervention/prevention.

Gaps in Resources:

The elementary D.A.R.E. Program has been firmly established in Harris County, and continued funding of this phase of the program is a must. However, as these students move into the Junior High/Middle School and Senior High environments, there is a distinct need for re-emphasis of lessons learned at the elementary level as well as additional resistance techniques, covering gang violence, criminal activities and conflict resolution. The reinforcement of a parenting program is vital to the “zero tolerance” message that D.A.R.E. is promoting. If a child or youth hears the same message at home that he or she hears in school and the community, it becomes clear that there is a total commitment to eradication of drugs.

Services in the area of prevention/awareness, identification, intervention, and treatment that could reduce the institutionalization of at-risk youths, first-time offenders, and chronic offenders are in need of a coordinated, community-wide effort. Additionally, for the youth released from institutionalized care, and expansion of services is needed to provide programming for an expanding population that exceeds the current aftercare program's resources. For youth released from institutional substance abuse or sex offender programs, specialized aftercare programming is needed to focus on specific needs of these high-risk youth.

Other gaps exist in services such as a lack of providers with culturally-sensitive and language barrier-free services; insufficient services providing prevention, intervention and treatment programs; lack of recreational activities; and lack of life skill training programs for youth *self-esteem*. Also needed are more programs to provide services such as the following:

- After-school and summer programs
- Mentoring and volunteer programs
- Substance abuse treatment services
- Violence prevention programs (including conflict resolution/mediation programs)
- Literacy and learning disabilities services
- Remedial tutoring for youth performing below grade level
- Out-of-school and dropout programs
- Leadership and personal development programs
- Career/job development programs
- Truancy reduction
- Value development
- Self-help skills
- Family crisis intervention
- Family preservation programs
- Parent skill building and parent support groups
- Law-related education
- Run-a-ways and homeless children's services
- Caseworkers for status offenders referred by Juvenile Probation and municipal courts
- Weekend day camp program (mandated by Justice of the Peace Courts) for status offenders and their families
- In-home family intervention
- Strong emphasis on family education concerning drugs and gangs
- Mediation programs
- School-based gang prevention curricula
- Case management and counseling services in primary grades
- Long-term residential care facilities for youth

Due to increased program needs mandated at the state level, HCJPD seeks other sources for funding necessary services for delinquent youth. Without outside support, an extensive gap in services would occur since many programs would be reduced or eliminated.

The overriding message is that there is a need for a balanced and comprehensive approach to prevention and intervention services in addressing the problem of violence. The community must work with the justice system to prevent criminal behavior and to intervene with violent offenders in effective ways.

III. Victim of Crime Issues

A. Domestic Violence

Problem Narrative:

The F.B.I. reports that there are millions of incidents of domestic violence against women every year in the United States. They also estimate that, in America, a woman is beaten by her husband or partner every 15 seconds. A study by the Justice Department found that the frequency of injuries inflicted by an intimate partner was four times greater than previously estimated. The Justice Department also reports that about one-fourth of all incidents of serious assaults are the result of domestic violence.

Domestic violence detrimentally impacts society. Spousal abuse cases resulting in serious injury and death are all too common in Harris County. In Harris County, there are more than 250,000 women are in domestic violence situations (TDHS). More women are injured through domestic violence than are injured from car accidents, rapes, and muggings combined, making it the number one cause of injury to women. Abuse or neglect in childhood increases the likelihood of arrest as a juvenile, arrests as an adult, and arrest for violent crime. Witnessing domestic violence has the same effect on children as experiencing the abuse directly.

A domestic violence victim has immediate needs: emergency medical treatment, a safe place to stay, information and referral, and a discussion of legal options. They also need a cultural sensitivity on behalf of law enforcement and care providers. Immediate resources such

as shelter, counseling, medical treatment, and personal outreach services for this vulnerable population are On-going and necessary. Long-term needs of this population include child care, career and vocational counseling, and transitional housing.

Generally, people are overwhelmed by the criminal justice system. They are not aware of either their rights as crime victims or the duties and responsibilities of the various parts of the criminal justice system. The many law enforcement jurisdictions, levels of courts, and different jails in Harris County are particularly confusing for domestic violence victims. They need specific criminal justice information and legal advocacy, along with multi-disciplinary approaches to support and referral information to navigate the criminal justice system successfully. While it is a state requirement that police agencies designate a liaison or department for victim assistance programs, some police departments do not have these programs in the Harris County area.

How Current Resources Work Together:

Through collaborative efforts, current community resources aggressively work toward the prevention of domestic violence of both children and adults. The ultimate goals of these programs are to 1) provide extensive sensitivity and intervention training to police officers and criminal justice personnel, 2) educate the community in preventing the recurrence of domestic violence, 3) provide direct legal advocacy for victims in the court systems, 4) provide victim/survivors with support and resources necessary to live free from violence, and 5) help victims/survivors obtain funds through the Crime Victims Compensation Fund.

Strategies/Plan:

Positive changes have occurred in the last ten years in the criminal justice systems' response to domestic violence that have resulted in increased arrests and prosecutions. However, there remains an overwhelming need for programs to combat the incidence of domestic violence. Such needed programs include: legal advocacy, specialized domestic violence units in police agencies, enhancement of victims assistance programs, counseling, health care and victim advocacy.

The Harris County Domestic Violence Coordinating Council has been meeting monthly for three years. The Council has incorporated and is a non-profit agency with 501(c)(3) status from the Internal Revenue Service. The efforts of the Council are further supported by the Harris County Judge's Office. Committees continue to meet, working on a variety of tasks. The Law Enforcement Committee is developing a standard domestic violence offense report; the Prosecutorial Committee is meeting with the Constables to discuss service of Protective Orders and is investigating the handling of Class C Misdemeanor assaults; the Post-Conviction Committee is working on collaboration; and the Protocol Committee is reviewing plans and initiatives from other communities around the country.

Speakers from a variety of organizations have made presentations to assist the Council with its work. Both the Assistant U.S. Attorney who handles VAWA cases and the Executive Director from the Texas Crime Victims Compensation spoke to the group. Organizations concerned with domestic violence issues in Harris County participate regularly in these monthly meetings.

There are many goals to be met to adequately address the problem of domestic violence in the community. Some of these goals are currently being met by services that must continue in order to assist victims of domestic violence in the community. Other goals are currently unmet to inadequately met.

Currently Met and On-going Goals:

- Provide multi-language, multi-culture service;
- Provide lesbian and gay domestic violence services;
- Educate the public as to the problem of domestic violence, the services available to victims, and intervention programs available regardless of gender;
- Provide free individual, group and family counseling services to adults and children who are traumatized by domestic abuse;
- Maintain 24-hour hotlines for referrals to appropriate agencies for assistance;
- Provide emergency transportation for victims in life-threatening situations;
- Advocate for the client in the court system and other social service agencies;
- Assistance through the criminal justice process from crime to parole or probation;
- Increase the number of emergency and outreach services throughout Harris County;
- Continue domestic violence teams in criminal justice to enhance victim assistance programs;

- Continue to provide supervised visitation/child exchange for non-custodial parents for families who have a history of domestic violence;
- Continue to increase prosecution and investigation of domestic violence cases;
- Continue to increase accessibility of protective order and other legal services;
- Continue participation of area organizations in the Domestic Violence Coordinating Council;
- Continue collaboration for service delivery;
- Address lack of services for female victims of domestic violence who are arrested as a mutual combatant;
- Continue to provide access to crime victims compensation fund;
- The members of this community planning committee will participate to collectively evaluate all funding sources available;
- Continue to develop programs that reduce the risk of dating violence and victimization in the schools.

Unmet or Inadequately Met Goals

- Extend transitional housing, job training, quality child care, and additional transitional services for victims of crime;
- Increase multi-cultural, multi-disciplinary awareness and training;
- Address lack of outreach and intervention services to children and youth;
- Provide non-emergency transportation for victims to access services;
- Provide prevention education on domestic violence for both children and adults;
- Encourage reconsideration of developing specialized domestic violence courts;
- Address lack of services for bereaved victims of crime and their families (including financial assistance and counseling);
- Address lack of outreach and intervention services for disabled victims of crime;
- Address lack of outreach and intervention services for elderly victims of crime;
- Increase outreach and education of health professionals, educators, and the business community;
- Encourage and explore ways to better use electronic media in communication and education;
- Education regarding the criminal justice response to the issue of mutual violence in gay and lesbian domestic violence situations;
- Encourage family violence screening in medical situations;
- Improve processing of protective orders.

Gaps in Resources:

Due to the sheer magnitude of the numbers of cases in the Harris County area, there are not enough shelters, services, or victim assistance providers to effectively serve domestic violence victims/survivors and their children who seek help.

B. Sexual Assault

Problem Narrative:

The National Crime Victimization Survey Report estimates that every year millions of women in the United States will experience violence. The National Victim Center reports that one in eight women will be raped at some point during their lives.

In the Harris County area, over 50,000 victims of family violence and sexual assault received services through one of the family violence/sexual assault service providers in the county. In addition, the large number of sex offenders released to the Harris County area increases the probability of victimization by sex offenders. The potential victims of family violence/sexual assault in the community far exceeds the available services. The lack of victim sensitivity training of medical personnel prevents the collection of evidence for prosecutors and further traumatizes the sexual assault victim.

Local agencies that work with child victims of sexual assault have witnessed a continual increase in referrals for services. In the past six years alone, over 15,000 child victims of sexual assault and their families have been referred to programs that provide specialized services to these traumatized individuals. These statistics emphasize the overwhelming need for intervention and treatment of child sexual abuse. Child survivors of sexual assault by a non-family member have few resources available in Harris County for intervention, counseling, and supportive services. The disabled is another vulnerable segment of the community that is often overlooked. Several studies report substantially higher rates of violence among women and children with disabilities, documenting physical and sexual abuse twice as often in this population compared to the non-disabled. Finally, the growing population of people over the age of 55 years increases the number of elderly victims of sexual assault. This population often requires special resources.

Strategies/Plan:

Due to the increase in sexual assault in Harris County, the strategies to meet the needs require an increase in available funding, education, and mental health and advocacy services.

Gaps in Resources:

The primary goal of Harris County is to provide preventive and continuing support for survivors of sexual assault and their families through counseling, hospital accompaniment, education, legal advocacy, and shelter services.

Current services that must continue in order to address the needs of sexual assault victims:

- Continue 24-hour, multi-lingual, crisis hotlines offering supportive listening, referrals, information, and basic needs to be victims of sexual assault;
- Continue multi-lingual, multi-cultural services for sexual assault victims;
- Continue to provide free individual, group, and family counseling services to adults and children traumatized by sexual assault;
- Continue to target schools for dissemination of information on the presence of juvenile and adult sex offenders in the immediate vicinities;
- Continue to encourage electronic monitoring of sexual assault offenders while on bond, probation or parole and educate the judiciary and the public about its limitations;
- Continue to provide legal advocacy in the criminal justice system for victims of sexual assault and their families;
- Continue to provide survivors access to funds through the Crime victims Compensation Fund;
- Continue multi-cultural, multi-disciplinary awareness, training, and coordination;
- Continue services to lesbian/gay sexual assault survivors;
- Continue to provide supervised visitation (if access allowed) for child victims;
- Continue to provide education to fight the epidemic of sexual harassment;
- Continue risk reduction and preventative education for school-aged children;
- Continue participation of area organizations in the Harris County Interagency Council on Sexual Assault/Multi-County Interagency Coalition Against Sexual Assault to promote collaboration and coordination of services in the community;
- Continue to encourage incarceration of violent and repeat offenders;
- Continue to develop programs that reduce the risk of sexual assault and victimization in the schools;
- Continue education about date rape drugs in sexual assaults.

Service goals currently unmet or inadequately met:

- Reduce delay in medical examination of victims of sexual assault;
- Encourage an aggressive approach to investigation and prosecution in child sexual assault cases and discourage availability of deferred adjudication;
- Continue and increase services to secondary victims of sexual assault, including bereavement services;
- Increase public and organizational education as to the issue of sexual assault, the services available to victims, the intervention programs available, legal updates;
- Encourage hospitals to increase provisions of SANEs (Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners);;

- Encourage collaboration between family and criminal courts to serve the best interests of the child;
- Increase special services for sexual assault victims over age 55;
- Encourage inter-agency collaboration among those agencies that interface with perpetrators to increase coordination in the management of sex offenders in the community;
- Provide proper supervised visitation for non-custodial parents with families with have a history of sexual abuse.

Due to the sheer magnitude of the numbers of cases in Harris County, there are not enough victims assistance providers to effectively serve the adults, children, and their loved ones who are victims of sexual assault.

C. Violent Crimes

Problem Narrative:

Most people know very little about how the criminal justice system operates. They may have a mistaken view that justice will be meted out in a swift and sure fashion. However, the reality of the situation is that the judicial system is a very slow process, especially to the victims of crime. When victims become aware of the limitations of the criminal justice system, they can feel that they have been victimized once again; therefore, there is a need for increased direct and comprehensive services for innocent victims of violent crimes. This is particularly true of victims of violent crimes.

Traumatized by the damaging effects of violent crimes, many victims are often in need of medical and/or psychological counseling. Because there is a lack of knowledge about resources and fund available through the Texas Crime Victim's Compensation Fund, many victims are left to utilize their own limited resource which cause them to go untreated; therefore, programs are needed to help victims obtain social services.

With an increase in violent crimes in Harris County, there is a need for a direct and comprehensive victim assistance programs. Harris County leads the state in the violent crime of drunk and drugged driving. Alcohol/drugs are involved in a multitude of the traffic fatalities in the county every year, which results in an increase in the number of victims of this violent crime.

Services are necessary to help fight crime and to help rebuild victims' lives. Victims and survivors of hate crimes have special problems that need to be addressed, since the crimes are motivated by racial bigotry, cultural bias, or prejudice against persons of certain sexual orientations that are different from their own.

Many violent crimes are committed against non-English speaking victims in Harris County. There is a need to have an adequate number of professionals who are multi-lingual and multi-cultural who act as treatment providers to victims and to educate and assist citizens with all aspects of the justice system.

Strategies/Plan:

The primary goal of the Harris County is to provide preventive and continuing support for victims of violent crimes through counseling, hospital accompaniment, education, shelter services, crisis intervention, and court advocacy.

Service providers assisting victims will explain how to file criminal chargers, check on the status of criminal cases already filed, as well as advocate with law enforcement and prosecutors on behalf of the victim. Information will be provided about protective orders, shelters, counseling, obtaining funds through the Crime Victims Compensation Fund, and any other assistance the client might request.

There are many goals to be met to adequately address the problems of victims of violent crimes. Some of these goals are currently being met by services that must continue in order to assist this portion of the community. Other goals are currently unmet or inadequately met.

Currently Met and On-going Goals:

- Continue to provide short-term emergency services for victims;
- Continue to provide multi-lingual, multi-cultural services;
- Continue public education and awareness, training for law enforcement, volunteers, criminal justice professionals and concerned citizens in sensitivity to victim's needs;
- Continue to provide services to survivors and victims of hate crimes;
- Continue to provide a multi-lingual 24 hour crisis hot line that offers supportive listening, referral, and information to victims;

- Continue to educate the public and victim service providers as to the dynamics of victimization including assault and hate crimes and the violent crimes of drunk and drugged driving;
- Continue to provide free individual, group, and family counseling services to the victims of crime;
- Continue to provide long-term recovery services for victims;
- Continue to provide survivors, families, and friends crisis response;
- Continue to encourage electronic monitoring of sexual assault offenders while on bond, probation, or parole and educate the judiciary and the public about its limitations;
- Continue to encourage the incarceration of violent and repeat offenders;
- Continue to provide multi-cultural, multi-disciplinary awareness and training and coordination of services between agencies;
- Continue to educate schools, administrators, nurses, counselors, teachers, and other professionals regarding available resources for victims;
- Continue to develop programs that reduce the risk of sexual assault and victimization in the schools.

Unmet or Inadequately Met Goals:

- Increase self-defense classes and education offered to citizens;
- Increase free medical, psychological, and advocacy services for victims/survivors of violent crimes;
- Increase services to victims in rural, outlying areas;
- Provide bereaved families with counseling and funeral assistance.

Gaps in Resources:

Harris County has previously been limited in its provision of services to victims due to lack of funding relative to the size of the problem and need of the County's victim population. Due to the sheer magnitude of the numbers of cases in Harris County, there are not enough victim assistance providers to effectively serve victims of violent crimes.

D. Child Abuse (Physical, Emotional, and Sexual)

Identified Problems:

Child abuse and neglect has reached epidemic proportions in Harris County. Currently, there are thousands of abused and neglected children in Harris County Children's Protective Services (HCCPS) custody – making Harris County custodian of more child abuse victims than any other county in Texas. These children were removed from their homes because of life-threatening abuse. They move from foster home to foster home an average of four times per year. Currently, HCCPS is receiving thousands of referral calls *per month*. CPS caseworkers in Harris

County are carrying 2-3 times the recommended caseload because of the lack of resources. HCCPS reports that *Houston compares only to Los Angeles and New York in the numbers of children in custody*. Two-thirds of all child abuse prosecutions in Harris County are handled by regular trial court prosecutors that may or may not be aware of the unique nature of these cases.

Problem Narrative:

Millions of children are currently being reported as abused and neglected in the United States. This national crisis is sadly evident in Harris County – with thousands of children in protective custody. Dr. Bruce Perry, Chief of Psychiatry at Texas Children’s Hospital, estimates that by the year 2020, over 50% of children will be born at the risk of child abuse.

The Children’s Protective Services reported that Harris County has the highest monthly average of children in foster care in the entire state of Texas. Studies show, that to be effective, CPS workers should investigate 10-12 cases a month. CPS workers are currently carrying two to three times the recommended caseload because of lack of resources.

The fate of these abused and neglected children lies in the hands of social workers, attorneys, and judges – people who will decide where they will live, and whether they will be reunited with their families or be placed up for adoption. Social workers are overloaded, attorneys’ schedules hectic, and judges’ caseloads overwhelming. Despite their best intentions, the time that can be spent with a child in protective custody is extremely limited.

Changes in the Texas Family Code have dramatically reduced the length of time abused children can legally remain in temporary out-of-home placements after coming into protective custody. Abused children who are in temporary custody must now have a final hearing regarding their permanent placement within a 12-month period; one six month extension is allowable if deemed necessary. This legislative change reduces the amount of time that children languish in foster care; it also increases the need for intervention as early as possible to make the 12- to 18-month period a true benefit for children.

The social, emotional, physical, and economic trauma associated with the discovery of childhood sexual abuse can leave irreparable scars on the life of a victim and his or her family.

Events following the discovery of sexual abuse – repetitive interviews, medical examinations, referrals for physical and psychological treatment, investigation and prosecution – perpetuate the victimization of children. When not coordinated and processed with a high degree of sensitivity and collaboration, these events often contribute to a systemic breakdown, resulting in failure to protect the child, convict the alleged offender and stop the abuse. Because of this, the child often continues to be victimized and family members are traumatized. Attention needs to be paid to the expertise and staffing of investigators and prosecutors in handling the complex nature of child abuse cases.

Due to the high recidivism rate of sex offenders and changes in legislation, law enforcement is being called upon to provide more resources to monitor, track, and supervise these convicted criminals. A vast majority of all sex offenders were convicted for offenses against children. Law enforcement is also going to be responsible for providing community awareness and education.

How Current Resources Work Together:

There are many existing resources in Harris County for victims of child abuse (physical and sexual) and neglect: AVANCE, Child Advocates, Inc., DePelchin Children’s Center, Family Service Center, Children’s Protective Services, Texas Children’s Hospital, ESCAPE Family Resource Center, The Children’s Assessment Center; City and County Health Departments, the Harris County Hospital District, private therapists and volunteers from the community, law enforcement agencies, Innovative Alternative, People in Partnership, Turning Point, Houston Area Women’s Center, Montgomery County Women’s Center, and Victim Assistance Centre. These resources provide for physical and mental, long-term and short-term needs of child victims.

Operating as a public/private partnership between governmental resources of the Houston area and strong private sector community support, The Children’s Assessment Center holds an Inter-Agency Agreement and Guidelines for The Center Operation signed by eleven partner agencies. Collaborative partners include: Child Advocates, Inc., Harris County Children’s Protective Services, Harris County Attorney’s Office, Harris County Sheriff’s Department,

Memorial Hermann Health Care Systems, Houston Police Department, Harris County District Attorney's Office, Interfaith Ministries for Greater Houston Youth Victim Witness Program, Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services, the Pasadena Police Department, the University of Texas Health Science Center of Houston, and additional law enforcement agencies. These agencies collaborate to provide an uninterrupted continuum of care to children who are victims of sexual abuse.

Increasing Coordination Among Resources/Strategies:

In order to address and treat the child abuse epidemic in Harris County, the following plan of action is recommended:

- Provide legal advocacy (civil) to defend the legal rights of abused (physical, emotional, and/or sexual) and neglected children through the court, educational, and children's protective systems;
- Ensure children are placed in safe and permanent homes as quickly as possible;
- Ensure that government child protection systems do, in fact, deliver services;
- Ensure rehabilitative services that will enhance the development of each child into a functional, productive adult community citizen;
- Provide crisis intervention, individual, group and family therapy to child victims of sexual and physical abuse and neglect and their families;
- Build multi-disciplinary approaches to providing essential short-term intervention and long-term recovery to children who are victims of physical and/or sexual abuse and neglect and their families.
- Provide training and increased staffing of prosecutors and law enforcement investigators handling these sensitive and complex cases;
- Provide community education and training on issues of child abuse and neglect.

Gaps in Resources:

There are thousands of abused and neglected children in custody of Harris County Children's Protective Services (HCCPS). Currently, about a third of these children are receiving legal (civil) advocacy services. These children move from foster home to foster home and may receive some rehabilitative services. CJD funding will ensure more victims of child abuse (physical and/or sexual) and neglect receive legal advocacy and necessary recovery services. In addition, CJD funding will provide additional legal staff who are specialized in the prosecution of these difficult cases.

This is a serious problem for Harris County which has thousands of children at risk of abuse and/or neglect. The fate of these children lies in the hands of social workers, attorneys, and judges – people who will decide where they will live in and whether they will be reunited with their families or placed up for adoption. All professional agencies dealing with these cases in Harris County are overburdened by excessive caseloads. CPS caseworkers are carrying 2-3 times the recommended level due to a lack of resources. The accessibility and availability of rehabilitative services to child victims of sexual abuse and their families continues to be underfunded. CJD funds will provide direct services to children and their families who would be excluded from treatment due to diminished TDPRS contract monies.

In addition, the following resources are needed to meet the needs of children and families confronted with child abuse (physical and/or sexual) neglect receive legal advocacy and necessary recovery services. In addition, CJD funding will provide additional legal staff who are specialized in the prosecution of these difficult cases.

This is a serious problem for Harris County which has many thousands of children at risk of abuse and/or neglect. The fate of these children lies in the hands of social workers, attorneys, and judges – people who will decide where they will live and whether they will be reunited with their families or placed up for adoption. All professional agencies dealing with these cases in Harris County are overburdened by excessive caseloads. CPS caseworkers are carrying 2-3 times the recommended level due to a lack of resources. The accessibility and availability of rehabilitative services to child victims of sexual abuse and their families continues to be underfunded. CJD funds will provide direct services to children and their families who would be excluded from treatment due to diminished TDPRS contract monies.

In addition, the following resources are needed to meet the needs of children and families confronted with child abuse (physical and/or sexual) and neglect:

- Transportation to enable children and families to access needed services;
- Increase in availability of specialized sexual abuse assessment and treatment;
- Increase in availability of court advocacy services for child abuse victims;
- Multi-lingual services and culturally relevant education and training;
- Parenting classes;
- Child care;
- After-school programs;

- In-home therapy services;
- Age-appropriate therapeutic services;
- Supervised child exchange;
- Increased counseling and crisis intervention;
- Emergency and transitional shelters;
- Conflict resolution training for parents and their children;
- Increased in availability of victim assistance programs.

E. Elderly Victims' Issues

Identified Problems:

As the general population grows and ages, Harris County has become home to an increasing number of elderly crime victims. Elderly persons make attractive victims to violent crime: they appear to be “easy targets.” Elderly persons often suffer more trauma from violent crimes. Not only do older bones break more easily, but the general health of the elder adult is usually poorer than that of the average young adult so older victims recover from injury more slowly. Some elderly victims may not ever fully recover from traumas such as violent rape.

In addition to the special physical vulnerability of elderly persons, this population is fast becoming a lucrative target for fraud schemes. Many elderly people are unaware of the kind of frauds that target their age group, and most do not know what resources are available to them to help recover from such frauds.

IV. Targeted Criminal Activity: Drugs, Gangs, and Violent Offenders

Identified Problems:

The Harris County area is a major trafficking and distribution center for vast amounts of illegal drugs. Thousands of pounds of cocaine and marijuana are seized by local law enforcement agencies each year. Houston is among the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas (HIDTA) designating by the Office of National Drug Control Policy. Houston’s geographical location, demographic diversity, transportation infrastructure, and international trade are some of the factors which make this area such a vital hub in the global drug trade.

As research continues to show, drug use is not decreasing among user population. In Houston, cocaine still ranks as the number one drug of choice, even beating out alcohol as the drug which is named most by those seeking alcohol and drug abuse treatment. Abuse of heroin increases as access to cheaper, more potent forms of heroin increases. Texas has seen statewide increase in the abuse of black tar heroin as well as on the rise now since the materials needed to manufacture the drug are cheap and readily available. Designer drugs such as Ecstasy remain popular among younger users, while new drugs such as Rohypnol or Gamma Hydroxybutyrate (GHB) are cutting wide swaths among adolescents and young adults. Meanwhile, alcohol remains the most easily accessible drug available, playing a role in a large percentage of violent crimes and about three-fourths of spousal abuse crimes.

Accompanying the business of making, selling, distributing, and using illegal drugs is the not expected assortment of criminal activity. For several years, drug-related offenses have accounted for one-third of all cases filed in Harris County felony courts. Houston is also a major site for the money laundering activity that a successful drug business requires.

The drug activities in the Harris County area overlaps with another area demanding increasing law enforcement and criminal justice system attention: gangs and organized crime. There are hundreds of gangs in Houston, with thousands of members. Many of these members are juveniles. While some statistics show a slight decrease in the total number of gang-related crimes in the area, the number of serious, violent crimes by gang members is increasing dramatically.

Gangs are evolving entities: they are merging into large units, “gang nations.” Alliances between formerly opposed gangs are not uncommon. As gangs evolve, there members become better educated: many gang members now conceal their gang affiliations in order to interfere with law enforcement’s attempts to monitor them. The criminal activities of these gangs are also changing, expanding to include a broader range of offenses: money laundering, drug trafficking, weapons violations, and murder. Mergers between prison gangs and street gangs can create sophisticated and violent coalitions. Considering the fact that the Texas Department of Criminal Justice sends more inmates to Harris County each year (by parole and mandatory supervision)

than Harris County sends to them as new admissions, the impact of the prevalent prison gang problem easily reaches this area.

How Current Resources Work Together:

Twelve police agencies in the community have joined together to form a multi-jurisdictional, multi-agency Harris County Organized Crime and Narcotics Task Force (hereafter referred to as the Narcotics Task Force), which is T.N.C.P. funded. This task force is a collection of officers from all reaches of the community, who are trained and equipped to eradicate street-level to mid-level to upper-level drug dealers. This collective approach relies upon the pooling of personnel, and finances for success.

In addition, the Narcotics Task Force works with the Harris County District Attorney's Office. Prosecutors prosecute all narcotics cases filed by area police agencies, including the Narcotics Task Force. Prosecutors also provide specialized training for these police agencies, again including the Narcotics Task Force. Prosecutors are available 24-hours a day to file charges, to draft warrants and informant contracts, and to provide law enforcement officers with advice regarding their investigations.

Many other resources in the area also work together. North Harris College, part of the North Harris Montgomery Community College District, assists Harris County by providing services for DWI enforcement and prosecution. The college employs DPS-approved Technical Supervisors. These Technical Supervisors teach schools where Peace Officers are certified as Operators for Intoxilyzer instruments for breath alcohol testing on DWI suspects. These same Technical Supervisors provide inspection and calibration services on instruments in the field, assist in the prosecution of DWI cases by providing expert testimony for the state, and assist the District Attorney's Office with technical information and records.

The Harris County District Attorney's Office works with the Drug Enforcement Administration and the Federal Bureau of Investigation in the investigation of mid-and upper-level drug targets. These cases are often prosecuted at a federal level in the United States Districts Court, but at times, the federal authorities file with the State some of their cases

involving at least 400 grams of a Group I controlled substance. There has been a recent effort to increase the coordination of the federal, state and local agencies to better share the assets of experience, intelligence, equipment, manpower, and finances.

The Narcotics Task Force and the Harris County District Attorney's Office have also taken steps to bring the medical community into a cooperative partnership with law enforcement to fight the drug problem through the sharing of information. For example, when Gamma Hydroxybutyrate (GHB) first appeared in the community two years ago as an abusable drug, the law enforcement community did not have a great deal of information about the substance. Further, the Medical community did not have the awareness that GHB was currently being abused and was leading to overdoses. Representatives of some of the leading hospital emergency rooms, the Poison Control Center, the Narcotics Task Force, the District Attorney's Office, crime laboratory chemists, and the Emergency Medical Services Director for the city of Houston all met for the purpose of exchanging information about this very dangerous drug. Since that time, these agencies have been able to respond appropriately to this new drug problem, and in an effort to deter further widespread use of the drug, these agencies have cooperated in joint media presentations with local news personnel to provide the public with correct information about the drug.

Local agencies such as Career and Recovery Resources, Inc. have also been responding to the rising rate of drug abuse in Harris County. The mission of Career and Recovery Resources, Inc. is to help people identify and overcome barriers to employment. Recognizing that substance abuse is a barrier to employment and a destructive influence within the community, this non-profit agency has been providing substance abuse treatment, especially within the criminal justice system, for over thirty years. Their Alternative Drug and Alcohol Treatment Program provides a multitude of outpatient services to person referred by the courts, probation departments, Harris County Children's Protective Services, or any other many other agencies in the area. The services provided include: specialized services for women, specialized services for Spanish-speaking persons, group and individual counseling, HIV/TB/STD education, HIV testing and counseling, job preparation training, job placement assistance, adult literacy classes, 12-step support group, and ESL classes.

Increasing Coordination Among Resources/Strategies:

Communication between the agencies involved in the investigation and prosecution of the targeted drug offenders is increasing. Through this increased contact, the partnership between the federal agencies and the Narcotics Task Force, as well as the Harris County District Attorney's Office, is reinforced. Because the numbers of personnel assigned to the local D.E.A. and F.B.I. offices can provide the specialized knowledge, expertise, and equipment needed for some investigations. The Narcotics Task Force is also attempting to refocus part of their manpower to target mid- to upper-level investigations. This re-focusing is an effort to have a greater impact upon the drug trade in the area, and may require the kind of expertise provided by the D.E.A. and F.B.I.

There has also been a recent cooperative effort between the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Texas, the Harris County District Attorney's Office, the Narcotics Task Force, the F.B.I., U.S. Customs, D.E.A., and the Houston Police Department Central Narcotics Division. This new project focuses upon specific, mid-level drug suppliers in the Houston/Harris County area. These agencies are coordinating their intelligence, man-power, and other resources to definitively impact these areas of the drug market.

The Violent Career and Gang Offender Prosecution Unit and the Mayor's Anti-Gang Office are continuing to develop a partnership in tracking gang-related crime and plan to track gang-member recidivism rates. One of the current goals of this partnership is to improve the identification of gang-related offenses at the time the cases are filed. An additional goal it to track the geographical location of gang crimes in order to better identify gang locations and target areas for intervention. The training programs are planned for district attorneys to improve their prosecution of gang cases. The Violent Career and Gang Offender Prosecution Unit continue to work with the Houston Police Department to share gang information, and their efforts include nearby counties such as Montgomery and Brazoria counties. Finally, and joint project with the local probation agency is currently underway to provide specialized supervision of gang members who are serving a probation sentence.

The Narcotics Task Force and the Harris County District Attorney's Office are increasing contact and coordination with the medical community to better identify new drug trends and to increase the public's awareness of new drugs. Better public awareness may help deter some negative impact from new and dangerous drugs. Along with the medical community, the local school systems also need to be better informed of trends in both drug and gang activity.

Gaps In Resources:

There is a need to provide continued, professional training for regional law enforcement personnel. Law enforcement personnel are required by TCLEOSE to participate in certified training classes at two year intervals in order to maintain their licenses. In addition, specialized training and expertise are needed for personnel involved with high-level drug investigations, for those working with gang crimes, and for those prosecuting career criminals. Finally, continued training in responding to the special needs of crime victims is important for law enforcement agencies to be able to serve the needs of this community. Reductions in state and local criminal justices budgets have compromised the ability of local agencies to provide this training. In many smaller law enforcement agencies, there simply are not enough personnel available to allow some officers to attend training classes. Resource gaps exist in both the availability of training and in the ability of law enforcement personnel to attend training.

The Breath Alcohol Testing program has identified a need to provide additional training to officers and prosecutors on techniques that would enhance prosecution and improve conviction rates. Alcohol abuse has been proven to be a major contributor in almost all categories of violent crime, and consistent and proper prosecution may assist in lowering crime. The Breath Alcohol Training Program at North Harris College needs additional funding to provide instruction to local peace officers and prosecutors on current skills and techniques for prosecuting DWI cases.

The currently TNCP-supported grants in the Harris County area provide a range of desperately needed services: identifying and prosecuting drug, gang, and violent crime cases; creating deterrence for these crimes; and providing the training ground for prosecutors to develop the expertise needed to successfully handle these demanding cases. All of the work

currently done by the Narcotics Task Force and the Violent Career and Gang Offenders Prosecution Unit relies upon T.N.C.P. grants. Without continued funding, the ability to provide these services would be severely compromised.

Finally, the Houston-Galveston Area Council covers thirteen counties in which over 200 criminal justice agencies service about a quarter of the state's population. As populations increase and with the greater mobility of people in today's society, the need for inter-agency cooperation in dealing with crime has become increasingly critical. However, such cooperation calls for a degree of sophistication and coordination that far exceeds many agencies' manpower and equipment. Thus a resource gap exists in the ability of these agencies to maximize the efficiency and utility of existing resources.

Resources Available

Included below are resources identified by the Harris County Community Planning Team that are available to provide services that could potentially help in closing criminal justice gaps:

Local and Federal Law Enforcement Agencies:

Airport Police, Houston	League City Police Department
Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms Bureau	Liberty County Sheriff's Office
Baytown Police Department	Meadows Police Department
Bellaire Police Department	Metro Police Department City of Houston
Brazoria County Sheriff's Office	Missouri City Police Department
Bunker Hill Police Department	Montgomery County Sheriff's Office
Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs	Morgans Point Police Department
Chambers County Sheriff's Office	Nassau Bay Police Department
Conroe Police Department	Pasadena Police Department
Deer Park Police Department	Pearland Police Department
Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA)	Piney Point Police Department
El Lago Police Department	Port of Houston Police Department
Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)	Port Terminal Railroad Police Department
Fort Bend County Sheriff's Office	Richmond Police Department
Friendswood Police Department	Rosenberg Police Department
Galena Park Police Department	Seabrook Police Department
Galveston County Sheriff's Office	Shoreacres Police Department
Galveston Police Department	South Houston Police Department
Harris County Constable Precinct 1-8	Southern Pacific RR Police Department
Harris County Organized Crime & Narcotics Task Force	Southside Place Police Department
Harris County Sheriff's Office	Spring Valley Police Department
Hedwig Village Police Department	Stafford Police Department
Highlands Police Department	Sugar Land Police Department
Hilshire Village Police Department	Surfside Beach Police Department
Houston Belt & Terminal Railroad Police Department	Taylor Lake Village Police Department

Houston Police Department	Texas Department of Public Safety
Humble Police Department	Texas Medical Center Police Department
Hunters Creek Village Police Department	Texas Rangers
Immigration and Naturalization (INS)	Tomball Police Department
Internal Revenue Service (IRS)	U.S. Customs
Jacinto City Police Department	U.S. Marshal's
Jersey Village Police Department	U.S. Secret Service
Katy Police Department	Union Pacific Railroad Police Department
Kemah Police Department	Village Police Department
La Marque Police Department	Waller County Sheriff's Office
La Porte Police Department	Webster Police Department
Lake View Police Department	West University Police Department

School Police Agencies:

Aldine ISD Police Department	North Forest ISD Police Department
Alief ISD Police Department	Pasadena ISD Police Department
Clear Creek ISD Police Department	Rice University Police Department
Cypress-Fairbanks ISD Police Department	San Jacinto College Police Department
Friendswood ISD Police Department	Spring Branch ISD Police Department
Galena Park ISD Police Department	Spring ISD Police Department
Houston Community College Police Department	Texas Medical Center Police Department
Houston ISD Police Department	Texas Southern University Police Department
Katy ISD Police Department	University of Houston Police Department
Klein ISD Police Department	University of Texas Police Department

Local and Federal Courts:

Municipal Court, Baytown	Municipal Court, Piney Point
Municipal Court, Bellaire	Municipal Court, South Houston
Municipal Court, Deer Park	Municipal Court, Seabrook
Municipal Court, El Lago	Municipal Court, Southside Place
Municipal Court, Galena Park	Municipal Court, Taylor Lake Village
Municipal Court, Hedwig Village	Municipal Court, Tomball

Municipal Court, Houston	Municipal Court, Wallisville
Municipal Court, Humble	Municipal Court, Webster
Municipal Court, Hunters Creek	Municipal Court, West University
Municipal Court, Jacinto City	Harris County Criminal Courts at Law
Municipal Court, Jersey Village	Harris County District Courts
Municipal Court, Katy	Harris County Justice Courts
Municipal Court, La Porte	Harris County Project Courts
Municipal Court, Nassau Bay	U.S. District Courts
Municipal Court, Pasadena	

Other Local Agencies:

Baytown Housing Authority	Houston Finance and Grants Department
Clear Creek ISD	Houston/Harris County Joint Commission on Children
Goose Creek ISD	Houston Health and Human Services
Harris County Children’s Assessment Center	Houston Independent School District
Harris County Children’s Protective Services	Houston Mayor’s Anti-Gang Office
Harris County CSCD (Adult Probation)	HPD’s Crime Stoppers Hotline
Harris County Community Youth Services	Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Program
Harris County Community Juvenile Justice Education	Juvenile Justice Charter School
Harris County Department of Housing & Community Development	Multi-County Interagency Coalition on Sexual Assault
Harris County Department of Social Services	Memorial Hermann Behavioral Health Center
Harris County Domestic Relations Juvenile Mediation	New Caney ISD
Harris County Domestic Relations Office	North College Law Enforcement Academy
Harris County Domestic Violence Coordinating Council	Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission
Harris County Health Department	Texas Board of Pardon and Parole
Harris County Hospital District	Texas Council on Family Violence
Harris County Interagency Council on Sexual Assault	Texas Department of Corrections
Harris County Juvenile Probation Department	Texas Department of Criminal Justice
Harris County Medical Examiner	Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services
Harris County Mental Health Mental Retardation Authority	Texas Juvenile Parole
H-GAC Criminal Justice Advisory Committee	Texas Juvenile Probation Commission
H-GAC Regional Juvenile Justice Alternative Program	Texas Mental Health and Mental Retardation

H-GAC Regional Law Enforcement Training	Tomball ISD
Houston Emergency Medical Services	24 Harris County School Districts

Community Organizations:

Access Health Inc.	Julia C. Hester House
Alexander Foundation	Katy Christian Ministries' Family Violence Center
Amelang & Associates	La Porte's Juvenile Anger Management Program
Annie E. Casey Initiative in the Third Ward	La Porte's Mini-DARE for Underprivileged Kids
Associated Catholic Charities	Lifeway
AVANCE	Montgomery County's Women's Center
AVDA	Montrose Counseling Center
Bay Area Turning Point	Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD)
Bay Area Women's Center	Neighborhood Centers, Inc.
Baylor College of Medicine/Allied Health	Noah's Ark Project
Be A Resource for CPS Kids (BEAR)	North Harris College Community Education
Benji's Special Education Academy	Northwest Asst. Ministries Family Violence Center
Bridge Over Troubled Waters	Nu Health, Inc.
BTGH Trauma Services	Parents of Murdered Children
CARE Collaborative	Poison Control Center
Career and Recovery Services, Inc.	Police Agencies' Victim Assistance Programs
Cenikor Prevention Network	Primary Prevention
Centerpointe Counseling Services	Reach Across Houston
Chicano Family Center	Refugee Service Alliance
Child Advocates, Inc. (CASA)	Riverside General Hospital
Child and Adolescent Development Inc.	Rusk Health Promotion Project
Child Care Council	Salt Inn Ministry
Children's Renaissance Center	Salvation Army
Chinese Community Center	Services to At-Risk Youth (STAR)
Chinese Physical Culture Plus, Inc.	SHAPE Community Center
Coalition for Greater Houston's Children	Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
Community Partners	South Park/Sunnyside Community Planners
Community Youth Services/CPS	Spalding for Children

Computer Smarts Community to Community	Star Of Hope
Crisis Intervention	Students Against Violence in Education (SOLVE)
DePelchin Children’s Center	Texas Children’s Hospital
Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE)	The Bridge
ESCAPE Family Resource Center	The Council on Alcohol and Drug Abuse
Family Service Center	The Positive Project
Families Under Urban and Social Attack	The University of Texas Health Science Center
Fifth Ward Enrichment Program Inc.	The Victim Center
GAP (Gang Activity Prevention)	Third Ward Community Cloth Cooperative
Greater Houston Children’s Collaborative	Tomball After School Special Program
Gulf Coast Community Services Association	Tomball Alternative Directions Program
Gulf Coast Trade Centers’ R10 Program	Tomball Community Guidance Center
Gulfton Youth Development Project	Tomball High School Cougar Court
Healthy Start Pilot	Tomball Juvenile Delinquency Prevention Program
Healthy Families Houston	Tomball Municipal Teen Court
Heights Early Childhood Collaborative	Tomball Youth Education Shoplifting Program
Heights Community Development Corporation	TRIAD Prevention Program
Hope, Inc.	Turning Point Ministries International
Houston Area Outreach Coalition	United Way
Houston Area Women’s Center	University of Houston Can-Do Project
Houston Crackdown	University of Houston Institute of Urban Education
Houston Drug Free Youth Program	University of Houston Social Work Department
Houston Recovery Campus	University of Texas Health Science Center of Houston
I Have A Dream Houston	Victim Assistance Centre
Initiatives for Children & Corporate Hands	YMCA/YWCA
Innovative Alternatives	Youth and Family Services Division
Interfaith Ministries Youth Victim Witness	3A Bereavement Foundation
JASA House	

Long-Range Plan Development, Monitoring and Evaluation

The Harris County Community Planning Team works in conjunction with other planning groups in the county to ensure a regular exchange of ideas. Individuals active in the planning process generally serve on many of these committees and share mutual concerns.

The Harris County Community Planning Team strives to meet periodically to review the plan and make necessary additions and deletions. At least one formal meeting of the entire group is held each fall, but agency and community representatives typically submit suggestions and changes via telephone and e-mail to the Community Planning Coordinator.

Drafts and annual updates of the Community Plan are circulated by e-mail with requests for comments, changes, etc. Wherever possible e-mail is used to reduce the need for meetings, printing, postage, etc.

It is the intent of the Community Planning Group to improve outcomes for Harris County families struggling with problems described in the plan's focus areas. Efforts are being made by many Harris County agencies and organizations to address problems with local funds as well as grant funds from multiple state and federal sources. To the extent that these funds are available, the Community Planning Team will continue to urge agencies to provide programming that addresses the outlined focus areas.